

# UEAPME opinion on the Draft 2015 Joint Report on the implementation of the ET2020 Strategic Framework for EU cooperation in education and training

## 1 – On the context

- UEAPME takes note of the Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for EU cooperation in education and training (ET2020) which highlights the new priorities for European cooperation in education and training.
- **UEAPME reiterates the importance of maintaining an integrated approach for education and training** at EU level which should aim at facilitating flexibility, permeability as well as transparency and comparison of qualifications and competences independently of the way they have been acquired.
- UEAPME shares the opinion that labour market and societal challenges require a strong educational and training base providing adequate skills development throughout Europe. UEAPME regrets therefore the poor figures resulting from the 2014 Education and Training Monitor, in particular the scores on literacy, numeracy, and lifelong learning. **The low levels of basic competences is worrying** in many respects. Effective policies and education systems are needed to equip Europe's population for personal fulfilment as well as for labour market needs, sustained innovation and economic growth. A future-oriented approach is needed for the design of education systems and curricula.
- UEAPME welcomes the key message that **education and training systems should improve their effectiveness and efficiency** to contribute to raising skills level of the workforce, addressing skills mismatches, and anticipating and meeting rapidly changing needs of labour markets.
- UEAPME agrees with the continuity of **the four strategic objectives** (lifelong learning and mobility, quality and efficiency, equity and social cohesion, creativity innovation and entrepreneurship). However, re-calibration of the policy focus is needed in view of the current economic and employment challenges. **UEAPME repeats its recommendation that efficiency of funding be directed towards the economic case of education and training policy, as well as cost-effectiveness.** Furthermore, more emphasis is needed on entrepreneurship at all levels of education and training.
- UEAPME welcomes the proposal to steer European cooperation under the framework up to 2020 and increase the work cycle from 3 to 5 years. Clear alignment with the EU 2020 Strategy is essential for the simplification and transparency of the ET2020 process. Alignment is not only necessary in terms of cycles, but also of policy priorities. The working priorities need to be stabilised, rather than cycle-oriented.
- UEAPME strongly supports the Riga declaration and conclusions to implement deliverables for **improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of VET**. It is crucial that this work does not lose its momentum. The reform of VET systems in several Members States needs to be promoted to better answer the labour market needs.
- With regard to indicators it is essential that the **higher VET pathway is more visible within the 40% benchmark** of people aged 30-34 having a higher education or equivalent qualification.

## 2 - On main challenges and future priorities

### 2.1 - Quality and relevance of learning outcomes for skills development

- **The quality of learning outcomes to be stimulated in a lifetime perspective**  
 UEAPME has repeatedly called for more efforts in increasing basic competences level for economic purposes but also for personal fulfilment.  
 Acquiring solid basic skills and ensuring a quality primary and secondary education should remain a constant priority as they are the basis for further learning and facilitate integration in the labour market. Furthermore, acquisition of transversal skills and key competences such as creativity, entrepreneurship, learning to learn, critical thinking, team work or e-literacy should be strongly supported since they belong to new skills needed on the labour market.
- **Early childhood education and care (ECEC)**  
 This is an important component of lifelong learning strategy and should be seriously considered as one of the best means for tackling further integration and higher proficiency in key competences.
- **Measures reducing early school leaving (ESL)**  
 UEAPME welcomes measures introduced at national level for tackling early school leaving. However it should be further strengthened since low level of learning outcomes and lack of skills are major obstacles for labour market integration.
- **Higher Education systems should boost the knowledge economy**  
 HE needs to effectively respond to a changing society and labour market and to adapt to the knowledge economy and digital area. HE should notably better cooperate with businesses in order to avoid skills mismatches, foster employability of graduates and facilitate their transition to the labour market. However HE should not be limited to academic education. **Higher Vocational Education and Training should be much more valued and promoted.**  
 UEAPME, with some of its key members, is actively working on the project “**Quality Assurance in Higher VET**” which aims at promoting quality of Higher VET and a better parity of esteem between academic Higher Education and Higher VET. This project will define “European Guidelines and Principles on Quality Assurance in Higher VET”, which should serve as a European reference for all HiVET providers and qualification awarding bodies<sup>1</sup>.
- **Vocational education and training (VET) graduates show good employment rates**  
 UEAPME is very pleased to see that VET schemes and apprenticeship are fully recognised as a very valuable pathway for delivering skills relevant for the labour market.  
 The Copenhagen process, the Bruges communiqué and the Riga declaration have defined ambitious priorities for 2015-2020. Time has come for fostering VET reforms and implementing work-based learning. Anticipation of skills needs for the labour market is a difficult task. It should mainly rely on regional and local actors closer to the reality of employers. Aggregate data at EU level does not and cannot sufficiently take into account territorial and sectoral specificities.
- **Adult learning is the basis for up-skilling and re-skilling**  
 This is an important part of the E&T agenda. However AL should better take into account the labour market needs if the aim of the up- or re-skilling is the integration in the labour market.  
 Continuous VET and on the job-learning are key components of a successful AL agenda.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.qa-hivet.net](http://www.qa-hivet.net)

## 2.2 – Education must contribute to social cohesion, equality, non-discrimination and civic competences

Education plays an important role for social cohesion through an improved access for disadvantaged learners. The task of education is also to promote citizenship, mutual respect, openness and responsibility. Efforts should be done for more inclusive education and training for all learners.

## 2.3 – Relevant and high-quality learning

### • Facilitating learning mobility

Learning mobility is a key tool for acquiring generic skills and key competences. It which should be further promoted in general and not be limited to Higher Education. In that sense, internationalisation should also be considered for VET, including Higher VET.

UEAPME has always strongly promoted learning mobility for young people and in particular for apprentices and VET students. The **Euroapprenticeship platform**<sup>2</sup> created by UEAPME and its members proposes a unique network to promote, implement and enhance learning mobility for apprentices in Europe.

Spending time abroad during a normal education and training pathway is one of the best means to acquire key competences and generic skills more and more requested by employers. However learning outcomes and competences acquired abroad should be further validated in the country of origin when the young person comes back.

### • Strengthened and simplified EU transparency and recognition tools

UEAPME fully agrees that transparency and recognition tools are essential for mobility and lifelong learning. The EQF was recommended to the Member States as a voluntary instrument to promote transparency and comparability of qualifications. On this basis Member States have established national qualification frameworks to which national qualifications are classified. If this common basis is changed, it is very likely that the acceptance of the EQF will be seriously affected in the Member States. A shift from transparency to recognition should be made gradually and validation of non-formal and informal learning should be further promoted.

**Nevertheless UEAPME disagrees that the EQF and related National Qualification Frameworks are well suited for the recognition of qualifications.**

The EQF has been a very successful instrument so far, albeit differently than originally envisaged. EQF and NQFs have first served as catalysts for reform.

The original goal of EQF as a transparency instrument is yet to be achieved. Qualifications that are comparable in terms of learning outcomes are to be found on the same levels irrespective of their institutional basis. Currently no one knows about the EQF validity and its overall consistency. There are good reasons to consider that its overall consistency is rather limited at present.

According to us, it is necessary to first reassess the EQF's objective. If "transparency of qualifications" remains an objective which should be kept, the EU Commission and the Member States should continue working on it. To fully achieve the transparency objective, the horizontal comparisons as well as second and third reference rounds are needed. Only then, if the transparency objective is achieved in a reliable way, can the question of shifting the EQF role from transparency to recognition tool be discussed. Realistically, the feasibility of such an ambitious goal will require a medium to a long-term timeframe.

<sup>2</sup> [www.euroapprenticeship.eu](http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu)

- **Filling the investment gap**

UEAPME agrees that investing in education and training is a decisive factor for productivity, competitiveness and growth. However those investments choices have to be well selected and made more efficient. They notably should meet the labour market needs though VET, Higher VET and HE and focus on skills gap and mismatches.

- **Refugees and asylum seekers**

UEAPME would like to have the issue of refugees and asylum seekers better integrated in the draft report since it will be fully part of the new challenges for the education and training systems in the short, medium and long-term.

Education and training systems will have a major role to play in transforming this new challenge into a real opportunity for the European society and economy. Teachers and trainers should be prepared for supporting the successful integration of refugees and their children in the society and in the labour market.

### **3- On governance and involvement of social partners**

Involvement of social partners is fully part of a good governance system. For this reason, UEAPME recommends that not only the European, but also the national social partners be better involved in the cooperation between stakeholders throughout efforts strengthening the impact of ET2020.

UEAPME welcomes the intention to re-design the Working Groups under the ET2020 priority areas. The new generation of Working Groups should better reflect the ET2020 agenda and avoid overlaps as it partly happened with the current working groups. Furthermore, outcomes and results should be better promoted. UEAPME also reiterates its willingness to contribute to the new Working Groups.

UEAPME welcomes the Education and Training Monitor as a useful tool to assess national situations and progress.

Finally UEAPME recalls the need for improving governance with regards the role of national social partners in the EU Semester, National Country reports and Country Specific Recommendation, notably for those dealing with Education and Training reforms.

15/10/15