



## **“The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

### **Press Release**

IMMEDIATE ISSUE:

#### **Vocational training must have parity with general education**

- **Link between universities and small enterprises should be strengthened**
- **Increasing the education and training benchmarks will dilute their effectiveness**

**Brussels, 24 May 2005** UEAPME, the European small and medium business organisation, has reiterated the call for vocational training to be given an equal standing with general education at a meeting with the Troika of Education Ministers yesterday evening (Tuesday).

“Vocational training plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of the labour market and this must be recognised. Steps must be taken to ensure vocational training has the same status as other types of higher-level education,” said **UEAPME Secretary General Hans-Werner Müller**.

On the integrated guidelines, Mr Müller welcomed the inclusion of training and education as a positive development, recognising the direct link between training, employment and, ultimately, productivity. “Education and training policy in the EU must address the needs of the labour market and improve the skill-base of the workforce,” continued Mr Müller.

UEAPME welcomed the inclusion of entrepreneurial skills education in the integrated guidelines, as a means of increasing employment and strengthening innovation in the EU. However, the organisation stressed the need to improve cooperation between universities and enterprise if the European economy is to remain competitive. In particular, there must be a focus on strengthening links with SMEs, in order to enhance innovation in the EU.

UEAPME also underlined the importance of the education indicators and welcomed the proposed benchmark for linguistic skills. “Language skills are vital for a strong EU labour market and for ensuring mobility of workers and it is positive that this is being recognised as a priority,” commented Mr Müller. However, he urged the Education Ministers not to create further new indicators, as this would dilute the overall effectiveness of the strategy.

“It is important that the Member States make progress towards reaching the 2010 targets without delay. Increasing the proportion of students in the scientific and technological disciplines to 15% and reducing the level of school drop-outs to 10% are key targets for improving European competitiveness,” concluded Mr Müller.

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**EDITORS’ NOTE:** UEAPME is the employer’s organisation representing the interests of crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 78 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across the whole of Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with nearly 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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