

UEAPME comments regarding the Commission's Staff Working Paper on the development of benchmarks on education and training for employability and on learning mobility

Introduction

UEAPME welcomes the decision to come with such a new proposal to introduce benchmarks on education and training for supporting employability and learning mobility of young people.

UEAPME is particularly pleased to see that the Commission has finally given a concrete follow-up to the very vague formulation included in the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training 2020 as adopted by the Education Council in May 2009¹.

Furthermore the new discussions around European benchmarks on employability and mobility are fully in line with the last Council recommendation "Youth on the move - promoting the learning mobility of young people" from May 2011, which constitutes a new milestone for fostering a better learning mobility culture defined as "transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge, skills and competences, is one of the fundamental ways in which young people can strengthen their future employability...."

Therefore setting ambitious benchmarks are full part of the means to support Member States in their efforts towards progress on the promotion of learning mobility for young people and notably for those following a vocational training pathway. However, effectiveness of the benchmarks will very much depend on follow-up measures put in place by Member States and support provided by European policy.

Specific comments on the current proposal:

1 - Benchmark on employability

The employability topic is a complex and long term issue covering different aspects of the working life, starting with the preparation to employment, continuing with the access to the labour market and followed by the stay in employment and progress during the career. It needs to take into account all the possible scenarios and transition periods between employment and unemployment, between different statuses as employee or self-employed and re-entry after a leave.

- UEAPME agrees that the employability benchmark for young people we refer to in this document should concentrate on **the crucial phase which is the "transition from education to employment"** and its duration...

Getting a first job has become a key challenge for many young people notably during the crisis period. But the success of this phase will very much depend on the quality of guidance and counselling and on the robustness of the key competences acquired to establish a good link between education and work.

¹ « the Commission is invited to study the possibility of extending such a benchmark to include VET and teacher mobility" Education Council conclusions on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training up to 2020 www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf+Education+Council+conclusions+on+the+strategic+framework+for+European+cooperation+in+education+and+training+up+to+2020&hl=fr&gl=be&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShUIJ84W6dPrCTtjzpbwke0-B8QcJFWAnPrFxy4be5z78hB307h7AAh29mNN1ZxHZGTIfp1xiVcYfMcX_GCdiqiVF_kuZXiD4NOI6uqwkjQP7FJgNVVdae4GAFMET8dXM8I7p&sig=AHIEtbRmkR-BVYz0RHbmvQYtPlzqP-C8Ww

- UEAPME fully supports the intention to **operate a breakdown of the benchmark by specific population in view of giving more visibility to the performance of the VET systems** in comparison to the general education systems for young people's employability.
- In order to be consistent with the current EU tools, the discussion on benchmarks on employability for VET learners should take into account **the already existing indicators n°5 and n°6 supporting and increasing employability as defined in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET²**, including the utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace.
- Concerning the quality of the first job and the possible underutilisation of people's potential, it will be more relevant to focus on ISCO and on the level of jobs people are occupying. The reference to ISCED and its role for a quality benchmark and to a better matching of ISCED with the ISCO classification is more problematic because ISCED classifications for educational qualifications have the tendency to underestimate the value of VET.

2 - Benchmark on learning mobility

- For UEAPME it makes sense to limit the learning mobility to physical mobility, which is the most obvious pattern for learning mobility of young people.
 - We also consider useful to have different references to a minimum mobility duration when it comes to tertiary students and graduates in VET due to the different organisation of education systems. **A minimum duration of 3 months/ 2 months for tertiary students and of 3 weeks for VET student for a stay abroad is a realistic approach.**
 - However, this will only be possible **if the framework conditions for learning mobility are substantially improved including higher financial means** (notably within the future Lifelong Learning Programme) **and the setting up of adequate structures** as stated in the May 2011 Council recommendations on learning mobility.
 - We share the views that opportunities for mobility in VET should increase significantly in the coming years, but **it will require a lot of combined efforts from all stakeholders to overcome the many remaining obstacles for this category of young people**, including notably **substantial support for small business employers in creating placements for apprentices** (hosting and sending) and a strong increase in financial sources for young people's learning mobility.
- **Under these conditions we support the ambitious but politically necessary benchmark that at least 10% of EU graduates from initial VET should have a study or training period abroad.**
Learning mobility is nowadays a key tool for development of personal and professional competences and should become a genuine part of all types of education and training curricula.

² **N° 5 : Placement in VET programmes:**

(a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

(b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

N°6: Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace:

(a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type training and individual criteria (b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences

3 - Age span:

- Concerning the proposed age span from 20 to 34 years, UEAPME considers it on the one hand as too broad and on the other hand as starting too late. It would lead to the exclusion of a substantial number of young graduates in VET concerning learning mobility but also to a lesser extent employability.
- In order to avoid this gap, the learning mobility benchmark **should start already with 16 years** an age where VET students are experimenting with learning mobility - and also because between the age of 18 and 20 a number of VET diplomas or certificates are obtained and young persons are looking for a job.
- Furthermore the age span **should end at a maximum of 30 years because** it currently covers very different economic and social situations notably towards the end and it does by far not coincide with the duration of most VET or general education.

4 - Availability of comparable data

- An important challenge with benchmarks is about gathering comparable data. It is well known that there is a lack of data notably on learning mobility in VET. More efforts should be done by Member States including at regional level to start implementing statistical obligations on learning mobility for all categories of young people.
- For the employability benchmark, a close cooperation with EUROSTAT might be very helpful.
- Another obvious difficulty is about the lack of comparable data. The first stage should be to have a clear definition of learning mobility.
- Secondly, Member States should be strongly encouraged to systematically collect data in the field of learning mobility based on the same definition.
- Even if mobility schemes are far from being limited to the use of the European mobility programmes, the latter could integrate an obligation for statistical reporting. This would facilitate the comparability at EU level.

Possible future use of the benchmark

- UEAPME would like to see the ECVET tool mentioned in this paragraph as a key tool for promoting learning mobility for VET students.
- UEAPME supports the idea of a “Mobility scoreboard” as a tool for monitoring progress in promoting learning mobility and removing obstacles to it.
- Concerning learning mobility in VET we are still at the beginning of a long term process, which will require a substantial investment in more infrastructures for the promotion and organisation of transnational mobility and more public funding sources. In this respect we expect the future Lifelong Learning Programme post 2013 to make a substantial contribution.

Last but not least, the current “Euroapprenticeship” project³ on mobility of apprenticeship promoted by UEAPME and its members is designed to contribute to reach the learning mobility benchmark.

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³ <http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu/en/home.html>