



UNION EUROPEENNE DE L'ARTISANAT ET DES PETITES ET MOYENNES ENTREPRISES
EUROPÄISCHE UNION DES HANDWERKS UND DER KLEIN- UND MITTELBETRIEBE
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CRAFT, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES
UNIONE EUROPEA DELL' ARTIGIANATO E DELLE PICCOLE E MEDIE IMPRESE

UEAPME position on the draft 2006 joint progress report on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme

Executive summary

Education and training play a central role if the Union wants to achieve the Lisbon strategy objectives. This is particularly true after its mid-term revision and the setting up of integrated guidelines for growth and jobs (2005-2008).

UEAPME fully agrees with the challenges identified by the European Commission for education and training in Europe.

Therefore, the outcomes of this new joint progress report 2006 on the implementation of Education and Training 2010 work programme is essential to feed into the new integrated guidelines dedicated to education and training issues.

Education and training has an economic as well as a social role, and is an integral component of the social values of the European Union. Therefore in the context of the modernisation of the European Social model, education and training systems in Europe need to be reformed as well.

In order to adequately achieve a knowledge based society and at the same time contribute to social inclusion, it is important to provide European citizens through their education and training pathways, with key competences which will help them in their integration in the labour market.

The pace of the reforms needs to be accelerated and priorities need to be set. UEAPME sees the following three areas as main priorities for the next stage in the education and training reform process:

- *Reducing the number of early school leavers*
- *Enhancing the attractiveness and quality of Vocational Education and Training*
- *Increasing and facilitating Mobility in education and training*

Social partners at European and national level need to be fully included in the reform process and the realisation of a lifelong learning reality.

1. General comments

UEAPME welcomes the draft 2006 joint progress report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. The 2006 joint progress report is the first report on education and training after the mid term review of the Lisbon strategy and since the publication of the new Integrated guidelines on growth and jobs. It is also the first report in the new biannual cycle decided on by the European Commission in 2004. The progress on the implementation of the work programme should feed into the various guidelines for growth and jobs dedicated or related to education and training.

Technological change, demographic change and international competition make education and training, and in particular lifelong learning, crucial for European economic and social development. Therefore, UEAPME welcomes the synergies between Education & Training 2010 and the integrated guidelines, which emphasise in particular:

- Expanding and improving investment in human capital through efficient lifelong learning strategies, increased access to initial vocational secondary, and higher education, and enhanced participation in continuous and workplace training (IG 22)
- Adapting education and training systems in response to new competence requirements through better identifying occupational needs and key competences and anticipating future skill requirements, as well as recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and ensuring the attractiveness, openness and high quality standards of education and training systems (IG 23)

As well as on:

- promoting entrepreneurial culture in education and training (IG 10)
- increasing investment in R&D and attracting more students into scientific, technical and engineering disciplines (IG 12)
- Guidance and training (IG 18)
- Geographic mobility (IG 20)

European Social Partners clearly recognised the importance of lifelong learning for achieving the Lisbon goals when they adopted their Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications early 2002¹.

In the light of the demographic ageing that Europe is experiencing, continuous training is particularly important for older workers, as Europe will be facing a reduction of workforce in the near future. This however cannot only begin once the workers have reached a certain age, but has to start early on and be part of a broad active ageing strategy.

Education and training has a dual role, namely economic and social. Furthermore education and training are a substantial part of the European Social Model, and just as the European Social Model needs reforming, so do education and training systems. Social partners have an important role in the education and training field and in achieving the Lisbon goals and should therefore be as best as possible included in the reforms of the European education and training systems.

¹ Please see

http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2002/FINAL%20DSE%20Framework%20of%20actions%20EN.doc

Education and training systems are at the heart of social inclusion. So stronger efforts should be made for reducing the number of early school leavers and increasing the completing upper second level education as well as by providing young people with key competences and skills which facilitate their integration in the labour market. UEAPME therefore fully agrees with the European Commission that labour force participation and the role of VET systems are key means of ensuring social inclusion.

UEAPME welcomes the fact that most Member States have included education and training policies as part of their national Lisbon strategies plans. However, UEAPME shares the Commission's opinion that the rhythm of reforms, and above all its implementation, needs to be speeded up in order to reach the Lisbon goals and making Europe a true knowledge-based economy. The acceleration of the pace of reforms should become the Members States' main priority. This also requires good cooperation between the different national ministries (in particular employment and education) and the inclusion of relevant stakeholders, and particularly social partners.

2. Main Priorities for European employers of Craft and Small and Medium-sized companies

UEAPME agrees with the Commission that priorities have to be set and concentrated on, taking into account the fact that some priorities can vary among Member States and therefore have to be adapted to each specific situation. The priorities of the European craft, small and medium-sized enterprises for the second half of the "Education & Training 2010 work programme are the following:

Reducing the number of early school leavers

This priority is fundamental. Primary and secondary education form the foundation of all subsequent learning, be it in vocational education and training or in general education. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an intensification of efforts and increasing of investment into basic education. Every citizen should be equipped with a minimum level of knowledge, and basic competences which will allow him or her to follow any further continuous training or lifelong learning opportunity for increasing his or her competences. Many Craft and SMEs have concrete experience with the integration of many young people who have failed in the secondary education system, and companies are obliged to invest a lot of time and money to solve the various difficulties such situations create.

Enhancing the attractiveness and quality of Vocational Education and Training

It becomes more and more obvious that Vocational Education and Training is one of the best means of access to the labour market and an important factor for social inclusion. However, UEAPME must agree with the Commission that improving the attractiveness and quality of VET continues to be a key challenge for the future. As SMEs are the backbone of the European economy and the main job providers, they are more than ever in need of high-qualified and high-skilled workforce able to innovate and develop a spirit of enterprise for the vast majority of job profiles they offer. Therefore, in order to upgrade VET one has to:

- Adapt the education and training systems according to the new competence requirements of the labour market

- Better recognise and valorise initial vocational training, in particular initial vocational training in alternation
- Enable and create links between VET and general education, so that **the parity of esteem** of VET and general education (including higher education) would be fostered as declared in the Maastricht communiqué.

Mobility for people in vocational training

This is a priority especially important to European crafts, small and medium-sized enterprises. The current European mobility programmes (ie ERASMUS and LEONARDO) favour young people coming from a higher education background rather than from a professional education and training background.

This situation needs to be tackled. This is a question of equity and social justice, but also about reinforcing European citizenship.

UEAPME fully supports the amendments introduced by the European Parliament on the Commission's proposal for the new integrated programme on lifelong learning reinforcing the mobility dimension. These amendments concern in particular:

- Accompanying measures for apprentices and young people in their initial vocational training
- Supporting measures for SMEs
- Support to individual mobility projects

3. Further specific comments on other important objectives

Investment in continuous training

The Commission qualifies the developments of public investment in education and training as positive, but the real evaluation should be measured not only along quantitative criteria but also along qualitative criteria. The efficiency of investments in skills and its economic return should be largely considered as well and evidences should be provided in order to motivate entrepreneurs to invest more in human capital. Vocational, continuous training and re-qualification of persons who should adapt to change, should be key priorities. A more targeted use of the European Structural Funds for vocational training and continuous training is therefore imperative, especially for SMEs.

The communication stresses, that although improvements have been made, there is still a lack of investment – particularly from the private sector – in human resources, but it does not at all look into the reasons for this.

First of all, UEAPME would like to repeat that the responsibility of investing in continuous training needs to be shared between all the interested parties involved, public authorities, enterprises and the individual, through real partnerships. So far the responsibility of the individual has not been acknowledged enough.

Secondly, more has to be done by decision-makers to properly understand why businesses are not attracted to invest more in human resources and how this can be made more attractive for them.

Thirdly, **incentives are important for SMEs** to invest in continuous training, but they should not be limited to financial incentives. They also need support measures in order to tackle the problems related to the absence of staff during training.

Equally important is the offer of training provisions adapted to the needs of SMEs. Many small companies do not invest in formal continuous training, because they simply do not find tailored training provisions.

Fourthly, an important part of investment of Craft and SMEs in human resources is delivered through non-formal learning and on-the-job training, but it never appears neither in official reports nor in statistics. UEAPME repeats its call for this serious deficiency to be corrected.

Competences and skills

This lies at the heart of the challenges for Europe. Competences and skills are together with innovation one of the key components of productivity and are essential for the competitiveness of enterprises. Raising competence and skill levels which respond to the labour market needs, is urgent in order to guarantee people employability and to contribute to the competitiveness of the European economy. UEAPME therefore welcomes the recommendation of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, and in particular the key competence on entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, UEAPME recognises the need to ensure the quality of teachers and trainers if the aim of the knowledge society as well as the benchmarks of the 2010 work programme, in particular concerning competences and skills, want to be achieved. Teachers and trainers play a key role in the education and training system, because they are the ones who should transmit competences and skills necessary for the labour market to the young people.

Universities, innovation and research, links with universities

So far the Bologna process has been rather positive, nonetheless Europe is still lagging behind its main competitors on investing in higher education, particularly in the field of sciences and in the research sector. For UEAPME, it is important to reinforce the triangular relationship between knowledge, education and research-innovation.

Particularly important for SMEs in this context is:

- To better link the general education; including higher education to the needs of the labour market
- To create a close partnership between higher education and industry

It is important that partnerships are not limited to large companies, but that there are also co-operation agreements with SMEs, which need to benefit from the results of applied research for improving their capacity of technical innovation based on research development.

Working methods

UEAPME welcomes the new working methods put in place, based on a number of common tools, principles and frameworks. In this framework, UEAPME supports in particular the EQF and the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning.

The “Maastricht communiqué” was a substantial step forward in the field of Vocational Education and Training as well as the Bergen communiqué for the Bologna process.

UEAPME welcomes particularly the efforts made to streamlining the process and to gain more consistency through the replacement of the various working groups by a single Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group. The establishment of cluster of countries focusing on the same priorities and the development of peer learning activities are very promising. However, UEAPME would like to insist that all these new methods should **be result-oriented**.

Implementation 2010 national and European Level

At national level:

When it comes to implementation, one key issue should be the establishment of national targets using the European references. From the figures provided in the annex, it appears very clearly that the level of departure varies from country to country and that each Member State should adapt the European ambitions to its national reality. This should also facilitate the culture of evaluation, based on quantitative and qualitative criteria.

At European level:

UEAPME strongly welcomes the principle of integrating the outcomes of the 2006 progress report into the Lisbon integrated guidelines, the EU guidelines for cohesion and in the debate of the modernisation of the European social model.

The use of structural funds, in particular of the European Social Fund should be maximised to support education and training development, with the view of a lifelong learning strategy.

4. Conclusion

UEAPME welcomes the current draft 2006 joint progress report on the implementation of the “Education and Training 2010” work programme.

Education and training is a fundamental component of the Lisbon strategy, and the outcomes of 2006 progress report of the Education and training 2010” work programme should feed into the new integrated guidelines on growth and jobs.

UEAPME supports the Commission’s call for an acceleration of the pace of the reform process, particularly because of the time needed for these reforms to take effect.

UEAPME sees the topics of *early school leavers, the attractiveness and quality of Vocational Education and Training, and mobility in education and training* as main priorities for the next stage in the education and training reform process.

Through the new working methods and the support of the Community financial means, in particular the better use of the European Social Fund, UEAPME hopes that the implementation of the necessary reforms will lead to a concrete progress.

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For further information on this position paper, contact:

Ralf Drachenberg, Employment and Social Policy Advisor,
UEAPME,
Rue Jacques de Lalaing, 4,
B-1040 Brussels.
Tel: +32 2 2307599
E-mail: r.drachenberg@ueapme.com

 The logo for UEAPME features the letters 'UEAPME' in a blue, sans-serif font. The 'E' and 'A' are partially overlaid by a blue square containing five white stars, similar to the European Union flag.	<p>UEAPME is the employer's organisation representing the interests of crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>UEAPME is a European Social Partner.</p>
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