

ETUCE Circular 1/2012

Information concerning the Education & Training 2020 strategic framework

- **Education and training policy affected by the crises: Report from the Education Council meeting on 10 February, 2012**
- **Concerns of the stakeholders on the *Erasmus for All* initiative**
- **Entrepreneurship education**
- **Modernisation of higher education**
- **Teacher educators in the spotlight of the Commission**
- **Professional development of trainers in vocational education and training**
- **Role of the trade unions in implementing quality assurance tools**
- **Adult learning strategy**
- **Early school leaving**
- **Recommended readings**
- **Dates to remember**

Education and training policy affected by the crises

Report from the Education Council meeting on 10 February, 2012

The first council meeting for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport under the Danish Presidency took place on 10 February. The main focus of the Council meeting was a focus on how contributions to the education and training system can reduce youth unemployment.

Before the policy debate began, the Council adopted the 2012 joint report on the implementation of the “Strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training” (ET2020) together with the new working priorities for the period 2012-2014. The report is a response to the change of the economic and political context since the first version was drawn up in 2009. The aim of the report is to encourage reform and modernisation of the education and training system.

Danish Minister for Children and Education Ms Antorini initiated the policy debate by addressing the pressing problem of youth unemployment in Europe, which at the moment reaches an average of 20 % for the 15-24 year olds. According to the Danish minister, youth unemployment is reinforced by children leaving school early and accordingly not achieving the necessary requirements to get a job. In addition, a lot of educated young people cannot get a job, because, at the moment there is no need for their qualifications in the labour market. Then, Ministers were invited to exchange their experiences on youth unemployment and to propose initiatives on how to prevent it and how to deal with the current problem. During the debate, focus was mainly on four topics:

- Matching between education skills and labour market needs.
- Improvement and establishment of the dual education system in vocational education and training (VET).
- Incorporation of the business sector into the education sector, thus promoting entrepreneurship.
- Prevention and innovation in order to avoid early school leaving.

All ministers agreed that a change of the education system is necessary in order to combat future youth unemployment. Several members also stressed that action need to be taken immediately and not only to avoid a future crisis. The speakers emphasised the need to establish a closer link to the business sector and to better promote the possibilities of obtaining apprenticeship in VET.

The Irish Minister for Education and Skills was the only one, who had his doubts about the effectiveness of this kind of cooperation, especially in countries with a strong rural tradition. The debate ended with closing remarks from Commissioner Vassiliou and Ms Antorini, who confirmed that the discussion of dual approach towards VET and entrepreneurship will be put forward further during the Danish presidency.

The 2012 joint report can be found via:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0902:FIN:EN:PDF>

Concerns of the stakeholders on the *Erasmus for All* initiative

The European Commission initiated a new programme package for the 2014-2020 period in December 2011, which will replace the expiring Lifelong Learning Programme. The initiative, which would fuse all existing sub-programmes, such as the Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Grundtvig and Youth in Action programmes, made the European stakeholders tense about the foreseeable consequences of the adoption of the programme. This became clear at the Consultation of stakeholders on the "Erasmus for All" proposal organised by rapporteur Ms Yoomi RENSTRÖM (SE/PES - EDUC) of the Committee for Regions (CoR) on 20 January 2012 in Brussels. The rapporteur invited national and European stakeholders to give an opinion of the Erasmus for All initiative, based on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing "ERASMUS FOR ALL" and the communication on the programme from the Commission.

The stakeholders participating in the CoR-meeting welcomed the mobility of teachers and an increased budget in this area. However, they were curious about how learning mobility should be implemented, how can schools prepare during an economic crisis, and how will a foreign teacher teach in a national curriculum, etc.? They had the same concerns as ETUCE in regards to the appeal of the name, and the programme being too focused on higher education.

The main concerns of the social partners on the Erasmus for All initiative are the following:

- The new programme relies on an excessively business-centred approach.
- A change of the name to "Erasmus for All" could lead to misunderstandings, believing that the programme addresses only people in higher education.
- Provision of study loan to obtain Master studies abroad may contribute to the indebtedness of students.
- The increased availability of study loan may also encourage the governments to increase a trend of marketization of the Master level studies, which most certainly would contribute to social exclusion.
- The increased budget of the programme should not lead to further cuts in the national education budgets.
- Besides focusing on the mobility of teachers and trainers, the proposal should also focus on teacher education in order to prepare schools to teach lifelong learning.
- The focus on adult learning and especially the objective of non-formal learning in this area is limited.
- The program does not emphasise enough that gender inequalities are still to be dealt with.
- The simplification of the program is welcomed, but it must not reduce the visibility and effectiveness of already existing education sectors such as adult learning and VET.

The Erasmus for all Communication and the proposal for a Regulation can be found via:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/com_en.pdf

Entrepreneurship education

A Commission report on enhancing entrepreneurship in education was published in November 2011. The report was based on two symposia held in Budapest and Istanbul in 2011, mainly attended by practitioners and policy makers from across Europe.

The objective of the report is to make entrepreneurship a natural part of education in primary and secondary school, thereby encouraging students from an early age to engage in entrepreneurship and provide them with entrepreneurial competences.

To implement entrepreneurship in education, the report suggests that entrepreneurship should be a mandatory part of the initial teacher education curriculum; that non-educational sectors should be involved in the education of teachers; that teacher students draw from earlier experiences from other parts of the labour market.

ETUCE welcomes the focus on improving pupils' skills, such as creative and logical thinking, and also welcomes improvements in the initial teacher education. However, entrepreneurship should not overshadow the basic skills and key competences a child is required to achieve in primary school. Furthermore, a strengthened link with the business sector in the area of VET is welcomed, but the induction phase of teachers in businesses is questionable in the area of general education.

The report on entrepreneurship in education can be found via:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0902:FIN:EN:PDF>

Modernisation of higher education

The 5th Open Method of Coordination Thematic Working Group meeting on Modernisation of Higher Education was held in Brussels on 9 February 2012, where Jens Vraa-Jensen represented ETUCE. The meeting was attended by representatives from approximately 20 Member States' Governments, Norway and Switzerland. The objective of the meeting was a debate and exchange of experience of on-going reforms in the area of higher education in Europe and further discussion of the work programme of the Thematic Work Group for 2012-2013.

All aspects of the work programme will unfortunately lead to growing marketization of higher education, growing tuition fees etc. The ETUCE representative objected to the proposal to include discussions on funding and governance of higher education institutions in the Bologna work. During the last decade, it has been an advantage to the Bologna-process that it mainly has been focused on structures, learning outcomes, increasing exchange and mobility and not on harmonisation of governance and funding in accordance with the dominating neo-liberal policies in the European Commission and in many member states.

The working group decided to include the project in the work programme entitled "Time for a paradigm change: student centred learning" (T4SCL) and to invite a teacher to a so-called "high level group on excellent teaching".

The countries submitted national reports on the latest development in higher education. Hereby we would like to highlight some interesting elements of the recent reforms in higher education in Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Estonia:

The education reform in **Italy** focuses on the development of recruitment of professors in universities. A new action plan for recruitment of professors in Italy has been introduced, containing criteria and parameters for scientific evaluation of candidates when hiring, based on scientific and research activity. The evaluation of candidates will be submitted to a national commission, although hiring of the candidates will be decided by the universities.

The news from the **Netherlands** on the improvement of higher education is the introduction of performance contracts with individual higher education institutions, reinforcement of quality assurance and accreditation, and debate on “unbalanced mobility”. The Dutch government has published a new Strategic Agenda for Higher Education in order to increase the quality of higher education. It includes also a fundamental change in the direction of the financing of this area. The government will be investing up to €230 million to boost the quality of higher education, where the majority of the financing will come from an increasing private contribution.

Furthermore, the government will improve the accreditation process in higher education. Also, due to a rise in the share of incoming EU students, especially from Germany, which affect the state budget and the quality of higher education, the government wishes to establish a “balanced cost system” based on a bilateral agreement with Germany, following the example of the Nordic countries.

The reform of the higher education system in **Poland** will contribute to more performance-based financing and stronger links with businesses. The reform will also provide greater autonomy to the institutions, which gives university departments the option to launch new degree programs without ministerial authorization. They will strengthen the transparency by allowing quality assessment of programs and institutions, and accessibility and fairness by offering free-of-charge programs to qualified students. The government also plans to make the procedure for obtaining student loans and state guarantees for poor students easier.

Estonia has issued a draft on higher education reform, mainly focusing on students’ right to obtain a degree in higher education funded by the state budget, with the intention of increasing the fairness in the higher education system in Estonia. The students must earn 30 ECTS points per semester in order to keep their state financed studentships. Although the draft does not forbid the students to work while studying, it limits the opportunities of having a job alongside studies to a great extent and also endangers mobility, since students are rarely capable of obtaining 30 ECTS while studying abroad.

Teacher educators in the spotlight of the Commission

Hans Laugesen represented the ETUCE at both the 5th and 6th Open Method of Coordination Working Group meetings of the European Commission on Professional development of teachers. The 5th meeting was a Peer Learning Activity held on 27 November till 01 December 2011 in Warsaw. The main objective of the meeting was to develop key competences of teachers. Poland, Sweden, Spain, The Netherlands and Hungary were discussed as policy examples.

The meeting concluded that teachers differ in their need for internal or external motivation and that a variation of approaches which includes opportunities, incentives and requirements is needed. The working group also concluded that the following conditions are necessary for a good professional development of teachers:

- A system to stimulate engagement in professional development.
- Instruments for assessing competence development.
- A coherent provision for competence acquisition and development.
- Teachers ownership of the development process.
- Social dialogue between stakeholders.
- Access to development opportunities for teachers.

The 6th meeting in the working group was held on 17 January 2012 in Brussels and had the main objective to discuss the teacher educators. The working group concluded at the meeting that the current role of teacher educators is weak and scattered. Teacher educators as a group, is highly heterogeneous and have no central requirements for qualifications or experience. Furthermore, the national interest in teacher educators is mostly low or non-existent and there is no official induction or regulations on professional development.

At the next meeting, in the working group will be on 17 January 2012. The topic will be to finalise the programme for the upcoming PLA Teachers Educators Conference, which will be held on 26-28 March 2012.

Professional development of trainers in vocational education and training

The European Commission and CEDEFOP have jointly launched a Thematic Working Group on trainers in vocational education and training (VET) with a focus on VET trainers at the work place in both initial and continuing VET. Its first meeting was held 2 February 2012 in Brussels and ETUCE was represented by Dan Taubman. Other participants were representatives of Ministries of Education, social partners (ETUCE and EFEE) and VET stakeholders.

The objective of the meeting was to discuss and agree on missions and priorities for the working group, issues for peer learning activities, work plan and main outputs.

The group's thematic priorities and activities were presented with a focus on:

- Skilled workers conducting both new and continuous training of co-workers as part of their job tasks.
- Training specialists, who can provide training externally to larger companies.
- Workplace tutors and mentors in apprenticeship schemes.
- Changing competence requirements linked to lifelong learning.
- Recognition of trainers (certification, diplomas).

The priorities and activity areas are to be supported by peer learning from one another and about others. The meeting opened with a presentation on EU statements on VET since 2002 and CEDEFOP activities in this area. The main issues in the presentation were modernisation of VET with a focus on development of in-company trainers, workplace training, the importance of non-formal training, and the need to improve initial teacher training.

CEDEFOP introduced research on in-company trainers, followed by a discussion of the various points and issues raised in the presentations, as well as a discussion of the work plan for peer group learning activities.

The working group agreed on the thematic priorities and on the work plan.

Implementation of quality assurance tools by trade unions

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) Newsletter published an interesting article entitled “The involvement of social partners in the EQF referencing process” in December 2011. The article provides recommendations on how to strengthen linkages between the national frameworks and national sectoral qualifications. The need to establish such linkages stems from new requirements and changes both in the labour market and in the education system.

The article suggests some “stepping stones” for future cooperation:

1. Dialogue between education specialists and human resource professionals.
2. Dialogue between social partners and the representatives of higher education.
3. Cooperation between economic and professional sectors.
4. Existing quality tools should be systematically used (EQAVET, EQARF).
5. Cooperation at national level between national authorities and social partners as a preliminary necessity for the “learning society”.

The EQF Newsletter can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/newsletter_en.htm

In relation to the involvement of social partners in quality assurance, CEDEFOP has issued a publication entitled “Using Learning Outcomes” both in regards to teachers and social partners. As for teachers using learning outcomes, the publication treats both pros and cons.

Learning outcomes are adequate for specifying a certain standard for what should be achieved at the end of education. However, they can also limit a teacher’s development of diverse teaching for diverse learners. *“If learning outcomes are applied and interpreted in ways that restrict the ways teachers teach or the ways individuals learn, then there may be disincentives for making learning desirable and accessible”* – say’s the study.

The variety in teaching approaches and descriptions of qualifications across Europe should also be taking into account when establishing learning outcomes at European level. Furthermore, guidelines on learning outcomes should be unambiguous and specific, so as not to confuse teachers and learners about which results are requested.

As for social partners, leaning outcomes are expected to give a better understanding of what is required from a graduate student. Moreover, occupational standards should be developed by social partners, considering that they have better information about which performance standards are expected in the workplace.

The study is available at the following link:

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Using_learning_outcomes.pdf

Adult learning strategy

A renewed European agenda for adult learning was presented on 17 November 2011 as a draft Council resolution. ETUCE followed up with a statement on 24 November 2011 welcoming the fact that the Council puts emphasis on the importance of adult learning and personal development.

However, the Council fails to set a sufficient benchmark for the participation in adult learning, even though adult learning has become more crucial during the crisis. Furthermore, if quality of teaching and research in adult learning is to be maintained and developed, the social partners need to be involved. ETUCE also requested from the Council to encourage Member States to invest more in adult learning. Finally, ETUCE welcomes the Council conclusions on improving professional development of adult education staff.

ETUCE representatives have participated in working group meetings regarding quality in adult learning and financing of adult learning. The first working group meeting on quality in adult learning was held on 17 October 2011 and was attended by Tatiana Babrauskiene from FLESTU Lithuania. The working group meeting on financing adult learning was held on 8 February and was attended by Rossella Benedetti from UIL Scuola Italy. The objective of this meeting was to define a draft working programme for the WG. A statement on further missions was agreed upon in regards to *“wider benefits resulting from adult learning, public vs. individual/private funding, and supply vs. demand”*.

As a social partner, ETUCE is invited to a meeting preceding the launch conference on implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. The meeting will take place on 27 February and will be attended by Tatiana Babrauskiene from FLESTU Lithuania. In order to facilitate the implementation of the adult learning agenda and the cooperation between Member States, each country is designing a National Coordinator with whom the European Commission will work closely. Trade unions may already get in touch with these National Coordinators in order for the social partners to be actively involved in this process.

The Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning can be found via:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:372:0001:0006:EN:PDF>

Early school leaving

Elzbieta Leszczynska represented the ETUCE at the first Open Method of Coordination Working Group meeting on Early School Leaving held in Brussels on 15-16 December 2011. Beside the working group members experts from stakeholders and agencies were also present.

The objectives of the meeting were to discuss the mandate, the working methods and the three year work programme for the working group. The meeting agenda included both plenary and group discussions and were focused on four major issues:

- The monitoring and coordination of policies.
- Vocational education and training (VET).
- Teacher training, transition and guidance.
- Parents, the role of local communities, the relevance of curriculum, motivation and language support.

The primary tasks of the working group will be; reporting on own practice and experience, peer learning activities, evaluation, analysing examples of good practice and finally supporting the European Commission in analysing and understanding trends within the field. Discussions about further plans and activities will be continued at the working group's next meeting which will take place on 1-2 March 2012.

Recommended readings

- ⇒ ***The official programme of the Danish Presidency***
http://eu2012.dk/en/NewsList/Januar/~/_media/C7302481785E4F9A876B0EAEC29F9A11.ashx
- ⇒ ***CEDEFOP: Development of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe***
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/201202_VETAlert.pdf
- ⇒ ***Assuring quality in vocational education and training: The role of accrediting VET providers***
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3061_en.pdf
- ⇒ ***Communication from the Commission: Youth Opportunities Initiative***
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0933:FIN:EN:PDF>
- ⇒ ***Eurydice: Growing teacher shortages in the EU – summary and full report:***
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/134EN_HI.pdf
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/134EN.pdf
- ⇒ ***OECD report: Does money buy strong performance in PISA?***
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/50/9/49685503.pdf>
- ⇒ ***CEDEFOP conference conclusions: The role of the social partners in implementing European tools and principles***
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Conference_EU_tools_FINAL.pdf
- ⇒ ***Education and culture DG: Key competences for lifelong learning. European Reference Framework.***
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf

Dates to remember

18-21 March 2012:	Bologna Follow-up Group meeting, Copenhagen
21-23 March 2012	International Conference on Research Infrastructures, Copenhagen
24-25 April 2012:	Conference on VET-Business Co-operation, Copenhagen
24-25 April 2012:	Meeting in the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), Copenhagen
23-24 April 2012:	ETUCE Higher Education and Research Standing Committee Meeting, Bucharest
26-27 April 2012:	Bologna Ministerial Conference and Bologna Policy Forum, Bucharest
26-27 April 2012:	Youth on the Labour Market: Innovation, inclusion and improving skills, Horsens
8-9 May 2012:	Conference: Celebrating 25 years of the Erasmus Programme, Copenhagen
9-11 May 2012:	Conference on New Qualifications for New Jobs, Copenhagen
10-11 May 2012:	Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council (EYCS), Brussels
23-25 May 2012:	European and Global School Leadership conference, Dublin
24-25 May 2012:	Meeting in the EU Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB), Copenhagen
11-13 June 2012:	International conference: Structural frameworks for open, digital research - strategy, policy & infrastructure
14-15 June 2012:	Conference on Raising Achievements for All Learners – Quality in Inclusive Education, Odense
18-19 June 2012:	Conference on entrepreneurship in education and training, Horsens