

Pierre Mairesse
Director- Directorate General for Education and Culture
European Commission

2 May 2014

Input EFEE to the ET2020 mid-term stocktaking

The European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) welcomes this EC request for input from the European Social Partners on key questions of overall importance to the Education & Training 2020's functioning, such as the strategic objectives and future priorities

EFEE shares with the EC its concern for efficiency in terms of ET 2020's working period and governance arrangements. By providing input to this mid-term stocktaking we hope to contribute to the ET 2020 Joint Report and the improvement of the governance of the ET 2020 from a European Education Employers' perspective.

Your key questions for the European Social Partners, (both the cross-industry and sectoral social partners in education) are divided into 4 sub-questions, which are interlinked. This consultation being the first one for the EC to directly consult EFEE on the ET 2020, and the EU's overall growth and jobs strategy and its flagships initiatives (e.g. Youth on the Move), EFEE considers the best approach is to focus on future priorities and our possible contribution to their implementation.

2.1 and 2.2 Link between ET 2020 and EU's overall growth and jobs strategy; further strengthening links between education and the labour market

EFEE is of the opinion that **modernising education and training systems** will help to raise skill levels and also boost the transversal skills and competences needed by labour markets, such as digital, language and entrepreneurial skills and competences. It is indeed very important to link closely the future ET 2020 priorities with the EU's overall growth and jobs strategy.

However, we need to bear in mind that completely reforming education systems will not be the answer to the current economic and financial situation in Europe. National education systems are based on national cultural, socio-economic values and decades of work and experience of educational professionals. We need to be prudent not to harm our education systems by quick changes triggered by the demands of the labour market or the media, or policy makers wanting a quick fix for the current unemployment rates. Providing education for our children, our youngsters and adults is more than training them to be employees. Education should instead provide key skills and competences that give all Europeans the capacity to go on learning for the whole of their lives so that they may be able to adapt effectively to the changes that will affect all aspects of their lives – in the family, in the community and in the workplace.

In this context, EFEE recognises the value of the **European Key Competences Framework** as an important tool that informs the debate about skills mismatches in the current labour market and the

need to better anticipate future skills' needs. In a world where change is continuous, it is not possible for education and training providers or enterprises to predict accurately what specific competences will be required in the workplaces of the future. Notwithstanding the fact that **for some sectors specific skills are very important**, the European Key Competences Framework has been the basis for our current work on contributing to the improvement of the skills and competences of those working in the public services.

As education employers, together with the teacher unions, we have a dual role to play; we need to make sure that the **skills and competences of our teachers, our professors, our researchers and our school leaders** are **of the highest quality, evidence based and up-to-date**. EFEE works collaboratively with its members in facilitating the development of a culture that creates the best possible teaching and learning climate and fosters a culture of openness and continuous learning for all. At the same time, we as social partners in education must ensure that those we educate have the competences required by a modern society.

In short, EFEE would welcome actions on the part of the EC to further **raise awareness of the European Key Competences**. We are of the opinion that in a lot of European countries, too much focus is paid to the international rankings published by PISA/ the OECD, which only measure a narrow range of traditional competences and ignore a whole range of modern skills and competences.

As everybody knows, employability and a good education involve more than excellent PISA results, or adapting our current school systems to the labour market of tomorrow. It is about both the education of civilised human beings and also about giving them the right transversal skills and competences to be able to **adapt to the ever-changing demands of 21st century living, including but not exclusively the demands of the labour market**. Taking into account that curriculum design and assessment of educational attainments fall strictly under the competence of Member States, EFEE would like to see the EC further contributing to this debate by continuously raising awareness of the European Key Competences Framework, while working jointly with the national and regional authorities of Member States and the **national social partners in education**. **Peer Learning Activities** could be a very helpful tool here.

2.3 ET 2020 future priorities: Opening up education & professionalisation of teachers and school leaders

EFEE is as committed as the EC to **modernising of the education sector** as we believe that, in order to respond to the changes in demand, all 21st century education providers (schools, colleges and universities) should be up-to-date and modern and should provide for a **professional working environment** for all their teachers, professors and researchers and provide an interesting learning community for all pupils and students.

We recommend that the next work cycle of the ET 2020 focus on the modernisation of the education sector and its personnel. In this regard, we consider the following two areas of major importance for further European cooperation.

1) Opening up education

1a) Teacher acquisition of digital skills is an important step towards the efficient use of the possibilities created by new digital technologies. We, as education employers, see such development of digital skills as a necessary investment in our teachers, an investment that will deliver real benefits for pupils, students, and the future of Europe. It provides an opportunity to increase quality, efficiency and equity in education. However, the resources necessary for acquiring 21st century digital skills can be significant and we need to be realistic in the current economic and financial situation where we as employers are under pressure from national governments to freeze or downsize educational budgets. One should also be mindful that acquiring and further developing digital skills is not the sole responsibility of education providers, but rather a joint effort between the key players in the education sector - national and local authorities, teacher training institutions, education providers, teachers, employers, trade unions, schools, school leaders and other stakeholders. Therefore, the financial burden needs to be divided between these stakeholders. Together, we need to be innovative in providing training: peer learning and train-the-trainers might provide welcome learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders.

Needless to say, like any other employee in any other job, teachers themselves have an important role to play in their own professional development. They have the first responsibility for their own suitability in the labour market.

1b) Connecting classrooms and deploying digital devices and content is a step towards a more efficient and open educational sector. However, it should be recognised that the digital situation in schools and universities varies across EU member states and across educational institutions within states. Therefore, the necessary steps to take are very diverse. Again it is a shared task and all stakeholders in education will need to be innovative and entrepreneurial in making sure that every school is digitally connected.

1c) Mobilising all stakeholders to change the role of digital technologies in education institutions is a challenge and an opportunity for our sector. Employers, trade unions, school leaders and others can contribute to the creation of an atmosphere that stimulates teachers to see the utilisation of new technologies as an opportunity rather than as a threat. We already mentioned the importance of finding new and innovative solutions (e.g. peer learning) to support the switch towards digital teaching and learning.

2) The professionalisation of teachers and school leaders is critical to improving the quality of the teaching profession and attracting and selecting the best candidates for teacher training in the first instance. However, it is not sufficient to attract the most academically able teaching. We must also recruit to teaching those with the dispositions most suited to teaching. Furthermore, we must put appropriate continuous professional development programmes, peer learning programmes and self-evaluation processes in place to facilitate teachers and school leaders continuously updating their competences – most particularly in respect of using ICT effectively to continuously improve learner and school outcomes. While ultimately school leaders and teachers must be accountable for their work and their continuous professional development, education providers must facilitate them in this regard.

Suggestions for concrete improvements in this regard can be worked up later by DG EAC in close collaboration with all stakeholders, including the Education sector social partners.

2.4 Contribution of the social partners to implementing the future priorities

Although we are pleased to provide input to the ET 2020 stocktaking, it is clear to EFEE and its national members that there is real a need for continuous **consultation** with social partners further on in the process, both at national and European level. If the EC wishes to mobilise ET 2020 stakeholders, increase their ownership, harness their expertise in support of ET 2020 and improve the governance of the ET 2020, the EC should take seriously the involvement of the **European sectoral social partners** in education as well as national social partners in education.

We do appreciate the fact that EFEE currently contributes to ET 2020 by taking active part in the ET 2020 Working Groups and we are very keen to provide these groups with our ‘employers-in-education’ point of view. We support the OMC method of these working groups and the Peer Learning Activities that have provided excellent learning opportunities and concrete outcomes such as the high quality document “Supporting teacher educators for better learning outcomes” prepared by the WG on the “Professional development of Teachers”.

There is however room for improvement. Firstly, as mentioned in our earlier communication, EFEE urges DG EAC to offer us the opportunity to take active part in working groups currently operating at European level such as the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), the Bologna Follow-up Group, the VET Business Forum. EFEE would also wish to be involved in the work of the European Centre for the Development of Vocation Education and Training. We are convinced that EFEE will bring added value to these groups and meetings, being the representatives of employers in education and representing a whole variety of diverse members; ministries of education, local and regional authorities, national education councils, associations of colleges and universities, etc. EFEE can also, through its members and networks offer you excellent access to national education experts across the European community.

Secondly, we recommend that the EC **systematically consult** the European sectoral social partners in education when it comes to EC strategies, programmes and communications in the area of education in order to facilitate more democratic decision-making process at EU level.

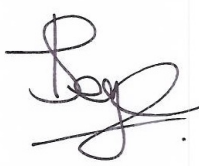
Thirdly, we would welcome the possibility of taking part in the **new Education and Training Forum** as suggested in the 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the EC on the implementation of the ET 2020.

Such opportunities would also be in line with our mutual agreement on an enhanced cooperation between the European Social Partners and the services of DG EAC, as was decided at the High Level meeting with Commissioner Vassiliou on 16th October 2013.

Last but not least, we consider it very important for a clear recognition of the involvement of the **European sectoral social partners in education** that in future EC documents the correct terminology is used when referring to **both** the cross-industry European social partners as well as the sectoral European social partners in education. Mentioning only *European social partners*, as now has been

the case, is considered by a lot of stakeholders as referring only to the cross-industry European social partners.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Stege', is positioned above the printed name.

Bianka Stege

General Secretary European Federation of Education Employers