

UEAPME contribution to the mid-term stocktaking and assessment of the Education and Training 2020 strategy

Introduction:

The merit of the Education and Training Strategy 2020 is its long term nature aimed at covering the entire scope of education and training, and at facilitating synergies between the different education and training pathways of citizens at all ages and across the life cycle.

The Education and Training Strategy 2020 has been adopted in 2008 before the crisis and the setting up of the European Semester with the country specific recommendations including on education and training. In addition, it was just two years before the adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy where education and training and in particular skills play an important role for growth, competitiveness and inclusion.

Since 2008 the economic and social context has changed and priorities, tools and governance should be adapted accordingly.

The Education and Training Strategy 2020 governance, reporting process and working priorities remain complex.

This is why UEAPME considers it **necessary to better align the ET 2020 and EU 2020 strategies, to simplify the ET 2020 process and to put more emphasis on stable key working priorities instead of cycles.**

In view of the ET 2020 mid-term stocktaking and next joint report, UEAPME would like to make the following comments along the four questions asked by the European Commission.

Q1: ET 2020 strategic objectives:

Is there scope for introducing significant content-related changes to the ET 2020 strategic objectives?

As UEAPME we consider the **4 strategic objectives remain largely valid.**

- 1. lifelong learning and mobility,**
- 2. quality and efficiency,**
- 3. equity and social cohesion,**
- 4. creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.**

Nevertheless, in the context of the second strategic objective, **efficiency of funding should go more in the direction of the economic case of education and training policy and cost-effectiveness.**

Furthermore the fourth priority should have a **stronger emphasis on entrepreneurship** and developing entrepreneurship spirit at all levels of education and training.

Q2: The link between ET 2020 and the EU's overall growth and jobs strategy. What further steps should we take to strengthen the contribution of ET2020 to the EU's overall growth and jobs strategy?

UEAPME acknowledges the efforts undertaken in 2012 to adjust the ET 2020 strategy in order to contribute to achieving Europe 2020's objectives.

On the tools and governance structures, the changes proposed in 2012 are going in the right direction for underpinning the implementation of country specific recommendations, modernising the national education and training systems, reinforcing their efficiency and quality as well as equipping people with skills needed on the labour market. However, it is not clear to what extent the proposals of the Commission have been fully implemented in the last 2 years notably in the field of governance.

For example we have no information on how the Education committee cooperates with the other EU level committees, notably the Economic Policy Committee, the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee. On this specific aspect as European Social Partners we call for better synergies including with our Social Dialogue Committee in line with our Declaration on economic governance.

On ET 2020 governance process more needs to be done:

The involvement of social partners at national level is currently inexistent in the ET 2020 Strategy as such.

At EU level, UEAPME supported the reorganisation of the Technical Working Groups going towards reduction in numbers and more consistency of content. Despite clear and robust mandates, it is still too early to assess their outcomes and the impact of their work at national level.

On indicators, quantitative targets should be complemented with a more qualitative approach.

Quantitative targets are important tools for comparing national performances of education and training systems but even more strategic is the qualitative dimension of achievements in terms of learning outcomes, labour market relevance and employability.

On the 40% of tertiary or equivalent education attainment, UEAPME considers it essential to have the higher VET pathway more visible in the 40% benchmark.

So far this benchmark is biased towards academic tertiary education, which only partially reflects businesses' needs for "higher qualifications". VET at tertiary level is often not captured by ISCED. A more pronounced focus on the addition "or equivalent qualifications" of the benchmark is needed. The EQF should replace ISCED as a point of reference for the Europe 2020 benchmark.

Q3: ET2020 future priorities

Should we introduce changes to enhance the operational nature of ET2020? Building on the existing European agendas and mandates of the ET 2020 Working groups, please specify the two key priorities areas that we should focus European cooperation on during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017), preferably with an indication of a concrete output that should be achieved. Please provide a brief policy rationale for these suggestions

UEAPME considers it necessary to limit the number of working priorities listed under the 4 strategic objectives. Well chosen key priorities, stable for more than the current cycle, are the best way forward to achieve tangible results. Reforming education and training systems is a medium and long-term process and takes time to bear fruit.

Priorities should be defined in view of boosting the growth and jobs agenda.

Priority n°1: Identification and provision of skills needed for the labour market. Learning outcomes in all education and training pathways should be the cornerstone and basis for E&T reforms at national level;

Priority n°2: Attractiveness of vocational education and training including further promotion of work-based learning and apprenticeship at all levels and new developments of higher VET;

Priority n°3: Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship spirit should also be high on the agenda together with the development of generic skills and competences including through enhanced learning mobility;

Priority n°4: Acquiring solid basic skills and ensuring a quality primary and secondary education should remain a constant priority as they are the basis for further learning and facilitate integration in the labour market.

Quality should be an overarching priority in each of the 4 strategic objectives and priorities.

Q4: Contribution of social partners to implementing the future priorities

What are the lessons learned from social partner participation in ET 2020 so far and how could the concrete contribution by the social partners in the implementation of ET 2020's future priorities be enhanced?

For the time being participation of social partners in the ET 2020 strategy has been less successful.

At EU level UEAPME had the possibility to be involved in the previous Working Groups but the methods were far from being ideal and the outcomes not so obvious. The Working Groups were too numerous and their objectives were not enough focused. In addition the link with the EU 2020 Strategy was not so clear.

Given the efforts of the Commission to renew the Technical Working Groups and optimise the Open Method of Coordination, including exchange of good practices and peer learning, we expect that such improvements will translate into more concrete results.

At national level, as far as we know, social partners have not been involved. One of the main reasons is that social partners were traditionally not involved in education policy and in certain Member States not even in vocational education and training policies despite the necessity to have them on board.

Social partners should be part of the governance of work based learning and apprenticeships if such schemes are to deliver skills needed on the labour markets. This is crucial notably for SMEs.

The ET 2020 strategy and its working priorities should be better aligned with the EU 2020 strategy and Country Specific Recommendations. New efforts are made to involve national social partners in the EU Semester and in this way they should be better placed to actively contribute for better results on ET 2020.

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