



Director

Thessaloniki, 15 January 2010
Dir/AMB/proda/2010/025European Commission
Secretariat General
Unit D1
European Commission
B - 1049 Brussels**Subject: Public consultation on the future EU 2020 strategy**

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this common Agenda for the future EU strategy. Further to internal consultation we hereby enclose Cedefop's contribution.

As the European Agency for the Development of Vocational Education and Training, we hope that this input will be of value, since we offer our views as experts in the field of Vocational Education and Training, Skills needs/supply forecast, and other key areas covered in the EU 2020 strategy working document.

We take this opportunity to wish you all success in this initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Aviana Bulgarelli
Director

Cedefop's comments on the EU 2020 Strategy discussion paper

Cedefop welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important policy document, which sets out the guidelines for our work in this decade. The current paper provides a good opportunity to reflect on the state-of-play and reassess Europe's future objectives and priorities. Please find below some reflections on the overall strategy and the issues particularly related to skills and vocational education and training (VET).

General comments:

- To demonstrate the EU's role, value and support and to highlight the need to continue/renew the joint commitment of all, it is important that the document sets out some of the major achievements so far, especially in these difficult times.
- Consequently, Cedefop suggests linking the future strategy more closely with the work done since 2000. The new strategy could build on a brief SWOT analysis of the Lisbon strategy, its methods and implementation. This would mean looking back briefly at Lisbon's original objectives and pointing to achievements and shortcomings in the different policy areas. This would also highlight the importance of policy evaluation and implementation. Under Lisbon, much work went into devising new policies; the key phase now is to implement them. Showing the links between different policy areas is also important to give the new strategy a holistic approach. For example, to "become green", requires education, training, research, innovation and economic policies to interact. Because of the impact of the crisis and the recovery, the strategy could have a vision of where we want Europe to be ten years from now. The work achieved under Lisbon can provide the basis for setting out that vision.
- The future strategy also needs to address disparities between countries, regions, which have often been made worse by the economic crisis. Targets or benchmarks that might be set in different policy areas could be based on mutually agreed minimum standards which are then differentiated to reflect the different development stages and characteristics of countries.
- As we know from the past, the impact on unemployment lags behind and it can be expected to rise once stimulus measures, such as short-time working agreements, are phased out. The labour market will recover more slowly than the economy. Cedefop's skills forecasts point to skills shortages despite possibly high unemployment. There is a need to look more closely into these structural imbalances on the labour market.
- The section on constraints and new challenges lists some issues related to inclusion and cohesion. However, the current focus on help for people in periods of employment transition ("transitional flexicurity" – see below) might be broadened. Demographic change and potential skills shortages as well as social stability emphasise the importance of greater social cohesion. This requires better and more flexible education and training and implementing the common EU tools for lifelong learning developed under the Lisbon agenda (see below).
- The paper considers "having a job ...the best safeguard against poverty and exclusion" and refers to support for those temporarily out of work. References could be added to conditions necessary to reduce the number of the working poor (see respective Commission reports and OECD Employment outlook). This could include an "external" dimension, for example the ILO Decent Work agenda.
- The Lisbon strategy attributed a significant role to education and training. Further, the warning that "Cutting spending in forward looking areas such as educationwould inhibit reaching the 2020 objectives", is both welcome and very true. Consequently, we would argue that education and training, in particular VET, could be more prominent in the text.

- This is because, not only is it recognised that Europe's future depends on the knowledge, skills and competences of its people, but also because there is a good story to tell concerning education and training. The European Commission, Member States and social partners are working more closely than ever in this area and considerable progress has been made in agreeing common aims and objectives and developing common tools to help make lifelong learning a reality. Further, there remains the commitment in this area to continue education and training reform. These issues are discussed below.

Specific comments that relate to **education and training**, in particular **vocational education and training (VET)** and its role in the new strategy:

- Given the crucial role that education and training plays in establishing inclusive societies where growth is based on knowledge, the paper could include an account of Europe's achievements on the common priorities in education and training and the employment policy guidelines which relate to lifelong learning/education and training. It could demonstrate the EU's support to improve investment in human capital and skills development through structural funds and common programmes.
- This account could also reflect on Europe's strengths as seen from the outside. Europe is acknowledged for its strong VET models. As shown by the rapid development of comprehensive, overarching national qualifications frameworks in almost all EU and EEA countries, there is growing interest in Europe's work on a reference framework (the European qualifications framework (EQF)) to compare qualifications between different countries and to recognise knowledge, skills and competences that people have acquired outside formal education and training.
- European cooperation in VET, has led to the development of common principles and tools to help implement lifelong learning. The tools help make people's skills and competences visible and comparable. They support mobility for learning and working. The list of agreed common tools and principles is substantial (Europass, European qualifications framework, European credit system for VET, European quality assurance framework, common principles for education and career guidance and counselling and validation/recognition of knowledge, skills and competences which people acquire outside formal education and training). This progress is reflected in the European Commission's reports on the implementation of the Education and training work programme 2010 and Cedefop's reviews of the Copenhagen process.
- **Priority 1** advocates a stronger emphasis on education, **priority 2** underlines the importance of skills. To sustain growth, equal value has to be given to knowledge, skills and competences acquired in different types and stages of education and training (parity of esteem). Most jobs, at all levels are becoming more and more knowledge and skill intensive. Consequently, we have to invest in education and training in a flexible way and create more flexible paths to enable people not only to progress to higher levels of educational attainment, but also to combine different types and levels of education and training. This includes learning/skills development at the workplace. It requires working environments and work organisations to encourage and stimulate learning. We need a less linear approach to education/training, work and retirement (as pointed out in priority 2). This requires a rethink of education and training including the role of active labour market measures. This has already begun, in particular through European cooperation in VET (Copenhagen process). There is increasing focus on what people know and can do, not how and where they learned to do it and a growing trend to recognise the knowledge, skills and competences acquired at work or in other situations.

This requires a more holistic view of education and training/ learning throughout people's lives with flexible pathways. Qualification frameworks need to be comprehensive and cover all kinds and levels of learning. It is important to break away from traditional paradigms and

the text provides an opportunity to set out a new vision for education and training in the future.

- The paper could broaden its focus to include VET. More than half of Europe's young people graduate from upper-secondary education with a vocational qualification. Furthermore, more and more VET is offered at higher education level. What is needed are closer links in both directions between higher education and VET and a stronger focus on the outcomes of different programmes or modules or learning that takes place at work.
- More emphasis might also be given to key competences/basic skills. Key competences are not only needed for successful school to work transition, but basic skills are also needed to succeed in lifelong learning and to acquire higher skills. It is important to stress is that key competences need to be transferable occupational skills and those relevant in the specific professional context. (Sweden for instance, is revocationalising its upper secondary education and training, other countries are looking to integrate more key competences into their VET; Ireland is including key competences in PhD programmes). The current debate is focusing on the question of which skills and what is the right mix. Especially as traditional boundaries between occupations are blurring and people might need to combine knowledge, skills and competences in one occupational field with partially those of another field. This is particularly important if we advocate self-employment and consider that SMEs are Europe's backbone.
- The approach to innovation and creativity could also be developed further. As well as discussing creative industries and "knowledge-based" firms, it could also advocate learning environments and work organisation and tasks to foster innovation and creativity across all levels and types of education and training and in all businesses and occupations.
- The need for a better match is briefly mentioned in **priority 2**. The text rightly discusses mobility, green jobs and the growing health sector. However, it could discuss more broadly the imbalances in the labour market that exist despite the crisis. Current job openings remain unfilled.
- Closer cooperation between the labour market and education and training at all levels is needed. Cooperation needs to go beyond partnerships between education and training authorities and institutions and social partners and enterprises. Partnerships should also include labour market authorities, guidance and placement services and civil society. A new vision of Europe would also acknowledge the role and value new types of partnerships.
- Research/business partnerships also include education and training institutions below university level whether in general education or VET. We also suggest replacing the one-way approach of innovation transfer from universities/research institutions to business by a more mutually beneficial one, as enterprises do not only apply outcomes of research but often initiate or carry out applied research.
- While VET alone can not solve exclusion issues, it has a specific role to play in promoting employability as it has closer connections with the labour market than general education. The practical character of VET also appeals to many individuals. It can help people to avoid dropping out and to achieve a higher level of education attainment than they might otherwise have achieved through other forms of education. VET can also help individuals socially excluded or threatened by it, into mainstream pathways, rather than special programmes which can maintain, or reinforce, the social divide between groups.
- How to empower people in inclusive societies (**priority 2**), could focus more on empowering citizens/individuals as learners and workers. This not only includes easier access to education and training but also support for them through education and career guidance at different stages in their lives, validation and recognition of they have learned (irrespective of how they learned it), placement and support services, incentives and legal frameworks. Since Lisbon, work has been done to provide individuals with greater choice,

but many people, in particular the most vulnerable, need support to navigate through these options.

Cedefop will be happy to provide evidence from its work related to VET/lifelong learning to support the account of achievements and challenges and underpin the rationale of the strategy.