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Opening speech for the Thematic Forum on School-Business Cooperation

The School-Business Forum

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Minister, Mr Sundgren, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you all to this **thematic forum on school-business cooperation**.

This is a new initiative for the European Commission – the first time we focus on cooperation between education and business from the perspective of schools.

There is a strong tradition of collaboration between higher education and business. Our **University-Business Forum**, launched two years ago, is a highly productive space for dialogue on improving this collaboration. But we should not restrict dialogue to higher education. Compulsory education is just as crucial. This is where the core skills are learned. It is when opinions and attitudes take root. And it reaches everyone.

It was very clear during the university-business forum debates that there was a strong demand for expanding the work of the forum to schools – a demand that came especially from business.

We have many excellent examples of schools and enterprises working together to the benefit of both. Many member states have developed innovative synergies between business and schools – some of the leading practice in the world is to

be found in the EU. But in general, the **cultural divide** between these potential partners is still too wide.

This is why the University-business forum proposed a **new focus on school-business cooperation**. And not before time. Because opening up our schools to the wider world is a vital step in gearing up education for the changing world around us, and for the challenges we face, challenges that have been deepened by the crisis.

The economic crisis and the response - Europe 2020 strategy

The **crisis has focussed all our minds on jobs and skills**. And it has created a sense of urgency; a sense that things must be done differently in the years ahead.

In response, the Commission has designed its '**Europe 2020**' strategy; a strategy for exiting the crisis and basing our future on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth driven by knowledge and innovation.

Ultimately, it is people's skills and their creative and innovative potential that will defeat the crisis and devise solutions to the challenges of the future. So **education and training have a key role** in this strategy – innovative education and training that can respond to change in the world of work and society at large, and that builds on cooperation with the outside world.

Within Europe 2020, the Commission has proposed a limited number of targets on which to focus our efforts. Of the five headline targets, one is devoted to education and training:

- to reduce the share of early school leavers by a third, to 10% from the current 15%, and
- to increase the share of university graduates from 31% to at least 40%.

There is no trade-off between these two objectives; we must address the issues of both **basic skills** and **high-level skills** together, to instil excellence and open up access for all to high quality education.

Europe 2020 intends to **combat the particular difficulties facing young people** in acquiring the right skills for the future, and in procuring decent work. It proposes many measures that go to the heart of this forum:

- Our Youth on the Move initiative, for example, will promote **entrepreneurship** by creating opportunities for young professionals to improve their skills in another country.
- It will encourage Member States to **make education more relevant** to the world of work and offer better guidance to young people seeking jobs.
- Our Innovation Union initiative will strengthen links between **education, business, research and innovation** and **support young entrepreneurs**
- It will encourage more **science, maths and engineering graduates**, and a focus in school curricula on **creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship**.
- Our Agenda for New Skills and Jobs will develop **partnerships between the worlds of education and work**, and ensure that people develop the **right skills for the jobs of the future**.

New skills for new jobs - key competences

So what does this mean for the skills young people need to develop in schools; and what does this mean for teaching and learning?

The 2006 European Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning has become something of a bible for answering this question.

Knowledge alone - the traditional output of schools - is not enough in a fast-changing world, one where jobs themselves are changing. People need a mix of skills to cope with and develop new knowledge, and to pursue more flexible career paths. The key competences recommendation defines this mix – basic skills, such as mother tongue, maths, science; and cross-cutting skills such as learning to learn, initiative-taking and entrepreneurship.

Schools are making good progress in adapting teaching to this approach. There is a shift towards more **innovative learning** and a new **focus on learning outcomes** – not just what students know, but what they can do with their knowledge and skills.

But changing the curriculum is only the first step. Developing skills instead of just transmitting knowledge calls for new approaches to teaching and learning, and the commitment of the whole school community.

The aims of the School-Business Forum

Thus, preparing students for the future is an increasingly complex task. This is why we propose a partnership approach, and why the Commission is keen to encourage and share knowledge about school-business cooperation. This Forum will give us the mechanism to circulate good practice and identify success factors across Europe.

Let me give you a flavour of what school – business partnerships can achieve.

1. Develop new skills

The new jobs being created, in particular in the service sector, require people to react swiftly, to cope with the unexpected, and to look for new solutions. Employers increasingly look for people with problem-solving and entrepreneurial mindsets, as well as solid basic skills.

School-business cooperation provides real-life settings in which young people can sharpen their knowledge and skills; in particular their creativity, initiative-taking, entrepreneurship and problem-solving abilities - skills that can hardly be learnt in an old-fashioned classroom setting, in a timeframe of 45 minute lessons.

2. Changing role of teacher and opening up schools

Secondly, school-business cooperation can enrich the learning environment – it can help students put theory into practice; see which skills will count in working life, and help them to adapt to change.

School-business cooperation can broaden the teacher's role - encouraging teachers to take the role of a facilitator or a coordinator within the learning process. This is essential as students take more responsibility for their own learning; set their own goals and monitor their own progress – and, ultimately, become true lifelong learners throughout their lives.

3. Improving the match between education and labour market

Thirdly, school-business cooperation is vital for overcoming a central challenge shared by education and work – getting rid of the mismatch we too often find between the skills needed for a job and the skills available. Cooperation with business is a vital source of information about which skills are actually needed on the labour market these days.

As a result of this mismatch, Europe is facing shortfalls in certain professions – in maths, science and technology, for example. School-business cooperation, by presenting role models, for example, or through practical work, can encourage students, including more young women, to choose a career in these areas. It is

also naturally a source of career guidance; and placements and work experience can be very powerful for motivating students and for making career choices.

But this is not only about business telling schools what they need. Business can help schools overcome other difficulties - lack of access to the latest technologies or to extra-curricular activities etc. Business contacts can help teachers to update their knowledge about their own subject and its application.

Conclusion - involving stakeholders in shared solutions

Cooperation and dialogue are the first step. But both sides need to be committed, and to act on their commitment.

- Business needs to invest in school-business cooperation by allocating staff and resources.
- Education authorities have to allow for time and flexibility in the curriculum.
- Teacher training institutes need to take it on board in their training programmes.
- Schools and teachers may have to re-organise their teaching practices to introduce more cooperative forms of learning.
- And finally, stakeholders (including the Commission!) have to offer their support - by creating a framework for policy makers and practitioners to meet, to keep up the impetus at institutional level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in an interdependent world, and can only overcome the challenges by working together. The Europe 2020 Strategy is a new framework for a new way

of thinking – for building shared solutions rather than working in isolation. I invite you all to take full advantage of this Forum, and of the impetus of this new Strategy, to make business-school cooperation a cornerstone of an inclusive, innovative Europe.

Thank you.