

Joint Committee on European Affairs

Joint Committee's Contribution to the European Commission on its Green Paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people, COM (2009) 329

1. The Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs wishes to thank the Commission for their invitation to national parliaments to submit their views and comments on Commission proposals received under the Barroso Initiative, including Green and White Papers. This initiative has now been placed on a formal Treaty basis with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. It is the intention of the Joint Committee to work the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty to the fullest extent possible and therefore hopes to see the political dialogue between the Commission and the national parliaments further enhanced. This political dialogue is crucial in respect of making better EU policy and laws which properly reflect the concerns and needs of our citizens.
2. As part of this enhanced political dialogue as underpinned by the Lisbon Treaty, the Committee has considered the Commission's Green Paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people. The following is the views of the Joint Committee on this important policy area. The Committee asks that the Commission take account of its views when preparing its follow-up proposals to further promote the concept of learning mobility for all young people and its Communication expected in 2010 as part of the Youth on the Move initiative.
3. The Committee believes that learning mobility is vitally important to the educational development of young people. Mobility adds to human capital, as students access new knowledge and develop new linguistic skills and intellectual competences. In addition, employers recognise and value these benefits. The Committee agrees with the recently updated Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET2020) where it highlights the importance of learning mobility as an essential element of lifelong learning and an important means of enhancing people's employability and adaptability.
4. The Committee endorses the Leuven Communiqué which stipulates that at least 20 per cent of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad. For this to be achieved, more effort is required to promote the Erasmus programme and to encourage students to participate. To this end, the Committee suggests that a system of organised visits by Erasmus alumni to second level schools should be established. This would raise awareness of the programme and start secondary level students thinking about mobility options before they enter third level education.

5. However, the Committee believes that learning mobility should not be restricted only to the Erasmus programme involving third level students or those most-mobile language students. More programmes and measures should be established to extend learning mobility to include young people engaged in vocational training, at secondary level, engaged in apprenticeships and young entrepreneurs. To this end, it is important to enable teachers, trainers and youth workers to benefit from mobility programmes. This would not only benefit their effectiveness in their organisation through the widening of their skills set but will also mean they can act as ‘multipliers’, motivating their students to undertake a period of mobility abroad.
6. The Committee believes that preparation of mobility experiences is crucial to the success of mobility programmes. The practical aspect of a young person’s travel abroad should be properly prepared such as accommodation, living expenses, support services, travel and social outlets. Otherwise, the student will be less likely to engage actively in the educational aspect of the mobility and will come away with a negative view of the experience. In turn, this young person will not act as a ‘multiplier’, encouraging others to participate in educational mobility. A key component to the proper preparation of mobility experiences is the role of the placement officer/coordinator at institutional level in facilitating quality mobility experiences.
7. To encourage young people to engage in educational mobility, it is important that they feel they will gain from the process, that the process will assist them in achieving their qualification or in securing employment. The Committee suggests therefore that a system of awards could be established at an EU level which young people would receive on completing a mobility programme. The Committee also believes that the progress made with recognition of qualification instruments should be built on so that these become a well know and workable tool across the EU.
8. The Committee agrees that existing and new arrangements should be explored on how public authorities and other stakeholders could be better mobilised to promote the mobility of young people. It is vitally important that different levels of public authorities – the EU, national, regional and local – work closer with business, civil society, universities and private individuals in finding ways they can cooperate better and in turn benefit from supporting learning mobility among young people.
9. To facilitate greater learning mobility, the Committee believes that the portability of student grants needs to be addressed. The Committee understands that this is a legally complex area but supports the proposal that the Commission could publish guidance in this area, based on the key implications of the case-law as established

by the European Court of Justice. However, such guidance must accommodate the circumstances arising from the differences in national supervision. As a result, this proposal should be further explored in consultation with the Network of Experts on Student Support in Europe (NESSIE), as established within the Bologna process. This work should be limited to preparing guidelines for Member States as it is not possible to establish hard and fast rules in this area.

10. The Committee welcomes the reference in the Green Paper to mobility exchanges with non-EU countries. The internationalisation of mobility is important for broadening the horizons of young people and for gaining skills and experiences which may not be readily available within the EU. A sound approach to the internationalisation of educational mobility not only encourages the mobility of EU students but also strengthens policy dialogues with non-EU countries and promotes EU educational services.
11. The Committee believes that educational mobility is also important for promoting European cohesion and fostering a European identity among young Europeans. Exposing young people to other European cultures and experiences would encourage a better understanding of the EU. The role of education was identified as a key factor in promoting public engagement in and understanding of the EU by the Houses of the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Ireland's future in the EU, established following the defeat of the Lisbon Treaty in the first Irish referendum. Extending mobility beyond third level institutions to include young people engaged in vocational training, at secondary level, engaged in apprenticeships and young entrepreneurs would be important for promoting a greater European identity across a broader range of sectors.
11. Learning mobility should not be seen as an end in itself but rather as part of a process aimed at improving human capital. It has an important role to play in improving skills sets, furthering educational attainment and facilitating professional training. As a result, it has an important contribution to make in ensuring that European economies become more competitive. The Committee therefore believes that learning mobility should be an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. In particular, the opportunities for educational exchanges and traineeships in the area of green technology should be explored as part of developing a smart, low carbon economy in Europe. Promoting learning mobility, therefore, should be addressed as part of the review of the Lisbon Strategy and the preparation of its successor post-2010.

Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs

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