



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 3.5.2021  
C(2021) 3252 final*

*Dear President,*

*The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion on the Communication on a European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience {COM(2020) 274 final} and the support for the Agenda expressed therein.*

*The Communication forms part of a broader package of ambitious measures designed to deliver on the very first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights while ensuring a prompt recovery from the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, harnessing the ecological and digital transformations and taking full advantage of the opportunities they offer.*

*With its focus on skills for the green and digital transitions, the European Skills Agenda supports the European Green Deal {COM(2020) 640 final}, the Digital Strategy {COM(2020) 67 final} and the new Industrial and SME Strategies {COM(2020) 102 final and COM(2020) 103 final}, as well as the proposal for a Council Recommendation on a “Bridge to Jobs – reinforcing the Youth Guarantee” {COM(2020) 276 final} adopted on the same day.*

*The Commission has a clear commitment to ensure access to quality up- and reskilling opportunities for all, including notably for the most vulnerable in our society. At the same time, the Commission recalls that the organisation of education and training and its content remains the competence of Member States in line with Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty.*

*The implementation of the European Skills Agenda is monitored through the European Semester and Union funding complements national public and private resources and supports Member States, regions and stakeholders to put this into practice. For example, the Recovery and Resilience Facility has up- and reskilling as one of the seven priority areas for investment and the European Social Fund Plus will continue investing in up- and reskilling.*

*The Commission has taken due note of the views expressed by the Camera Deputaților in its Opinion and will take them into account in the various phases of debate, design, development, implementation and evaluation of the actions announced in the European Skills Agenda, in close synergy with the efforts deployed to establish the European Education Area.*

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President of the Camera Deputaților  
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*In response to the more technical comments in the Opinion, the Commission would like to refer to the attached annex.*

*The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Camera Deputaților and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Maroš Šefčovič  
Vice-President*

*Nicolas Schmit  
Member of the Commission*

*The Commission has carefully considered each of the issues raised by the Camera Deputaților in its Opinion and is pleased to offer the following clarifications.*

*Point 2: Inclusion of self-learning and extracurricular learning*

*Self-learning and extracurricular learning are covered in the Skills Agenda's action 8 "Skills for Life". It will prioritise non-formal, life-wide learning, intergenerational, intercultural and community learning, taking place in multiple environments outside formal education and training.*

*In addition, the Commission's new career management platform Europass provides access to information on all types of learning and working in Europe, including links to national services provided by Member States.*

*Points 4 and 11: Improve digital training and revitalise the Coalition for Digital Skills and Jobs*

*The Skills Agenda supports digital skills for all and at all levels - from basic digital skills to advanced, in particular through its action 6 – "Skills to support the twin transitions". The Skills Agenda will support EU Information and Communication Technology-Jump-Start trainings to provide short-term intensive training to quickly equip people with above-basic digital skills; support digital crash courses for SMEs and the "digital volunteers" programme to upskill the current workforce in digital areas, as already announced in the SME strategy.*

*The Skills Agenda is complementary to the update of the Digital Education Action Plan, which presents a vision for encouraging the development of a high-performance digital education eco-system while enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. Actions under the updated Digital Education Action Plan include: i) developing a European Digital Skills Certificate that is recognised and valued by individuals and employers across Europe, based on the Digital Competence Framework, and ii) updating the Digital Competence Framework to include a series of new examples of (artificial intelligence and data related) knowledge, skills and attitudes that are applicable to each one of the '21 DigComp' competences. Action to support the digitalisation of learning include a commitment to bring forward a proposal for a Council Recommendation by end 2021 on online and distance learning for primary and secondary education. Its focus should be an EU-wide common understanding of how to make distance, online and blended learning effective, inclusive and engaging.*

*In addition, the Digital Europe Programme, just launched at the beginning of 2021, aims to strengthen capacity and advanced digital skills. This complements other Union funding programmes such as the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, REACT EU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.*

*The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition has been revitalised with a new secretariat and a renewed effort to encourage Coalition members to make new pledges (for instance to provide*

digital training). There are now 550 Coalition members and 160 pledges. There is now also a user-made ranking of pledge performance via the scoreboard.

Other actions of note in this area include: the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01), and 'SELFIE' - an online self-reflection tool for school learners, teachers and leaders, including in VET, on how digital technology is used for learning and training.

As concerns skills, including digital skills, in the medical sector, this has been the subject of a recent high-level round table in the context of the Union's 'Pact for Skills' initiative.

#### Point 6: Early childhood education

The 2019 Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems recognises that “the family is the most important place for children to grow and develop, and parents (and guardians) are responsible for each child’s well-being, health and development”. However, it also acknowledges that “access to high quality early childhood education and care services for all children contributes to their healthy development and educational success, helps reducing social inequalities and narrows the competence gap between children with different socioeconomic backgrounds”.

The Recommendation therefore encourages Member States to “support child development in a consistent way as early as possible by using early childhood education and care services”.

The proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee recommends that Member States provide free and effective access for children in need to early childhood education and care.

#### 9. European Education Area

In line with the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) adopted on 19 February 2021 and the Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 adopted on 30 September 2020, the Commission will establish a European Education Area Platform. This platform will serve as an interactive public gateway to support access for Member States and stakeholders to information concerning actions, services, instruments and results in connection with the European Education Area and to promote cooperation, as well as mutual learning. By the end of 2022, the Commission will also publish a European Education Area Progress Report, taking stock of progress and remaining barriers to the realisation of the European Education Area and proposing next steps, as necessary.

#### 10. Pact for Skills

The Pact for Skills invites companies and industrial value chains, Social Partners, national and regional authorities, chambers of commerce, learning institutions, and any other interested organisations to commit to addressing skills challenges. This may be through

*individual commitments, or by setting up or joining partnerships and pooling resources throughout the entire eco-system.*

*The Pact will mobilise resources and incentivise all relevant stakeholders to take real action to upskill and reskill the workforce, by pooling efforts and setting up partnerships supporting green and digital transitions as well as local and regional growth strategies. Any cooperation result, such as a professional profile or a core training module, will naturally be used by partners in compliance with their national legal frameworks.*

*The members of the Pact will have access to a support service comprising networking, knowledge and guidance hubs. They will also have access to clear information on available EU funding. The EU is dedicating unprecedented funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the new Multiannual Financial Framework to support skills. The Commission is actively encouraging Member States to plan adequate resources for upskilling and reskilling, including through the Pact for Skills.*

#### *Point 12: Support to older people*

*The EU is supporting employment and social policies encouraging the active labour market participation of older people and skills development at all stages in life, supporting career transitions and longer and healthier working lives. The recent Green paper on Ageing {COM(2021) 50 final} calls for increasing employment and productivity based on enhanced education and lifelong learning, harnessing the digital and silver economies, and fostering senior entrepreneurship. EU funding is available to support policies pursuing these objectives.*

#### *Point 17: Individual learning accounts*

*The Commission agrees that to ensure quality, it is important to make sure that individuals are able to choose between a sufficient number of alternative training providers and training offers. It is also important that individuals can easily access information about the quality of training opportunities, and their recognition on the labour market. One objective of the Commission's initiative on individual learning accounts is to make it easier for individuals to navigate the training offer, to select quality training that is tailored to individual needs and will improve their employment and income prospects.*

*The Commission will take a close look at the experiences that exist in the Member States with individual learning accounts and similar schemes, to identify good practices on how countries ensure that the training offer is of high quality and responsive to individual and labour market needs. Preliminary evidence points to the importance of robust and durable governance arrangements that also involve Social Partners.*

#### *Point 19: Skills intelligence*

*The Commission is aware of the need to have a clear understanding of skills needs and skills gaps, which is ever more important in a fast-moving labour market. This includes the need*

*always to have an eye to emerging and future needs. For this reason, the Skills Agenda, in particular under action 2, will support the development of new skills intelligence, including at regional and sectoral level – building on the work by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) using big data analysis. A permanent online tool will be created where real-time and more granular information will be published so that all interested stakeholders can use it.*

*Skills intelligence tailored to individuals' needs will be presented in Europass. In addition, the Commission will seek to disseminate skills intelligence, for instance through the Pact for Skills and in synergy with the European Research Area partnerships. The Commission will encourage the network of public employment services to prioritise the early identification of skills shortages and trends linked to growing job opportunities, as well as encouraging the use of skills intelligence by public and private employment services. The Commission will also work with Social Partners in generating and promoting skills intelligence, for example, supporting Social Partners' work on skills intelligence in sectors not covered by other initiatives such as the Blueprint for sectoral skills cooperation. Account should also be taken of matching skills of third country nationals with vacancies – as needed. Migration can play a role in reducing skills gaps.*

*Point 20: Horizontal funding theme to support the acquisition of life skills*

*Skills development is a cross cutting theme in the main Union funding instruments. The Recovery and Resilience Facility has 'reskill and upskill' as one of its seven investment priorities. The Commission Recommendation on Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE) also underlines the importance of investment and reforms in this area. Similarly, the ESF+ will remain an important Union funding programme for skills, education and training, in particular for disadvantaged groups, while Member States will also benefit from the Technical Support Instrument to set up inclusive strategies for up- and re-skilling of adults. More specifically, the Erasmus+, will contribute to skills development, especially in a transnational context and invest in education and training systems. This latter programme has a dedicated strand devoted to non-vocational adult education, which will support the development of life skills and abilities to cope with changes and adaptation throughout life, as well as community building and cohesion.*

*Point 22: Regulatory framework for micro-credentials*

*The growing use of, and potential for, micro-credentials is an outcome of the changing nature of the labour market and of education and training provision, offering more diverse and agile pathways to engage in accredited learning in a lifelong learning perspective. As such, micro-credentials offer one way to enable people to participate in 'bite-sized' education and training to hone their skillset in line with their current job needs or future personal and professional aspiration.*

*The European Skills Agenda and the Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 include an initiative regarding a European approach to micro-credentials. The Commission is currently developing this initiative. A European approach to micro-credentials aims at establishing EU standards supporting the quality,*

*transparency, recognition and take-up of short learning courses leading to micro-credentials, substantially widening learning opportunities and facilitating access to the labour market and job transitions.*