

## Promoting the learning mobility of young people

### Summary

In this opinion the Committee examines the European Commission's Green Paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people (COM(2009) 329, dated 8 July 2009).

The Green Paper deals with the learning mobility of young people and identifies a need to define strategies to achieve the ambitions set out. Its purpose is to open up the debate to stakeholders and the wider public, seeking their views on how best to boost substantially the opportunities for the learning mobility of young people. It concentrates on the following five aspects of mobility:

- it seeks to promote organised learning mobility;
- it deals firstly with mobility between the countries currently participating in EU programmes, while at the same time seeking to develop exchanges with the wider world;
- it promotes not only 'like-to-like' mobility across borders but within sectors (schools, universities, enterprises, etc.), but also cross-sector movements, e.g. from the world of education to the world of business and *vice versa*;
- it focuses on physical mobility, while recognising also the value of virtual mobility;
- it concentrates on the mobility of young people, which is not to say that learning mobility is not important for all age groups. The main cohort envisaged would be 16–35 year-olds.

In this opinion the Committee wishes to strongly emphasise the importance of internationalisation. The Committee believes it is extremely important that opportunities be developed and improved for pupils and students to spend parts of their education or work experience abroad. The Committee also draws attention in the opinion to the Government-initiated investment of SEK 20 million in increased teacher mobility for 2010–2011.

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[As requested, pages 2–4 of the original document have been omitted from this translation.]

## Examination by the Committee

### Main contents of the Green Paper

#### **Background**

In the introduction to the Green Paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people (COM(2009) 329), the Commission states that learning mobility, i.e. transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new skills is one of the fundamental ways in which individuals, particularly young people, can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development. Europeans who are mobile as young learners access new knowledge, develop new linguistic skills and intercultural competences and are more likely to be mobile as workers later in life. There is a clear consensus on the benefits of the learning mobility of young people.

In January 2008 the European Commission established an Expert Forum with the mandate to explore how to expand mobility, not only within the university sector, but among young people more generally. The Forum presented its report in June 2008 which called for learning mobility to become the rule, not the exception among Europe's young people. In July 2008, the 'Renewed social agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe' affirmed that the Commission would continue to develop a 'fifth freedom' by removing barriers to the free movement of knowledge and promoting the mobility of young people in particular.

The Council concluded in November 2008 that 'every young person should have the opportunity to take part in some form of mobility, whether this be during their studies or training, in the form of a work placement, or in the context of voluntary activities.' It invited the Member States and the Commission to further develop the concept of mobility for all young people.

In April 2008 the Ministers in charge of higher education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process adopted the Leuven Communiqué, which stipulates that in 2020 at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad. In 2006 around 310 000 young people benefitted from mobility within European programmes, which represents a mere 0.3% of the age cohort of 16–29 year-olds in the EU.

#### **Contents of the proposal**

The purpose of the Green Paper is to open up the debate to stakeholders and the wider public, seeking their views on how best to boost substantially the opportunities for young people to have a mobility experience. It concentrates on the following five aspects of mobility:

- it seeks to promote organised learning mobility;
- it deals firstly with mobility between the countries currently participating in EU programmes, while at the same time seeking to develop exchanges with the wider world;

- it promotes not only ‘like-to-like’ mobility across borders but within sectors (schools, universities, enterprises, etc.), but also cross-sector movements, e.g. from the world of education to the world of business and *vice versa*;
- it focuses on physical mobility, while recognising also the value of virtual mobility;
- it concentrates on the mobility of young people, which is not to say that learning mobility is not important for all age groups. The main cohort envisaged would be 16–35 year-olds.

The Green Paper is structured in three sections: issues regarding the preparation of a mobility period, issues regarding the actual period spent abroad, and proposals for a new partnership on mobility. In each Section the Commission poses a number of questions which stakeholders are encouraged to answer.

## **Preparing for a period of learning mobility**

### *Information and guidance*

When young people are exploring mobility opportunities, they need access to information on options, on funding and guidance regarding their choice and on practical issues. There is a wealth of information and guidance available, and it can be grouped into three main areas: funding opportunities, learning opportunities for young people (education and training programmes) and practical guidance. The Commission requests answers to the following question: How can the availability of information and guidance related to mobility be improved? Please provide examples of good practice, including appropriate tools and ways to make such information available.

### *Promotion and motivation*

There is consensus among many decision-makers that learning mobility is good for young people. However, the benefits of learning mobility may not be understood among young people themselves. The Commission requests answers to the following questions: What can be done to better promote and motivate young people to be mobile? Please provide examples of good practice in this area. What do you see as the difficulties in motivating young people to become mobile?

### *Languages and culture*

Some of the key competences to be acquired through learning mobility are foreign languages and intercultural skills. The Commission requests answers to the following question: How can the linguistic and cultural obstacles to mobility be best addressed? Please provide examples of good practice.

### *Legal issues*

The enlargement of the EU has greatly increased the geographical scope for youth mobility. However, many obstacles remain in the areas of administration and legislation. The Commission requests answers to the following questions: What are the main legal obstacles to mobility that you have encountered? Please give concrete examples. Can you provide examples of good practice in overcoming legal obstacles to mobility?

### *Portability of grants and loans*

Apart from scholarships, social benefits and loans from the home country can be an important source. However, these and other direct and indirect subsidies are often not portable, thereby discouraging young people from going abroad. The Commission requests answers to the following question: What kind of obstacles have you encountered regarding the portability of grants and loans and other benefits? Please give concrete examples.

### *Mobility to and from the European Union*

Under the 'Students Directive' (2004/114/EC), EU Member States shall facilitate the admission procedure for students, including by issuing the necessary visa in a timely manner. The Commission requests answers to the following question: What more should be done to promote mobility to and from the European Union? How should this be done? Please provide examples of good practice.

### *Preparation of the mobility period and quality assurance issues*

In order to increase the quality of the exchange, from the points of view of both the sending and the host institution/organisation, it could also be advisable to draw up a learning or training agreement. The Commission requests answers to the following question: What measures can be taken to ensure that the mobility period is of high quality? Please provide examples of good practice.

### *Reaching out to disadvantaged groups*

It is important to reach out to groups who tend to be excluded from mobility opportunities. The Commission requests answers to the following question: Which are the most important difficulties encountered by disadvantaged groups with regard to learning mobility? Please provide examples of good practice of how such difficulties can be overcome.

## **The stay abroad and follow-up**

### *Mentoring and integration*

The host organisation (school, educational establishment, youth organisation, company, etc.) should provide schemes such as mentoring to advise participants and help with their effective integration into the host environment, and act as a contact point for obtaining ongoing assistance. The Commission requests answers to the following question: Can you give some concrete examples of good practice in this area?

### *Recognition and validation*

It is vital to record, recognise and validate periods of learning mobility in an appropriate way. European instruments now available include: the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System ECTS (for higher education); the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET, adopted in 2009); the European Qualifications Framework (EQF); a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences,

Europass (Decision 2241/2004/EC); the Youthpass certificate for youth exchanges and volunteering; the European Quality Charter for Mobility.

### *Recognition of qualifications concerning higher education*

For higher education there is also the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) which was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in 1997. The Commission requests answers to the following question: Do problems with the validation and recognition of both formal and non-formal learning still constitute an obstacle to mobility? Please give concrete examples of improvements.

## **A new partnership for mobility**

### *Mobilising actors*

Overcoming the continuing obstacles to mobility requires a concerted approach. A new partnership is needed, with public authorities teaming up with partners from the worlds of civil society and business. The Commission requests answers to the following questions: How can all actors and resources at national, regional and local levels be better mobilised in the interest of youth mobility? Can you provide examples of successful territorial partnerships? Can you provide good examples and innovative ideas on the funding of youth mobility?

### *More active involvement from the business world*

There is a potential for further strengthening the motivation and engagement of business in youth mobility. The Commission requests answers to the following question: How can businesses be motivated to become more strongly involved in youth mobility? Please provide examples of good practice.

### *Virtual networking and eTwinning*

Virtual mobility, i.e. the use of the internet and other electronic forms of information and communication, is often a catalyst for embarking on a period of physical mobility. The Commission requests answers to the following questions: How can we best make use of ICTs to provide valuable virtual mobility opportunities to enrich the physical mobility? Can the eTwinning approach be used in other sectors e.g. voluntary service, vocational sector?

### *Engaging the ‘multipliers’*

Mobility periods of teachers and trainers in school, university and vocational education should be encouraged and recognised as an integral part of their work, as well as mobility of youth workers in youth organisations. The Commission requests answers to the following questions: Should mobility opportunities for ‘multipliers’ (teachers, trainers, youth workers, etc.) be given additional support and prominence in European programmes? What do you see as the main obstacles to a stronger engagement of teachers and trainers in promoting mobility?

### *Mobility targets*

The political efforts which have been made to promote mobility, e.g. the Leuven Communiqué adopted as part of the Bologna Process, should now focus on turning support into precise objectives. The Commission requests answers to the following question: Do you consider it worthwhile to define a mobility strategy and if so, at what level (European, national, institutional, sectoral, etc.)? Please provide examples of good practice.

### The Government's explanatory memorandum

On 2 October 2009 the Government presented its explanatory memorandum (2009/10:FPM11) concerning the Green Paper. It is evident from the explanatory memorandum that the Government takes a positive view of the fact that the Commission has presented a Green Paper on this important topic. The Government's position will be prepared in the Government Offices during autumn 2009, and the views of Swedish stakeholders will be heard.

### The Committee's position

The Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission has presented a Green Paper on this important topic. The Committee wishes to strongly emphasise the importance of internationalisation.

A larger proportion of young people studying or working abroad would lead to improved language skills, intercultural competences and responsibility, which would benefit not only the individual concerned but also the society in which he or she is active. Increased student mobility would increase Sweden's competitiveness and the employability of Swedish students in international companies and organisations.

Internationalisation gives the individual improved opportunities to choose the education that best suits him or her. The Committee believes that it is therefore extremely important for there to be increased opportunities to spend parts of an education or a period of work experience abroad throughout the process of lifelong learning.

The number of Swedish students studying abroad has remained relatively stable for the last ten years. Of approximately 24 000 students, around 20% took part in exchange programmes, while the others were 'free movers'. Two thirds of the students study in Europe, above all in the United Kingdom, Spain and Denmark. The proportion of students studying in Asia has increased in recent years.

In this opinion the Committee has chosen, under the appropriate headings, to bring up and comment on some of the aspects referred to by the Commission in the Green Paper.

### **Preparing for a period of learning mobility**

When it comes to the question of preparing for a period of learning mobility, the Committee is of the opinion that EU programmes must be flexible in terms of the duration and timing of the studies. It ought to be possible for shorter periods or periods starting at times other than at

the beginning of the academic year to be considered. It is the Committee's view that the EU programmes must also be flexible with regard to participating countries.

As far as language questions are concerned, the Committee makes the point that language skills are a precondition for participating in the EU programmes. At the same time this is also one of the greatest benefits of participation, i.e. that the students gain increased knowledge of a foreign language. The Committee wishes to stress the importance of early foreign language learning in primary education. Early learning contributes to more students believing they have the opportunity to benefit from studying in a language other than their mother tongue. It is important to prevent the situation arising whereby studying in a language other than the mother tongue has negative consequences when it comes to marking. More courses in advanced English would make exchanges with other countries possible. However, this requires teachers to have a good knowledge of English. Linguistic diversity is essential for the EU's exchange programmes. The Committee also wishes to underline the importance of pupils and students learning more languages than just English.

The Committee also wishes to emphasise the importance of simplified administration for participating in exchange programmes.

The Committee also wishes to stress the importance of Swedish student aid. Since this can also be used for studies abroad, it is a significant factor in Sweden's high level of international student mobility.

### **The stay abroad and follow-up**

The Committee wishes to underline the importance of recognition of studies undertaken in other countries. It is essential for educational establishments to have a flexible attitude towards recognising courses taken at other universities. Recognition is also important for studies at secondary level. The same argument in favour of internationalisation which applies to an increased exchange of students at universities and higher education institutions is also valid for pupils at secondary schools.

### **A new partnership for mobility**

Under this heading the Committee wishes in particular to emphasise the importance of teacher mobility. By also giving teachers at all levels the opportunity to benefit from mobility, the quality of education will improve. This is important not least for teachers to be able to encourage mobility amongst their pupils and students, but also because it will add an international dimension to education.

In this context, the Committee also wishes to draw attention to the Government-initiated investment of SEK 20 million in increased teacher mobility for 2010–2011.