

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2013/2041(INI)	Procedure completed
Rethinking education		
Subject		
4.40.01 European area for education, training and lifelong learning		
4.40.15 Vocational education and training		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	CULT Culture and Education		18/12/2012
		S&D ROTH NEVEĎALOVÁ Katarína	
		Shadow rapporteur	
		PPE ZVER Milan	
		ALDE TAKKULA Hannu	
		Verts/ALE TAVARES Rui	
		ECR MIGALSKI Marek Henryk	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs		06/02/2013
		S&D GÖNCZ Kinga	
	ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	REGI Regional Development	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Education, Youth, Sport and Culture	VASSILIOU Androulla	

Key events			
20/11/2012	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2012)0669	Summary
14/03/2013	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
17/09/2013	Vote in committee		
01/10/2013	Committee report tabled for plenary	A7-0314/2013	Summary
21/10/2013	Debate in Parliament		
22/10/2013	Results of vote in Parliament		

22/10/2013	Decision by Parliament	T7-0433/2013	Summary
22/10/2013	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

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Committee dossier	CULT/7/12128

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2012)0669	20/11/2012	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE510.619	28/05/2013	EP	
Committee opinion	EMPL	PE508.049	27/06/2013	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE513.374	03/07/2013	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A7-0314/2013	01/10/2013	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T7-0433/2013	22/10/2013	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2014)62	07/03/2014	EC	

Rethinking education

PURPOSE: to present a new strategic framework with a view to rethinking education and investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes.

BACKGROUND: investment in education and training for skills development is essential to boost growth and competitiveness: skills determine Europe's capacity to increase productivity. In the long-term, skills can trigger innovation and growth, move production up the value chain, stimulate the concentration of higher level skills in the EU and shape the future labour market.

However, European education and training systems continue to fall short in providing the right skills for employability, and are not working adequately with business or employers to bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the working environment. These skills mismatches are a growing concern for European industry's competitiveness.

Despite progress over the last five years in the percentages of those qualifying from higher education,

- sustained efforts will be needed to reach the headline target of 40% of young people completing higher education;
- early school leaving remains at unacceptable levels in too many Member States;
- 73 million adults have only a low level of education;
- nearly 20% of 15 year olds lack sufficient skills in reading; and
- participation in lifelong learning is only 8.9%.

By 2020, 20% more jobs will require higher level skills and the need to upgrade skills for employability will be one of the most pressing challenges for Member States to address the needs of the economy and focus on solutions to tackle fast-rising youth unemployment. This is why this communication emphasises delivering the right skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions and on working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders.

CONTENT: in its communication, the Commission identifies a limited number of strategic priorities to be addressed by Member States, alongside new EU actions to leverage national efforts. Among these, particular attention is given to combating youth unemployment.

A. Priorities for the Member States: the measures mainly seek to help the transition from learning to work and promoting work-based learning. The proposed measures may be summarised as follows:

1. Promoting excellence in vocational education and training (VET): the key actions are:

- developing, according to national circumstances, high-quality dual VET systems;

- aligning VET policies with regional/local economic development strategies namely for smart specialisation;
- enabling permeability with other educational offers;
- developing short cycle tertiary qualifications (2 years) focused on identified areas of skills shortage especially where there is growth potential such as ICT, healthcare and green skills; and
- strengthening local, national and international partnerships and networks between companies, especially SMEs, and VET providers.

2. Improving the performance of student groups with high risk of early school leaving and low basic skills: key actions include:

- putting in place high quality and accessible early childhood education and care,
- reinforcing the learning of basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and basic maths and science,
- early detection of low achievers in basic skills across all phases of schooling, and
- implementing evidence-based strategies to reduce early school leaving.

3. Strengthening the provision of transversal skills that increase employability such as entrepreneurial initiative, digital skills and foreign languages: introducing transversal skills across all curricula at all stages of education up, using innovative and student-centred pedagogical approaches, and designing assessment tools through which levels of competence can be effectively assessed and evaluated. All young people should benefit from at least one practical entrepreneurial experience before leaving compulsory education.

4. Reducing the number of low-skilled adults: increasing incentives for adult training by companies, validating skills and competences acquired outside formal education, and setting up access points (one-stop shops) that integrate different lifelong learning services, such as validation and career guidance offering tailored learning to individual learners.

5. Scaling up the use of ICT-supported learning and access to high quality Open Education Resources (OER): modernising the ICT infrastructure of schools, supporting ICT-based teaching and assessment practices, promoting the transparency of rights and obligations of users of digitalised content, establishing mechanisms to validate and recognise skills and competences acquired through OER and supporting education and training institutions to adapt their business models to the emergence of OER.

6. Revision and strengthening of the professional profile of all teaching professions including increasing teachers digital skills.

Implementation of these reforms will not be successful without increasing the efficiency of funding in education. To address this challenge, the Commission calls on Member States to stimulate national debates on ways to provide sustainable funding mechanisms. Particular attention should be devoted to developing funding schemes for VET and adult learning financed via shared responsibility between public authorities, enterprises and appropriate individual contributions (e.g. sectoral training funds, training levies, etc) and aimed at attracting large companies and SMEs to provide work-based VET training.

B. European-level coordination and contributions: at EU level, focus will be given to the following actions:

1. Enhanced country-specific focus and support to Member States in their efforts to implement the identified priorities by monitoring progress in each Member State in the context of the next European Semester and feeding the results of this country examination into the preparations of the 2013 draft country-specific recommendations. In autumn 2013, enhanced monitoring will commence of the education and training benchmarks, including a new benchmark on language teaching;
2. Improvements in work-based learning, in particular by establishing an EU level Alliance for Apprenticeships. As the first step, the Commission will support a Memorandum on European cooperation in vocational education and training, bringing together a number of Member States to learn from successful approaches and schemes;
3. Creation of a European Area for Skills and Qualifications to promote a stronger convergence between the EU transparency and recognition;
4. Funding Education for Growth to strengthen commitment to a skilled and continuously trained and re-trained workforce;
5. Analysing the impact of providing EU support to upscaling access and use of OER and ICT, and creating a EU dimension for online education;
6. Entrepreneurship education actions;
7. Partnerships between education, business and research such as the Knowledge Alliances, the Sector Skills Alliances and the partnership actions within the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme will be promoted through the proposed Erasmus for All programme 2014-2020 and Horizon 2020.

In conclusion, the Commission indicates that it will ensure that the contribution of education and investment in skills to growth and jobs is fully reflected in the European Semester. It will use European platforms of dialogue such as the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Education and Training, the Bologna process for Higher Education and the Copenhagen process for VET as well as the funding instruments to stress the sense of urgency on the priorities identified in this communication.

Rethinking education

The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report by Katarína NEVEŠALOVÁ (S&D, SK) entitled Rethinking Education in response to the Commission communication on the same subject.

Members recalled that in March 2013, the unemployment rate among young people up to the age of 25 in the EU was 23.5 %, while at the same time more than two million vacancies could not be filled. They affirmed that in several Member States, the number of unemployed and the duration of unemployment is increasing, and matching on the labour market is becoming less efficient.

In this context, Members welcomed the Commission communication, in particular its strong focus on combating youth unemployment through investing in skills, calling for the modernisation of higher education systems, as well as promoting world-class vocational education and training (VET). They also welcome actions to address the shortages of well-qualified teachers and trainers.

Faced with the economic and financial crisis, Members considered that Member States should uphold the right of all persons, whatever their economic circumstances, to free and universal education of high quality. They recalled that increased language competences contribute to fostering mobility and improving employability, peoples understanding of other cultures and intercultural relations.

They fully supported the Commissions proposal for a new EU benchmark on language competences, according to which at least 50% of 15

year olds should have knowledge of a first foreign language and at least 75 % should study a second foreign language by 2020.

Members urged further support of the acquisition and recognition of competences based on non-formal and informal learning.

Recalling the headline targets and goals to which the EU has committed itself under the Europe 2020 Strategy, Members called on the Member States to make public expenditure and investments in education, training, research and innovation a priority. They recalled that budget cuts in these fields will have a negative impact on education.

In parallel, Members strongly supported the observation of national situations and the launch of a debate at Union level with relevant stakeholders on investment efficiency and benefits in education and training. They urge the Council to adopt promptly the horizontal anti-discrimination directive which is key to guaranteeing genuine equality and combating bias and discrimination, including at school. They urged Member States to improve open access to all educational and scientific materials, with the aim of lowering costs for education and research, particularly in the light of recent budget cuts in these areas throughout the Union.

Youth investment for future: Members call for the recognition and involvement of youth and civil society organisations in the design and implementation of lifelong-learning strategies. They called for the recognition of qualifications gained by young people during their studies at non-home universities, particularly those qualifications gained in the context of the Erasmus programme. They also called for learners and the organisations to which they are attached to be involved in decision-making processes concerning education.

The report urged the Member States to promote the attractiveness and improve the labour market relevance of VET, make it an integral part of the education system and ensure its quality, in particular through the introduction of entrepreneurial and ICT training.

Members invited Member States and local and regional authorities, in cooperation with education institutions, to include elements of entrepreneurship education in the curriculum content in basic education, vocational training and higher education.

As regards scientific training, Members stressed the need to enhance the attractiveness and value of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects in education. They called on the Member States also to provide more efficient education with a focus on transversal skills, language skills and entrepreneurial skills, in order to achieve a greater level of EU-wide employability. They stressed the need for curricula to be multidisciplinary and designed to provide open-ended, transferable skills.

The report highlighted the importance of supporting young people, especially those not in education, employment or training (NEETs). It called on Member States to encourage employers to offer more quality apprenticeship placements.

Members drew attention to the added value of experience abroad in helping early school-leavers and young people without educational qualifications to find jobs. They considered that the Erasmus+ programme is an excellent framework through which to enable people in this category, too, to receive part of their vocational training abroad.

Members called on the Member States to:

- implement swiftly the European Youth Guarantee;
- invest in early labour-market activation mechanisms and employment schemes;
- halt the decline in spending on support for youth employment and education.

Financing: Members called for an integrated approach which harnesses the financing possibilities offered by the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund and national sources of financing for the achievement of smart growth. They stressed the role of the ESF in supporting investment in education and training, skills and lifelong learning; urges, therefore, for the safeguard of the minimum overall share for the ESF as 25% of the budget allocated to cohesion policy.

Strong focus on partnerships: the report highlighted the fact that strong partnerships draw on synergies between financial and human resources and contribute to sharing the cost of lifelong learning. They called for the enhancement of social and civil dialogue on education and training both at national and Union level, and for the strengthening of the role of social partners in policy making. They considered the encouragement of public-private partnerships to be an important step towards ensuring shared responsibility for education and career development, with the aim being to help graduates to adapt more swiftly to the requirements of industry and the market.

In parallel, Members noted that the Commission Communication does not specify any concrete implementation measures for cooperation between the educational sector and different social and business partners. They called on the Commission to seek support and initiatives actively, as well as other forms of cooperation with the private sector for the improvement of education. The Member States are called upon to improve cooperation and partnerships between businesses and the education sector at all levels.

On the other hand, Members called on the Commission and Member States to reflect carefully on the concept of cost sharing as a way of funding education. They called for further cooperation between education institutions and providers, the business sector, social partners, civil organisations, and local, regional and national authorities, as well as employment services in order to exchange best practices, to promote partnerships and to work towards providing quality placements.

Lifelong learning perspective: Members encouraged the Member States to promote cooperation and synergies in the field of lifelong learning, in particular to widen access to learning and design, and to adapt and modernise the curricula of education institutions. They noted with concern the wide divergence in available ICT resources and knowledge in schools and higher education institutions between and within the Member States. They stressed that the uptake of ICT infrastructure and knowledge should be mainstreamed in all education and training sectors in order to equip students for the digital age as best as possible.

Members urged the Member States to invest in lifelong learning for teachers, so as to assist in their professional and personal development, and also to promote the status of teachers and improve their working conditions. They called for teachers to be valued and given proper recognition in order to improve the quality of teaching provided to pupils.

Members called for the following measures:

- introduce uniform and objective criteria for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of teachers work and their influence on students academic results and personal development;
- establish individualised learning pathways in order to help people to update and upgrade their productive, social and economic skills throughout their lives;
- introduce specific measures in the form of financial support to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in order to ensure for everybody the opportunity of reaching the highest possible level of education and also to ensure that learners needs and welfare are

- met;
- ensure that the education system addresses the needs of all prospective students throughout the period of their studies;
- propose tailor-made arrangements to the Roma and other minorities;
- overcome occupational segregation and wage discrimination and discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation in education;
- provide a wide range of support structures, such as scholarships, grants, student loans on favourable terms, tutoring, mentoring and networking assistance to disadvantaged students throughout their studies;
- broadening access to education and traineeships.

Members considered that all Member States should make a major effort to reduce dropout rates, thereby meeting the EU 2020 headline targets which are aimed at a figure below 10%.

Members stressed the need to focus on low-skilled adults and on the role played by adult education and training in reaching out to these groups, as well as focusing on intergenerational learning.

Underlining the possibilities offered by massive open online courses (MOOCs) in terms of accessibility to high-quality education for everyone, Members called for measures allowing more flexible and creative ways of learning, promoting equality for all learners, and also in terms of cutting education costs incurred by learners as well as those incurred by universities.

Members strongly supported the creation of a European area of skills and qualifications in order to achieve transparency and recognition of qualifications acquired in VET or higher education and proposed to extend recognition also to qualifications gained outside of the formal education and training system.

Member States are urged to monitor and evaluate regularly with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, whether their education system and programmes have managed to reach out to the members of vulnerable social groups and if they have taken the necessary steps to reform their education systems.

Rethinking education

The European Parliament adopted by 556 to 105, with 6 abstentions, a resolution entitled Rethinking Education in response to the Commission communication on the same subject.

Parliament recalled that in March 2013, the unemployment rate among young people up to the age of 25 in the EU was 23.5 %, while at the same time more than two million vacancies could not be filled.

It affirmed that in several Member States, the number of unemployed and the duration of unemployment is increasing, and matching on the labour market is becoming less efficient.

In this context, Parliament welcomed the Commission communication, in particular its strong focus on combating youth unemployment through investing in skills, calling for the modernisation of higher education systems, as well as promoting world-class vocational education and training (VET). It also welcomed actions to address the shortages of well-qualified teachers and trainers.

Faced with the economic and financial crisis, Parliament considered that Member States should uphold the right of all persons, whatever their economic circumstances, to free and universal education of high quality. It recalled that increased language competences contribute to fostering mobility and improving employability, peoples understanding of other cultures and intercultural relations.

Members fully supported the Commissions proposal for a new EU benchmark on language competences, according to which at least 50% of 15 year olds should have knowledge of a first foreign language and at least 75 % should study a second foreign language by 2020.

They urged further support of the acquisition and recognition of competences based on non-formal and informal learning.

Recalling the headline targets and goals to which the EU has committed itself under the Europe 2020 Strategy, Parliament called on the Member States to make public expenditure and investments in education, training, research and innovation a priority. It recalled that budget cuts in these fields will have a negative impact on education.

In parallel, Parliament strongly supported the observation of national situations and the launch of a debate at Union level with relevant stakeholders on investment efficiency and benefits in education and training. It urged the Council to adopt promptly the horizontal anti-discrimination directive which is key to guaranteeing genuine equality and combating bias and discrimination, including at school. It urged Member States to improve open access to all educational and scientific materials, with the aim of lowering costs for education and research, particularly in the light of recent budget cuts in these areas throughout the Union.

Youth investment for future: recalling that young people have great potential and a crucial role to play in achieving the Europe 2020 targets for education and employment, Parliament called for the recognition and involvement of youth and civil society organisations in the design and implementation of lifelong-learning strategies.

It called for the recognition of qualifications gained by young people during their studies at non-home universities, particularly those qualifications gained in the context of the Erasmus programme. It also called for learners and the organisations to which they are attached to be involved in decision-making processes concerning education.

Parliament urged the Member States to promote the attractiveness and improve the labour market relevance of VET, make it an integral part of the education system and ensure its quality, in particular through the introduction of entrepreneurial and ICT training.

Parliament invited Member States and local and regional authorities, in cooperation with education institutions, to include elements of entrepreneurship education in the curriculum content in basic education, vocational training and higher education.

As regards scientific training, Parliament stressed the need to enhance the attractiveness and value of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects in education. It called on the Member States also to provide more efficient education with a focus on transversal skills, language skills and entrepreneurial skills, in order to achieve a greater level of EU-wide employability. Members stressed the need for curricula to be multidisciplinary and designed to provide open-ended, transferable skills.

The resolution highlighted the importance of supporting young people, especially those not in education, employment or training (NEETs). It

called on Member States to encourage employers to offer more quality apprenticeship placements.

Parliament drew attention to the added value of experience abroad in helping early school-leavers and young people without educational qualifications to find jobs. It considered that the Erasmus+ programme is an excellent framework through which to enable people in this category, too, to receive part of their vocational training abroad.

Members called on the Member States to:

- implement swiftly the European Youth Guarantee;
- invest in early labour-market activation mechanisms and employment schemes;
- halt the decline in spending on support for youth employment and education.

Financing: Parliament called for an integrated approach which harnesses the financing possibilities offered by the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund and national sources of financing for the achievement of smart growth. It stressed the role of the ESF in supporting investment in education and training, skills and lifelong learning. It urged, therefore, for the safeguard of the minimum overall share for the ESF as 25% of the budget allocated to cohesion policy.

Strong focus on partnerships: Parliament highlighted the fact that strong partnerships draw on synergies between financial and human resources and contribute to sharing the cost of lifelong learning. It called for the enhancement of social and civil dialogue on education and training both at national and Union level, and for the strengthening of the role of social partners in policy making. It also considered the encouragement of public-private partnerships to be an important step towards ensuring shared responsibility for education and career development, with the aim being to help graduates to adapt more swiftly to the requirements of industry and the market.

In parallel, Parliament noted that the Commission Communication does not specify any concrete implementation measures for cooperation between the educational sector and different social and business partners. The Commission is called on to seek support and initiatives actively, as well as other forms of cooperation with the private sector for the improvement of education. The Member States are called upon to improve cooperation and partnerships between businesses and the education sector at all levels.

On the other hand, Parliament called on the Commission and Member States to reflect carefully on the concept of cost sharing as a way of funding education. It called for further cooperation between education institutions and providers, the business sector, social partners, civil organisations, and local, regional and national authorities, as well as employment services in order to exchange best practices, to promote partnerships and to work towards providing quality placements.

Lifelong learning perspective: Parliament encouraged the Member States to promote cooperation and synergies in the field of lifelong learning, in particular to widen access to learning and design, and to adapt and modernise the curricula of education institutions. It noted with concern the wide divergence in available ICT resources and knowledge in schools and higher education institutions between and within the Member States. Members stressed that the uptake of ICT infrastructure and knowledge should be mainstreamed in all education and training sectors in order to equip students for the digital age as best as possible.

The resolution noted the importance of recognising education as a human right and urged Member States to improve open access to educational and scientific materials, with the aim of lowering costs for education and research, particularly in the light of recent budget cuts.

Parliament urged the Member States to invest in lifelong learning for teachers, so as to assist in their professional and personal development, and also to promote the status of teachers and improve their working conditions. It called for teachers to be valued and given proper recognition in order to improve the quality of teaching provided to pupils.

The following measures were called for:

- introduce uniform and objective criteria for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of teachers work and their influence on students academic results and personal development;
- establish individualised learning pathways in order to help people to update and upgrade their productive, social and economic skills throughout their lives;
- introduce specific measures in the form of financial support to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in order to ensure for everybody the opportunity of reaching the highest possible level of education and also to ensure that learners needs and welfare are met;
- ensure that the education system addresses the needs of all prospective students throughout the period of their studies;
- propose tailor-made arrangements to the Roma and other minorities;
- overcome occupational segregation and wage discrimination and discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation in education;
- provide a wide range of support structures, such as scholarships, grants, student loans on favourable terms, tutoring, mentoring and networking assistance to disadvantaged students throughout their studies;
- broadening access to education and traineeships.

Parliament considered that all Member States should make a major effort to reduce dropout rates, thereby meeting the EU 2020 headline targets which are aimed at a figure below 10%.

It stressed the need to focus on low-skilled adults and on the role played by adult education and training in reaching out to these groups, as well as focusing on intergenerational learning.

Underlining the possibilities offered by massive open online courses (MOOCs) in terms of accessibility to high-quality education for everyone, Parliament called for measures allowing more flexible and creative ways of learning, promoting equality for all learners, and also in terms of cutting education costs incurred by learners as well as those incurred by universities. It strongly supported the creation of a European area of skills and qualifications in order to achieve transparency and recognition of qualifications acquired in VET or higher education and proposed to extend recognition also to qualifications gained outside of the formal education and training system.

Member States are urged to monitor and evaluate regularly with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, whether their education system and programmes have managed to reach out to the members of vulnerable social groups and if they have taken the necessary steps to reform their education systems.

Lastly, the Commission is called upon to monitor whether the Member States have taken the necessary steps to reform their education systems in order to achieve the above-mentioned goals.

