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Main Policy Lines in Education and Training

(December 2013 – May 2014)

1. **European Union**
2. **Institutional context**

## European Semester

### Annual Growth Survey 2014

Communication from the European Commission, 13 November 2013

The Annual Growth Survey (AGS) takes stock of the economic and social situation in Europe and sets out broad policy priorities for the EU as a whole for the coming year. It launches a new European Semester of economic policy coordination, ensuring that EU Member States coordinate their economic policies and their efforts to promote growth and jobs.

The Survey is set against the background of several significant economic and policy developments:

* Signs of slow economic recovery in the EU.
* New rules on the coordination of budgetary policies in the Euro area are implemented for the first time = strengthening of EU economic governance, and discussions on further developing Economic and Monetary Union.
* 2014 will be the first year of implementation of the new European multi-annual financial framework.

The Commission proposes to adapt the implementation of the medium term priorities to the changing circumstances and to focus on making progress in the following five priority areas:

* Pursuing differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal consolidation
* Restoring lending to the economy
* Promoting growth and competitiveness for today and tomorrow
* Tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis (a.o. stepping up active support and training for the unemployed; pursuing the modernization of education and training systems including lifelong learning, vocational training and dual learning schemes).
* Modernising public administration

In terms of deepening the European Semester as a process, there are a number of areas where further improvements are needed:

* Greater ownership at national level. The Commission continues to recommend that the National Reform Programmes and the Stability or Convergence Programmes be discussed with national parliaments and all relevant parties.
* Stronger coordination among the members of the Euro area.
* Better implementation of the country-specific recommendations.

The Communication is accompanied by a Commission Staff Working Document ‘Overview of progress in implementing country-specific recommendations by Member State’.

The [Annual Growth Survey 2014](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/ags2014_en.pdf) and the Accompanying [Commission Staff Working Document](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/csrimpl2014_swd_en.pdf)

### Europe 2020

#### Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

Communication from the Commission, 5 March 2014

To monitor and advance national implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, Member States were invited to set their own targets and to spell out detailed actions as part of their national reform programmes. These programmes are reviewed annually at EU level as part of the European Semester of economic policy coordination.

The Communication has two parts:

* WHERE DOES EUROPE STAND FOUR YEARS ON?
* HAS THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY WORKED? Role of the targets, of the flagship initiatives, of the European Semester.

Four years after launching the Europe 2020 strategy, the purpose of this Communication is to take stock. The EU is on course to meet or come close to its targets on education, climate and energy but certainly not on employment, research and development or on poverty reduction. In these policy areas there are worrying developments. The commission puts an emphasis on the enormity of the change that the EU, its Member States, cities and regions have undergone as a result of the crisis,

The document gives a very well elaborated reflection on the added value and the pitfalls of the use of targets.

Yet the Commission has not drawn policy conclusions nor made policy recommendations at this stage. The Commission considers it necessary to launch an EU-wide consultation of all stakeholders on the lessons to be learned and on the main factors that should shape the next stages of the EU's post crisis growth strategy. The Commission will run a public consultation, based on the analysis in this Communication, inviting all interested parties to contribute their views. Following the consultation, the Commission will make proposals for the pursuit of the strategy early in 2015.

Results for the education targets:

Reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10% and increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%

These targets are broadly achievable by 2020:

* The share of early school leavers has fallen from 15.7% in 2005 to 12.7% in 2012, with half of Member States having already reached or approaching their targets. While part of this reduction may be attributable to a more difficult employment environment, there is also evidence of structural improvements and the trend is expected to continue, albeit at a slower pace.
* The share of young people having completed tertiary education has increased from 27.9% in 2005 to 35.7% in 2012. While this may vary from country to country, the trend is also considered structural and the 2020 target is expected to be met.

The Communication is accompanied by a number of annexes:

* Annex I: Main steps under the European Semester
* Annex II: For each of the Europe 2020 targets, this Annex reviews:
* Progress to date at EU level and illustrates possible scenarios until 2020.
* Latest data available on performances at national level and national targets for

2020.

* Trends in national performances, with some international comparisons where

possible.

* Annex III: State of play on Flagships initiatives.

The European Council held a first discussion at its meeting on 20-21 March 2014. The Council calls for more efforts to achieve the Europe 2020 goals, and looks forward to the planned evaluation of the Europe 2020 Strategy in 2015.

[The Communication](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/europe2020stocktaking_en.pdf)

[The European Council 20-21 March 2014](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141749.pdf)

## Greek Presidency of the EU

January – June 2014

The priority framework of the Presidency includes the promotion of policies and actions for

* achieving growth,
* combating unemployment,
* promoting economic and social cohesion and structural reforms,
* deepening integration and completion of EMU and
* addressing external challenges (including EU enlargement).

The programme includes four main fields of action:

* Growth – Jobs – Cohesion
* Further integration of EU-eurozone
* Migration – Borders - Mobility
* Sea Policies (horizontal priority)

In the field of education and training the presidency programme foresees:

* Council Conclusions (February 2014) on ‘Efficient and Innovative Education and Training to Invest in Skills’ (following a debate on results of PIAAC and PISA en addressing the Communication on ‘Opening up Education’ that will move forward the discussion on digital skills, learning methods and the use of OER) (point 2.1 of this document)
* A Conference on VET focusing on skills mismatches between demand and supply of the education and training system
* Council Conclusions (May 2014) on quality assurance at all levels of education and training (with also a focus on mobility of qualifications)
* Fostering of the U-Multirank (including a conference)
* A Conference on the implementation of Erasmus+
* A discussion on an approach to the new European benchmark in the field of language learning (May 2014)
* Council Conclusions (May 2014) on teachers’ education
* Focus on equity and social cohesion (conference on pre-school education and early school leaving)

[The draft calendar](http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/draft%20programme.pdf)

Presidency website: <http://gr2014.eu>

# Education and training

## Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting

24 February 2014

In support of the 2014 European Semester, EU education ministers adopted conclusions on efficient and innovative education and training to invest in skills. (see point 2.1). The Commission underlined that investing in education and training is crucial to reduce the skills gap and thereby help to combat unemployment. The Commission expressed concern that in some member states education budgets are stagnating or even decreasing.

Several member states recalled that teachers remain an essential element for educational success and underlined the importance of teacher training, recalling that digital tools are a means and not an end in themselves.

The Council also held a policy debate on skills and employability in the light of the results of PIAAC and PISA results. Guest speakers Frank Vandenbroucke (Belgium) and Frank-Jürgen Weise (Germany) opened the debate.

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/141155.pdf>

## Council conclusions on efficient and innovative education and training to invest in skills.

24 February 2014

The conclusions are a first response to the education aspects of the 2014 Annual Growth Survey, which launches the European Semester, to the Commission Communication on ‘Opening Up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new technologies and open educational resources’, and to the findings of the two recent surveys by the OECD: PISA and PIAAC.

The conclusions focus primarily on the need for education and training systems to improve skills performance in order to ensure that young people and low-skilled adults acquire the kind of skills and competences relevant to today’s labour market. Education and training are seen as having a strategic role to play in supporting economic recovery in Europe.

With a view to increasing the visibility of education and training in the 2014 European Semester, the Council agreed to focus on:

* facilitating long-term investment in the modernisation of education and training and the development of skills
* equipping people in all age groups with better and more relevant skills
* smoothing the transition from school to work, notably by promoting work-based schemes
* continuing to modernise and improve educational methods and making full use of the digital learning opportunities.

The Conclusions invite the Member States to adopt effective and inclusive education and training policies which take due account of the needs of learners with disadvantaged backgrounds and to incorporate digital forms of learning into mainstream education.

[The Conclusions](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/141138.pdf)

## Stakeholder consultation on the European area of skills and qualifications

The European Commission wishes to collect the views of stakeholders on the problems faced by Europeans with regard to the transparency and recognition of their skills and qualifications when moving within and between EU member states, on the adequacy of the related European policies and instruments and on the potential benefits of developing a ‘European area of skills and qualifications’.

The consultation addresses in particular the following issues:

* How to place a stronger focus on higher and more relevant skills
* Further strengthening links between education/training, mobility and labour market
* Adapting to internationalization trends
* Ensuring overall coherence of tools and policies and further implementing the learning outcomes approach
* Ensuring clarity of rules and procedures for the recognition of skills and qualifications for further learning
* Increasing the focus on quality assurance
* Providing learners and workers with a single access point to obtain information and services supporting a European area of skills and qualifications.

The results of the consultation will feed into a possible Communication that the Commission may launch in 2015.

[Questionnaire and background document](http://www.eunec.eu/european-heartbeat-news-eu/public-consultation-%E2%80%9Ceuropean-area-skills-and-qualifications%E2%80%9D)

## Education and Training in Europe 2020

Eurydice, November 2013

This report presents a comparative analysis of national responses to the Europe 2020 priorities in the field of education and training. It concentrates on educational reforms across four thematic areas that have a direct relevance to the Europe 2020 Strategy:

* Early school leaving
* Higher education
* Youth employment and vocational education and training
* Lifelong learning

The report can be seen as complementary to the Education and Training Monitor 2013. It does not provide any assessment of the progress made by individual countries. It reviews policy measures undertaken since 2011, the year following the launch of the Europe 2020 Strategy. It is based on Eurypedia, chapter 14 (Ongoing reforms and policy developments) and on the 2013 national reform programmes submitted to the European Commission.

[The report](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/163EN.pdf)

## National Sheets on Education Budgets in Europe 2013

Eurydice, December 2013

The sheets provide the most recent data on planned education expenditure in European countries. National education budgets are presented by type of expenditure and level of education. The publication makes it possible to identify changes in education budgets between 2012 and 2013. The national sheets also address the reasons for changes in the budgets.

<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice%20/documents/facts_and_figures/National_Budgets.pdf>

## Report on progress in quality assurance in Higher Education

European Commission, 28 January 2014

This report follows the first published in 2009. It highlights the potential for quality assurance to play a more active role in supporting reform at system and institutional levels and proposes EU actions to support institutions and member states.

The report explored the following questions:

* How has QA supported the academic community, students and other stakeholders in reaching quality goals?
* How has QA helped institutions to broaden access and ensure that students complete their degrees?
* How has QA supported higher education institutions in providing students with high quality, relevant skills?
* Has QA supported study mobility and internationalisation?

This report reveals gaps in how QA supports higher education reforms such as widening access, improving employability and internationalisation, or improving doctoral training and human resources strategies. QA has to become a support to creating an internal quality culture rather than a tick-box procedure. It needs to engage with all areas of an institution’s activities, to keep up with change in how higher education is designed and delivered, and involve the entire institution in creating a quality culture.

Moreover, citizens move between systems; learners are increasingly offered the chance of assembling their learning pathway by selecting opportunities from different subsystems and forms of delivers, including via learning resources delivered through ICT, and they need to be able to trust their quality. It would thus be valuable to discuss QA in higher education within a comprehensive context of all instruments for transparency and quality assurance. The case for closer coordination of all European instruments for transparency and quality assurance is being explored by the Commission as a way to achieve a full European area of skills and qualifications. (Cf the conclusion of the report infra).

[The report](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/doc/quality_en.pdf)

## Report on the implementation of the recommendation (18 June 2009) on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training

European Commission, 28 January 2014

This is the first report on progress of QA in VET in the EU. The EQAVET Recommendation established a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of VET systems, comprising a cycle of four phases (planning, implementation, evaluation and review), each supported by quality criteria and indicative descriptors to be applied at the VET-system, provider and qualification awarding levels. The framework is a ‘toolbox’ from which the various users may choose those elements that they consider most relevant to their specific systems. The Recommendation invited Member States to devise a national approach aimed at improving QA systems at national level, designate a Quality Assurance National Reference Point (NRP) and participate in the EQAVET network.

The report overviews achievements in QA mechanisms at VET system level and at VET provider level. The EQAVET survey and external evaluation (Evaluation of implementation of EQAVET final report by ECF GHK) show that some features of EQAVET are well embedded in the QA cultures of the member states. However, significant room for improvement remains for reaching a shared understanding that would greatly facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and increased mobility. There is limited synergy with European tools addressing the transparency of qualifications and competences: EQF, ECVET and the Europass framework, which focus on the outcomes of the learning process – what people know and are able to do. This aspect is not really addressed by EQAVET. In the field of governance, there is a need to ensure improved and sustained involvement of certain stakeholder categories, notably learners, higher education sector, employers and labour market actors as well as regional and local authorities.

The flexible approach of EQAVET has at the same time reduced its potential as a common language and conceptual framework across countries.

More explicit attention to the QA of qualification design and award, liaising to EQF, ECVET, Europass might allow EQAVET to better address non-formal and work-based VET but also to tackle the emerging issue of OER (open educational resources) or MOOCs (massive open online courses).

Citizens move between systems; learners are increasingly offered the chance of assembling their learning pathway by selecting opportunities from different subsystems and forms of delivers, including via learning resources delivered through ICT, and they need to be able to trust their quality. It would thus be valuable to discuss EQAVET within a comprehensive context of all instruments for transparency and quality assurance. The case for closer coordination of all European instruments for transparency and quality assurance is being explored by the Commission as a way to achieve a full European area of skills and qualifications. (cf the conclusion of the report supra).

[The report](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf)

## Towards a mobility scoreboard: conditions for learning abroad in Europa

Eurydice, 10 January 2014

10 January 2014

The first Scoreboard, developed by Eurydice, is part of the European Commission’s response to a call by Member States to remove obstacles to studying and training abroad a part of wider efforts to help young people gain the skills and experience they need to increase their employability.

The Mobility Scoreboard focuses on five key factors that influence young people’s motivation and ability to study or train abroad:

* Information and guidance about mobility opportunities
* Portability of student aid
* Knowledge of foreign languages
* Recognition of studies abroad
* Support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

Results vary significantly between Member States, and no single country scores highly on all measures.

The Scoreboard will be a basis for future joint monitoring at EU level, with the next update planned for 2015.

[The report](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/162EN_Learner_Mobility.pdf)

# Developments in other policy domains: A Quality Framework for Traineeships

## Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships

## European Commission, 4 December 2013

Quality traineeships are one of the key elements of the Youth Guarantee, which Member States are now getting ready to implement. The Youth Guarantee seeks to ensure that all young people up to age 25 are offered a good quality job offer, a traineeship, an apprenticeship or continued education within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

A recent survey undertaken for the Commission identifies a range of problems currently affecting traineeships in the EU, concerning two areas:

* + Insufficient learning content
  + Inadequate working conditions

The Quality Framework for Traineeships proposed by the European Commission aims to ensure that trainees can benefit from a high-quality learning experience, safe from exploitation.

The Framework is based on the principle of transparency. Member States should ensure that employers make clear in advance whether trainees would be paid or not. Employers would also have to specify other working conditions, the educational objectives, and the way in which trainees would be supervised. Member States should also ensure that employers respect EU rules on working time and minimum holiday entitlements. All these terms and conditions should be outlined in a written agreement signed in advance by the trainee and the employer. The Quality framework also provides that the duration of a traineeship should not exceed six months.

The proposed Quality Framework would also encourage more young people to train abroad, as the same standards would apply across the EU. This would complement the forthcoming extension of the EURES network to include traineeships.

[The Commission Proposal](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=nl&catId=89&newsId=2011&furtherNews=yes)

## Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships

Council Meeting Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs, 10 March 2014

For the purposes of this Recommendation, traineeships are understood as a limited period of work practice, whether paid or not, which includes a learning and training component, undertaken in order to gain practical and professional experience with a view to improving employability and facilitating transition to regular employment. The Recommendation does not cover work experience placements that are part of curricula of formal education or vocational education and training, and traineeships of which the content is regulated under national law and whose completion is a mandatory requirement to access a specific profession (e.g. medicine, architecture, etc.).

The Recommendation addresses two shortcomings of traineeships: insufficient learning content and inadequate working conditions. The Recommendation provides guidelines and tools to Member States, trainees and traineeship providers, other stakeholders in order to ensure that traineeships become an efficient means of easing transitions from training or inactivity to employment.

The main element of the QFT is the written traineeship agreement that indicates the educational objectives, adequate working conditions, rights and obligations, clear indications whether trainees will be paid or otherwise compensated and a reasonable duration for traineeships (that, in principle does not exceed six months, except in cases where a longer duration is justified taking into account national practices). Increased transparency would help to improve working conditions and stimulate cross-border mobility.

The aim of the Recommendation is to contribute, together with other initiatives such as the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Employment Guarantee, to the social and professional integration of young people on the basis of quality criteria and minimum standards. A good quality traineeship can have decisive and positive impact on an individual’s employability.

The Youth Employment Initiative will support trainees in the context of the Youth Guarantee, targeting young people from the Union’s regions worst affected by youth unemployment and co-financed by the European Social Fund 2014-2020. The Commission has launched a specific ESF Technical Assistance Support Programme to help Member States establishing traineeship schemes with ESF support.

Social partners can play a role in drawing up and making available simple and concise model traineeship agreements, particularly for use by micro enterprises and tailored for their specific purposes.

The Commission will foster close cooperation with the Members States, the social partners and other stakeholders with a view to swiftly applying this Recommendation. The Commission will monitor the implementation of the QFT in all Member States and report on progress on the basis of information provided by Member States.

[The Recommendation](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/141424.pdf)