



2017/2224(INI)

11.4.2018

OPINION

of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on modernisation of education in the European Union
(2017/2224(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion (*): Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz

(*) Associated committee – Rule 54 of the Rules of Procedure

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Notes that EU Member States bear the responsibility for their education and training systems and the EU helps them to set joint goals and share good practices;
2. Recalls that education, which should deepen critical, analytical and independent thinking and be focused on cultural and societal aspects, as well as on the needs of the labour market, is essential for responsible citizenship based on a culture of mutual respect and fundamental values, and is a fundamental human right;
3. Recalls, in addition, the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to acquire and develop skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market;
4. Notes, moreover, in the context of growing socio-economic divisions in the Union over the past decade, that quality education at all levels helps to minimise inequalities, including intergenerational socio-economic inequalities, and gender stereotypes and inequalities, and plays an important role in enhancing upward social mobility and convergence;
5. Highlights that the quality of teachers and their freedom to conform to education programmes and choose education methods is a prerequisite for quality education, which provides the best foundation for pupils to go on and succeed in the labour market;
6. Particularly emphasises, against this background, that access to quality education should be provided to all children and students in the EU, including those with disabilities, and irrespective of their parents' socio-economic, geographical or cultural status; calls on the Member States, therefore, to invest in quality education and training systems;
7. Believes that the completion of secondary education should be free and obligatory, and calls on the Member States to increase their efforts to give people who have dropped out of primary or secondary school a chance to re-enrol and complete their studies;
8. Stresses the need to maintain schools and educational facilities locally in all regions of the EU as an essential foundation for good education and equality of opportunity in the harmonisation of living and working conditions in Europe;
9. Points out that in the post-industrial era, changes to the advanced character of the EU economy, as well as the digitalisation, automation and robotisation of the EU labour market, has increased demand for high-level qualifications and skills (the rapid changes in ICT related-sectors, for instance, will result in 756 000 unfilled vacancies for ICT professionals in the whole EU economy by 2020), while demand for low-level qualifications and skills has fallen¹; calls on the Commission to undertake a thorough

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7711>

assessment of the impact that digitalisation, automation and robotisation is having and will have on the number and types of jobs;

10. Notes that the qualifications of the workforce often do not match the needs of the labour market, and, with this in mind, that despite strong demand in the labour market for high-level skills and the response of the education system in the form of the significant development of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)², approximately 20 % of Europeans, including 1 % of university graduates, lack basic skills such as literacy and numeracy^{2, 3}; recalls, moreover, that 44 % of Europeans lack basic digital skills^{2, 3}, which creates serious barriers to entry into the technologically advanced labour market, as well as to civic and active participation in society;
11. Notes that Member States should guarantee that nobody graduates from school without basic skills, including basic digital skills; underlines the fact that most jobs now require greater literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and other crucial skills and that modern education systems should therefore combine all eight key competences outlined in the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, which also include knowledge and attitudes; welcomes the fact that the proposal also defines digital skills as basic skills;
12. Stresses, against this background, the importance of making the maximum possible use of digitalisation in all forms of education; calls on the Member States and regions, therefore, to promote digital and digitalised education in all types of schools;
13. Calls on the Member States, in particular, to improve the digital literacy of citizens through adequate education from an early stage which develops language, logical and mathematical skills, as well as symbolic thought, based on coding, programming and related activities that are important for jobs in high-tech sectors and, more generally, in the digitalised labour market; observes that these skills are universal in nature and may be useful in many other sectors as well as in everyday life; welcomes, in this regard, such Commission initiatives as the Coding Week and the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, and calls on the Member States to develop comprehensive national digital skills strategies, which might help and support teachers and learners alike to acquire e-skills;
14. Calls on the Member States to ensure that the mastery of basic skills should be a prerequisite for graduation from every school from primary to university level, including adult educational centres, and calls on the Member States to prioritise the upskilling of adults with low skill levels; welcomes, in this regard, the Upskilling Pathways initiative – an important programme in the New Skills Agenda for Europe;
15. Considers it critical that teacher training involves digital literacy and skills, both at university level and for professional training throughout teachers' careers;
16. Highlights that basic digital skills and digital literacy developed through education

² Source: Education and Training Monitor 2017; OECD Survey of Adult Skills 2016.

³ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/587312/IPOL_STU%282016%29587312_EN.pdf , https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills_Matter_Further_Results_from_the_Survey_of_Adult_Skills.pdf [Annex A, table A3.3(L), A 3.3(N)].

systems should include teaching on a reasonable use of electronic equipment, in order to prevent the overuse of computers, the internet or mobile phones, and to save children from behavioural addictions to e-games and social media;

17. Stresses the importance of lifelong careers guidance in order to ensure participation in suitable, flexible and high-quality training and career paths; highlights the need to promote apprenticeship and training possibilities through awareness-raising initiatives for students, their parents, adult learners, education and training providers, employers and public employment services;
18. Recalls the importance of lifelong learning, through upskilling and reskilling, in opening up new possibilities for active inclusion and in developing skills and qualifications, particularly for the low skilled, the long-term unemployed, people with special needs, older generations and migrants; stresses the need to strive for an individual approach to career development and lifelong education and training; encourages the Commission to support the Member States in developing training and educational programmes facilitating active inclusion and the reintegration of adults returning to the labour market;
19. Calls on the Member States to actively promote, and disseminate information about, the opportunities available for low-qualified adults to improve their skills, including access to guidance and careers advice services; stresses that this information must be available in accessible and user-friendly formats;
20. Points out that in spite of the 2 million job vacancies in the EU, more than 30 % of qualified young people with diplomas are in jobs that do not match their skills or aspirations, while 40 % of European employers have trouble finding people with the required skills⁴;
21. Observes that skills mismatch can be attributed not only to inadequate qualifications, but also under- and over-qualification;
22. Stresses that skills mismatch and shortages in the labour market are significant factors in both unemployment and unfilled job vacancies⁵; considers that these worrying phenomena should be tackled by, inter alia:
 - making education systems cooperate more closely with business and social partners, such as employers' associations and trade unions, for example by inviting professionals and practitioners to play a role in the creation of apprenticeships and internships of real educational value;
 - improving mobility between cross-border regions, including the exchange of expertise at the highest political level; and
 - focusing on a holistic development of students, not only their employability, but also social and civic skills; encourages Member States, in this regard, to focus more on

⁴ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3072>,

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1502en_0.pdf

⁵ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/assisting-eu-countries-skills-matching>

transversal and soft skills, intercultural skills, critical and creative thinking, and problem solving and entrepreneurship, all skills which are required in the labour market;

23. Observes that different jobs may require the same skills and consist of the same tasks; is of the opinion, therefore, that education systems should be skill- and task-oriented to enable swift transitions between jobs; highlights that, in the context of societal and labour market evolution, education systems should focus on equipping students with the right set of skills, competences and knowledge to help them become active European citizens and be successful in the labour market; stresses that developing and strengthening skills is a continuous process which cuts across all levels of education and into the labour market; considers that skills and competences should be used in both the education process and in the recognition of education and qualifications through the system of micro-credentials – short, certified courses;
24. Welcomes, in this regard, the Commission communication on a New Skills Agenda for Europe⁶, which proposes solutions to skills mismatch and shortages and for finding the right system of skills recognition; recalls the importance of the 10 actions launched as part of this agenda, which provide the right training and support the acquisition of skills for people in the EU; takes the view that understanding the trends and patterns of demand for skills and jobs enables people to make better career choices, find quality jobs and improve their life chances; calls, therefore, for further skills forecasting;
25. Notes, furthermore, that the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) forecasts a parallel rise in skills from both the demand and supply side until 2025, and that demand for high-level skills in the labour market is outgrowing supply from the education system; recalls, in particular, that a shortage of employees in STEM-based sectors in the EU is predicted to reach over 200 000 by 2020; calls for improved cooperation with social partners, in order to take account of labour market needs, and for further skills forecasting for the development of the labour market; welcomes the fact that users of the future Europass platform will be provided with skills intelligence to guide them in their learning and career choices;
26. Notes that a considerable number of new jobs are being created in industries relating to renewable energy, and that green sectors and occupations should be addressed in school curricula accordingly;
27. Highlights that the large number of NEETs – almost 6.3 million young people aged 15–24 are neither in employment nor in education and training – could be reduced by preventing early school leaving, and by making schools more practical and connected to their local environment, by developing links with local companies, local authorities, social institutions and NGOs; is of the opinion that early school leaving, which is one of the reasons for young people subsequently becoming NEETs, could be combated by tackling poverty and social exclusion; believes that it is also important to support students in finding their own learning methods, including online courses and blended learning; welcomes the implementation of relevant and engaging curricula and of strong and well-developed guidance systems, with high-quality counselling and guidance

⁶ Commission communication of 10 June 2016 entitled ‘A new skills agenda for Europe: working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness’ (COM(2016)0381).

services for all students;

28. Points out the need to improve skills levels and qualifications among migrants and refugees; highlights that action, both at EU and national level, is required to support effective integration into the labour market, as well as labour market reforms, in order to benefit existing skills, knowledge and qualifications; recalls the need to improve systems for the recognition and validation of skills and qualifications, including those obtained outside the EU;
29. Greatly welcomes the fact, that as part of efforts to modernise school education in the EU, the Commission makes particular reference to the importance of promoting inclusive education by exchanging best practices on the integration of migrant pupils and by imparting common values;
30. Stresses, in addition, that retraining and other practical education and training measures for refugees and migrants should be further encouraged;
31. Stresses the special educational circumstances of children and adolescents whose parents travel professionally in Europe, and calls on the Commission to conduct a study to highlight their specific situation with regard to the challenges that they face in terms of pre-school and school education;
32. Considers that schools should be supportive and provide inclusive education to all learners, especially those with disabilities; emphasises the need to include children/pupils with disabilities in education, so they can lead independent lives and be fully integrated into society as active participants and real contributors; is of the opinion that thanks to current technological developments, pupils with disabilities are offered easier access to education courtesy of formal and non-formal learning methods; calls on the Member States to facilitate access to mainstream inclusive quality education, taking into account the needs of all students with all types of disabilities, which means, for instance, providing bilingual inclusive education for deaf children with regard to their special linguistic needs; calls on the Member States to monitor schools on their non-rejection policy;
33. Points out that the pace of change in the labour market, the diversity of educational systems, workers' increasing mobility, and rising levels of migration are requiring employers and education providers to recognise the qualifications, skills and competences acquired, including in non-formal and informal learning⁷, in line with a comparable assessment system and drawing on the best practices of Member States that have already introduced tools of this kind; highlights, in this context, the importance of policy response aimed at excluded and vulnerable groups in the labour market;
34. Recalls that the Council Recommendation from 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁸ called on the Member States to have in place, no later than 2018, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;

⁷ See European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2017 on a new skills agenda for Europe. Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0360.

⁸ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

35. Recalls the importance of improving or introducing procedures for the recognition of informal and non-formal education⁹, drawing on the best practices of Member States which have already introduced tools of this kind;
36. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue their efforts to enable the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and calls on the Member States to recognise the importance and usefulness of micro-credentials; welcomes the development of massive open online courses (MOOCs), which could broaden access to education for underprivileged groups or those whose circumstances prevent them from attending on-site classes and therefore increase their opportunities for a better job and life, thereby making it possible to combat unemployment, particularly among young people;
37. Calls on the Member States to internationalise education systems and expand student mobility programmes to better prepare students for the EU labour market, in which a lack of skills in foreign languages and cultures is the first barrier to mobility; stresses that student mobility programmes have contributed to European integration and have a positive impact on the employment of young people; calls, in this context, for special attention to be given to the cross-border aspect of education, for example by promoting the learning and teaching of neighbouring languages and, in particular, to include new academic priorities in this area, in both the academic and vocational pathways; deems it important to ensure that these actions will address all types of schools and all levels of education, so as to make the EU labour market available to graduates from not only universities but also the vocational education and training (VET) system;
38. Calls on the Commission to come up with a proposal to ensure that mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, are mutually recognised by the Member States, and to ensure sustained increased investments in Erasmus +, as well as financial and individual support; acknowledges the fact that in 2016, Erasmus+ supported 725 000 Europeans with mobility grants to help them study, train, teach, work or volunteer abroad, and is on track to meet its target of supporting 3.7 % of young people in the EU between 2014 and 2020;
39. Proposes that the Commission maintains entrepreneurship education and training as one of the priorities for a future Erasmus+ programme in the next financial period (post-2020) in all its actions, including mobility;
40. Regrets, in the context of growing demand for high-level competences and skills, the fact that, over time, the significant development of higher education is resulting in the inflation of diplomas, with a simultaneous growing shortage of vocational skills and qualifications, leading to imbalances in the labour market;
41. Calls, in this connection, for the creation of more skills geared towards the job market and a massive increase in the proportion of practice-oriented training; calls on the Member States in particular to develop more tertiary vocational education and training, to enable students to acquire high-level qualifications relating to practical skills and training; highlights, in this context, the importance of permeability between different

⁹ European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2017 on a new skills agenda for Europe.

education systems;

42. Observes that, regardless of growing student numbers, the share of graduates with high-level skills is differentiated between the Member States, and that the proportion of graduates with very low-level skills ranges from between 10 % and over 50 %; insists that evaluation criteria in higher education policies should also include qualitative criteria, for example the benchmark for Member States to increase student numbers¹⁰ should not only focus on the number of diplomas but also on the actual level of skills;
43. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote the renewed EU agenda for higher education among HEIs, regional and local authorities, and employers, with a view to addressing the needs of and challenges faced by both HEIs and students, by creating links with local and regional actors, reaching out to local communities, fostering local and regional development and innovation, building inclusive and connected higher education systems, strengthening collaboration with the world of work and addressing regional skills needs;
44. Underlines, moreover, the shortage of inclusive and high-quality vocational guidance in the Member States and considers that only attractive, sought after vocational education and training programmes designed with the input and cooperation of social partners can promote this choice among students;
45. Stresses, therefore, the need to improve the quality of vocational guidance in schools, and that the provision of bespoke educational guidance and support at all levels of education and training may improve access to the labour market;
46. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote the concrete employment opportunities associated with VET education and the relevance of VET education in the labour market;
47. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to make vocational and educational training more visible, by promoting platforms such as EURES, to ensure that it is accessible to all, gender balanced and non-discriminatory, and to guarantee that it has sufficient financing and to enhance its quality and attractiveness, and to promote dual education, work-based learning and reality-based learning in all forms at every level and form of education, including higher education, in order to ensure stronger ties between the education and labour markets and to provide permeability between different types of education; stresses, in this connection, the need for modern, technical equipment at educational venues, with the appropriate digital infrastructure; calls for the promotion of apprenticeship and entrepreneurship policies for young people to be developed and strengthened, in order to streamline young people's entry into the labour market;
48. Considers that in order to ensure the provision of quality apprenticeship or traineeship placements, it is fundamental that contracts are in place delineating the roles and responsibilities of all parties and specifying the length, learning objectives and tasks corresponding to clearly identified skills to be developed, employment status, adequate compensation/remuneration, including for overtime, social protection and security

¹⁰ Education and Training Monitor 2017.

schemes under the applicable national law, applicable collective agreements, or both;

49. Underlines the need to offer proper learning and training content and decent working conditions for traineeships and apprenticeships so as to ensure their crucial role in the transition from education to professional life; stresses that traineeships and apprenticeships should never be used as a substitute for jobs, nor should trainees or apprentices be considered for use as a cheap or even unpaid labour force;
50. Recalls that, today, excellence in education and training requires genuine integration between school and work, and highlights that this integration boosts both the quality of the numeracy and literacy learnt by children, and the professional skills they need to acquire; welcomes, in this respect, dual education systems and reality-based education – an innovative approach in which schools run real companies offering real products or services, and participate in the labour market;
51. Considers that graduate tracking information and the collection of accurate and relevant data (not only at national but also at EU level) is essential for quality assurance and the development of quality education that is content-based and corresponds to the needs of the labour market, and for reforming education systems to make them more flexible and inclusive;
52. Ensures that the career tracking system which monitors graduate employment rates and other career indicators should also be used for the evaluation of school curricula and teaching organisation, not only to boost the chances of graduates in the labour market, but also to strengthen their position and influence on building the economy and creating new jobs;
53. Calls for the collection of sex-disaggregated data on the graduate outcomes from tertiary education and VET, in order to improve the potential use of this data in the context of graduate employment and to assess the quality of education from a gender-based perspective;
54. Stresses that increased investments in education and training systems, as well as their modernisation and adjustment, are a crucial condition for social and economic progress; therefore stresses the importance of ensuring that social investment, especially in education and training for all, is prioritised in the new programming period of the multiannual financial framework for 2020-2026;
55. Calls on the Commission to strengthen its efforts, through the ESF and the European Semester, to support comprehensive public policies in the Member States focused on providing smoother transitions from education and (long-term) unemployment into work and specifically for the full implementation of the measures at national level outlined in the Council recommendation on the labour market integration of the long-term unemployed;
56. Reiterates the importance of monitoring the performance and impact assessments of the EU programmes targeting youth employment; notes the importance of effective and sustainable investments.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	27.3.2018
Result of final vote	+: 26 -: 22 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Guillaume Balas, Tiziana Beghin, Brando Benifei, Mara Bizzotto, Enrique Calvet Chambon, David Casa, Michael Detjen, Lampros Fountoulis, Elena Gentile, Arne Gericke, Marian Harkin, Czesław Hoc, Agnes Jongerius, Adam Kósa, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Patrick Le Hyaric, Jeroen Lenaers, Thomas Mann, Dominique Martin, Miroslavs Mitrofanovs, Emilian Pavel, João Pimenta Lopes, Georgi Pirinski, Marek Plura, Sofia Ribeiro, Robert Rochefort, Claude Rolin, Siôn Simon, Romana Tomc, Ulrike Trebesius, Marita Ulvskog, Renate Weber
Substitutes present for the final vote	Georges Bach, Amjad Bashir, Heinz K. Becker, Karima Delli, Tania González Peñas, Ivari Padar, Anne Sander, Sven Schulze, Jasenko Selimovic, Csaba Sógor, Neoklis Sylikiotis, Ivo Vajgl
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Jude Kirton-Darling, Ana Miranda, James Nicholson, Massimo Paolucci

