



EUROCHAMBRES

Connecting **business to Europe**

Position Paper

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Erasmus for All
COM/2011/0788

Recommendations

EUROCHAMBRES supports the new programme in the field of Education, Training, Youth and Sport, Erasmus for All, introduced in November 2011. However, improvements need to be made in order to better address political commitment of EU leaders from the informal January 2012 Summit¹, where **they recognised VET as a key tool for tackling youth unemployment and bridging the skills gap.**

EUROCHAMBRES' key recommendations:

- Maintain the proposed programme budget as a minimum allocation during the negotiations on MFF
- Earmark a specific amount of the budget for VET policy, of at least 30%, thus reflecting its importance and supporting efforts to enhance the role of VET in tackling unemployment, especially among young people
- Recognise the role of relevant stakeholders, especially Chambers of Commerce and Industry in providing education and training activities by inserting relevant references in the proposal
- Identify apprentices and trainees as a distinct target group within the budget of the programme in order to facilitate promotion of apprenticeships and traineeships schemes

EUROCHAMBRES strongly believe that Member States and the European Parliament fully understand that spending on education and training is the best investment that can be made for Europe's future, and that they will act accordingly.

Introduction

Education and Training are at the core of the Europe 2020 strategy and arguably none of the Europe 2020 objectives and headline targets can be reached without investment in human capital. Five flagship initiatives indicate the need for the modernization in education and training: Youth on the Move, Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, and also Digital Agenda, Innovation Union and Platform against Poverty. The Commission also underlined the need to increase EU support to education and training in its Communication on "A Budget for Europe"² in order to raise citizens' skills and tackle youth unemployment. **It should be also underlined that EU leaders recognised in the informal January Summit conclusions that VET is one the most important tools to tackle unemployment in Europe.**

European Chambers of Commerce and Industry long play a pivotal role in the development and delivery of education and training policy and in some countries **Chambers are the second largest training providers after the public sector in Europe.** In typical year, **over 2.5 million people receive training**

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/127599.pdf

² COM(2011)500 Final, 29.06.2011

qualifications from Chambers and Chambers also manage up to 900000 apprenticeships and provide distance learning courses for 40000 people every year. They cooperate closely with businesses and thus recognise the importance of the on-the-job training at all levels, notably through apprenticeships or traineeships. EUROCHAMBRES welcomes this new proposal and especially its emphasis on streamlining and simplification as a useful tool for increasing the level of education and training in the EU, however, urges decision makers to implement it in a 'user-friendly' way.

Key comments

The main objective of Erasmus for All is to implement two core educational goals of Europe 2020: to reduce school dropout rates and increase the number of people with tertiary education. In this context the new programme must in particular contribute to **improving the readiness for training among young people and increasing of their employability through strengthening of Europe-wide VET policies**.

EUROCHAMBRES considers the programme as a **crucial tool to foster the skills and learning mobility of young people**. This is especially important at a time of economic crisis and negative situation on labour markets, with notably high youth unemployment. It is also key for meeting companies' demand for more and better qualified workers and to overcome the skills mismatch. Leveraging the successful 'Erasmus' brand beyond higher education to all forms of education and training, including VET, should contribute to reaching the new proposed benchmark of 6% of EU initial VET graduates to have a study or training period abroad.

Specific comments

However, EUROCHAMBRES considers there are number of shortcomings, including especially lack of earmarked budget for VET.

I. Budget

EUROCHAMBRES approves of the increased total budget of €19 billion, which represents a 70% increase compared to the current funding of Life Long Learning Programme³. EUROCHAMBRES urges Member States and the European Parliament to maintain this level of funding and avoid any cuts during negotiations on MFF. Otherwise, the goals of Europe 2020 strategy will not be achieved.

In its conclusions of 14th February 2011⁴, the European Council recognised that "Education and training are key to achieving the Europe 2020 goals". Therefore, investing efficiently in high quality and modernised education and training is crucial because it lays the foundations for Europe's long-term competitiveness and also helps to address in the short term the effects of the crisis. The future

³ It has however also broader scope by merging all programmes into one

⁴ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/119282.pdf

programme should have sufficient means to contribute to the concrete implementation of these policy objectives. As the OECD "Education at a Glance" report⁵ clearly shows, "despite strained public budgets, governments must keep up their investment to maintain quality in education".

Chambers are also concerned about the amount of funds that the Commission receives for its own projects, like ECVET, EQAVET etc. and suggest that some part of the 4% sum to be allocated to supporting mobility goals. This will help to achieve the mobility benchmark.

EUROCHAMBRES believes that the current programmes have proved their added value and shown successes. We thus call on the Member States and the European Parliament to adopt the proposed budget **as the minimum allocation necessary to have a real impact in the current economic crisis and to match the ambitious targets of the Europe 2020 strategy**. This will send a strong political signal that education and training is considered as a priority in the efforts to enhance Europe's growth and competitiveness.

II. VET

EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the idea to have a programme that supports a lifelong approach to learning as learning should be accessible to all at all stages. However, EUROCHAMBRES believes that the programme should be inclusive and tailor made for each learner group. CCIs call for better visibility of training in the proposal and **highlighting the field of vocational education and training (VET)**. When it comes to definitions, EUROCHAMBRES is concerned that apprenticeships are absent from the list and similarly there is a lack of identified target groups that would include apprentices⁶. It would be consistent to include this since the recent Commission Communication "Youth Opportunities Initiative"⁷ mentions explicitly the importance of promoting apprenticeships and training as tools to tackle youth unemployment.

EUROCHAMBRES appreciates the substantial increase in the budget allocated for the mobility of VET students, which is now more than doubled. But more work is needed in order to remove practical, technical and legal obstacles to learning mobility and to set up a good infrastructure to support sending and hosting SMEs and better utilize their engagement in mobility of apprentices. The European Chambers of Commerce and Industry play as intermediate organizations a crucial role in supporting SMEs to handle the management of sending and/or hosting apprentices from abroad.

EUROCHAMBRES is, however, deeply concerned about the lack of clear budget allocation for VET as the new programme only provides guidelines on financial allocations. **EUROCHAMBRES would welcome the increase of earmarked budget for VET to 30% and also to have these guidelines inserted into Article 13(1)a on Budget, thus providing clear message on the division of funding under this article.**

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/2/48631582.pdf>

⁶ *Definition of apprenticeship as proposed by CEDEFOP: "a systematic, long-term training alternating periods in a school or training centre and at the workplace; the apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wages or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation".*

⁷ COM(2011) 933/3

EUROCHAMBRES calls on Member States to continue their efforts to fully implement short and long-term objectives of the Bruges Communiqué⁸ and contribute to progress on Copenhagen process, by putting more emphasis on VET policies in the new regulation.

III. Key Actions

Key action 1:

EUROCHAMBRES fully supports mobility as main priority under Key Action 1. However, EUROCHAMBRES recommends that a **special action on workplace training is designed under Key Action 1**. Different funding schemes for trainees and apprentices should be designed when hosted at a company. A specific funding scheme should be offered to the management of these traineeships that take place in a real working environment. That will help to recruit high quality host companies and to avoid mismatches.

Key action 2:

When considering the Knowledge Alliances under Key Action 2, EUROCHAMBRES highlights that innovation should not be limited to only technological aspect, but also include other areas. The EU should carefully approach this initiative and make sure that **SMEs can play an important role in this process**. Chambers support the Sector Skills Alliances that aim to establish projects between businesses and education and training providers in order to create new sector-specific curricula and encourage more innovative approach towards vocational teaching and training. This kind of support is relevant from the point of view of EUROCHAMBRES and Chambers are already active in bridging businesses and education sector.

Key action 3:

The management of the programme **should be based on a participative approach**. A structured dialogue with relevant European education and training stakeholders is a key to successful and efficient implementation of Key Actions. Currently, the proposal mentions “policy dialogue” with relevant European stakeholders in Key Action 3. EUROCHAMBRES calls on the Member States and the European Parliament **to recognise the crucial role Chambers play in delivering education and training to people across Europe** and explicitly mention this, by inserting in the Article 9(1)c on Support for policy reform, reference: “**relevant stakeholders, in particular Chambers of Commerce and Industry**”.

EUROCHAMBRES also underlines the need to avoid gaps or overlaps of Key Actions with goals of the structural funds and the European Social Fund (ESF). It is necessary to ensure complementarities.

⁸ Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in VET:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf

EUROCHAMBRES is the sole European body that serves the interests of every sector and every size of European business and the only one so closely connected to business. EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 45 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers, with over 19.8 million member companies. Chamber members employ over 120 million people.

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All our position papers can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.eu/content/default.asp?PageID=145**

EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 20 million enterprises in Europe – 93% of which are SMEs – through members in 45 countries and a European network of 2000 regional and local Chambers