

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Fostering creativity, entrepreneurship and mobility in education and training

(own-initiative opinion)

(2015/C 332/03)

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On 16 October 2014, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on:

Fostering creativity, entrepreneurship and mobility in education and training.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 May 2015.

At its 508th plenary session, held on 27 and 28 May 2015 (meeting of 27 May), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 88 votes to 8 with 21 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The EESC supports a joint initiative of the European Commission and European Council presidency trio to focus on entrepreneurship education ⁽¹⁾ and to foster an entrepreneurial mindset in Europe.

1.2. The EESC recommends that Member States return to the strategic framework for European cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) based on the 2006 Oslo Agenda, which is still highly valid.

1.3. The EESC recommends that Member States develop their own entrepreneurship education strategies or incorporate the entrepreneurship concept in their national lifelong learning strategies.

1.4. The EESC calls for gradual development of key competences as defined in the EP and Council recommendation (2006) ⁽²⁾ with the aim of contributing to better adaptability, employability, social inclusion and mobility.

1.5. High quality traineeships, internships, apprenticeships, dual or other work-based systems, start-ups and incubator programmes, volunteering and sports activities can ease the transition from school to work or self-employment.

1.6. The procedures for the recognition of knowledge acquired outside school need to be improved and learners, educators and employers must be involved in the design of recognition processes and be motivated by them ⁽³⁾.

1.7. Entrepreneurship education needs to be considered, however, in the context of the overall social — and not just business — environment. Entrepreneurship skills should be addressed at all levels of education and training, starting appropriately from an early age, in a manner that enables their continuous development across the curriculum.

⁽¹⁾ See the definition in point 5.3.

⁽²⁾ Recommendation of 18 December 2006, OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 214, 8.7.2014, p. 31.

1.8. The EESC supports the EC proposal addressed to the Member States to develop a competence reference framework for entrepreneurship within the context of the Key Competences Framework. This would help to ensure a coordinated approach across different levels of education and consideration for non-formal and informal learning.

1.9. The EESC calls on Member States to introduce a programme for teachers, trainers and educational leaders focused on developing entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. Educational establishments, meanwhile, should offer learning environments that promote entrepreneurial mindsets and are open to the wider community.

1.10. The EESC would emphasise the importance of partnership among different stakeholders — state administrations, schools, companies, employment services and families, highlighting in particular the role of social partners in developing professional and transversal competences that are geared to reality.

1.11. The EESC calls upon Member States to use all available programmes and tools supporting entrepreneurship in education and training, creativity, innovation and mobility. The EESC urges the Commission to provide the Member States with support and appropriate assistance in implementing Erasmus+, ensuring that all its instruments function properly.

2. The European policy framework

2.1. One of the priorities of the European Council conclusions of 26 and 27 June 2014, as set out in Annex I, *Strategic agenda for the Union in times of change* ⁽⁴⁾, was to help develop skills, and unlock talent and life changes for all by promoting the right skills for the modern economy and lifelong learning.

2.2. In order to contribute to the review of the Europe 2020 strategy, the Italian Presidency ⁽⁵⁾ launched a political discussion on the future role of education and training in the national and EU growth agendas. The Latvian Presidency is also continuing to promote digital opportunities and to foster entrepreneurship education, particularly at regional level ⁽⁶⁾.

2.3. The Council for Youth, Education, Culture and Sport stressed in its conclusions of 12 December 2014 ⁽⁷⁾ that both entrepreneurship and education are priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Developing an entrepreneurial mindset can have considerable benefits for citizens in their professional career and career of life.

3. General comments

3.1. The focus on entrepreneurship education represents a return to the **Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe** ⁽⁸⁾ stepping up the promotion of an entrepreneurial mindset in society, and the **Strategic framework for European cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)** ⁽⁹⁾.

3.2. Creativity and innovation are crucial for the development of enterprises and for Europe's ability to compete internationally. Investment in education and training for skills development is essential if we are to boost growth and competitiveness. The first challenge is to promote the acquisition by all citizens of transversal key competences such as digital competences, learning to learn, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness ⁽¹⁰⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ EUCO 79/14, p. 15.

⁽⁵⁾ Programme of the Italian Presidency 'Europe — A fresh start' p. 72.

⁽⁶⁾ Conference of the Latvian Presidency, Riga 11 and 12 February 2015 'Entrepreneurship in regions to strengthen the European Union's competitiveness'.

⁽⁷⁾ Council conclusions on entrepreneurship in education and training of 12 December 2014, OJ C 17, 20.1.2015, p. 2.

⁽⁸⁾ Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe, 2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/education-training-entrepreneurship/policy-framework/2006-conference/index_en.htm).

⁽⁹⁾ The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

⁽¹⁰⁾ In accordance with Strategic objective 4 (ET 2020): Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training, in the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009.

3.3. The LMO conference on 'Supporting start-ups to create growth and employment' ⁽¹¹⁾ also clearly showed that entrepreneurship education should be considered in the context of the wider social environment. The business environment should nevertheless be geared to facilitating businesses start-ups, cutting red tape, and creating job opportunities. Pre-start, start-up and development incentives can be effectively linked to a range of other active labour market policies (ALMP) and also need to be seen in the context of a wider framework of business support and enterprise development.

3.4. The revision of the Small Business Act ⁽¹²⁾ represents a unique opportunity to strengthen the links between measures focused on SMEs and entrepreneurial education using all available instruments, such as COSME. Promoting the upgrading of skills in SMEs and all forms of innovation is one of the 10 guiding principles for creating a level playing field for SMEs in the EU.

4. Key competences

4.1. The integration of the elements of entrepreneurship education in education and training should aim to give all learners, irrespective of their gender, socioeconomic background or special needs, the opportunity to develop the skills and competences needed for entrepreneurship.

4.2. In addition to basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic, entrepreneurship requires the gradual development of a range of key competences as defined in the EP and Council Recommendation from 2006 including a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives.

4.3. Communication in foreign languages is particularly essential for ensuring that European citizens are able to move, work, and learn freely throughout Europe and are becoming increasingly important for young people ⁽¹³⁾.

4.4. Digital entrepreneurship is critical in the Digital Single Market era for creating new jobs, for innovative ideas and for clusters that accelerate the pace of innovation. The EU needs to develop a policy framework that will promote ICT skills and encourage Member States to learn from each other about how they can increase the number and improve the quality of ICT-skilled graduates in accordance with companies' needs.

4.5. We need to unleash the huge potential of women and to explore their unique approach to leadership and running businesses. Member States, in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders, should implement programmes that focus on business and entrepreneurship skills development, and the involvement of women-led business in global supply chains ⁽¹⁴⁾.

5. How to promote an 'entrepreneurial mindset'

5.1. Entrepreneurial skills are important for life in general and for giving people more control of their futures. Entrepreneurship skills should be addressed at all levels of education and training, starting appropriately from an early age, in a way that enables their continuous development across the curriculum.

⁽¹¹⁾ 35th Meeting of the EESC Labour Market Observatory, 13 November 2014.

⁽¹²⁾ COM(2008) 394.

⁽¹³⁾ EC Strategic framework: (1) Barcelona objective agreed in 2002 by the Heads of States or Governments and (2) State and government. The 2008 Communication 'Multilingualism — an asset and a commitment' outlines the Commission's activities in this area.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Research Report 2013, Entrepreneurs: What can we learn from them? Part. 2/3 — Inspiring female entrepreneurs, CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development).

5.2. All school pupils should have the opportunity to take part in work-experience programmes to help develop these skills, and the tools developed to assess progress and demonstrate the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills should focus on improving the quality of future work experiences. A good example is a Finnish work programme which provides business-related training to different levels of education, 'Yrittäjyyskasvatus'⁽¹⁵⁾.

5.3. Entrepreneurship education is defined as 'a collection of formalised teachings that informs, trains, and educates anyone interested in participating in socioeconomic development through a project to promote entrepreneurship awareness, business creation, or small business development'⁽¹⁶⁾.

5.3.1. Europe is today pinning all its hopes on the promotion and development of dual systems and similar forms of work-based learning. The Member States that are operating such systems obtain good results over the long term and their youth unemployment levels are below the EU average.

5.3.2. Traineeships are an important means of tackling unemployment and the skills mismatch and securing the transition from education to the labour market. There should be more support for including traineeships in study curricula⁽¹⁷⁾.

5.3.3. Internships, which are about fostering the entrepreneurial attitudes of employees, and employee-driven/social entrepreneurship, can be successful examples of employee participation schemes aimed at achieving the economic and social goals of the organisations they work for.

5.3.4. Volunteering can constitute a valuable experience for skills development. The key non-formal education providers are youth organisations. Through their educational programmes they contribute to developing a number of transversal competences, such as teamwork, interpersonal skills, sense of initiative and risk-taking. Young people can learn from their mistakes in a safe environment (contrary to the real business world).

5.4. In 2012, the European Commission published a report entitled *Entrepreneurship education at school in Europe*⁽¹⁸⁾ focusing on national strategies, curricula and learning outcomes. Entrepreneurship education is currently promoted in most European countries and a number of different approaches have been adopted: 1) specific strategies/action plans focused exclusively on entrepreneurship education, 2) broader educational or economic strategies that incorporate objectives for entrepreneurship education, 3) individual or multiple initiatives relating to entrepreneurship education.

5.5. Not all people are born to be businessmen or businesswomen. An entrepreneurial spirit only generates more options for them to succeed in their professional career and career of life. But those who have talent for doing business and the courage to turn their entrepreneurial spirit into action should be promoted.

5.5.1. Business incubators are centres for innovation and entrepreneurship activities. They can be found at many universities and provide a safe environment where students can receive professional guidance for turning business ideas into reality and take risks without negative impact and a culture of failure. Students at business schools with incubators can have a more direct route to joining a start-up or launching their own business.

5.5.2. Entrepreneurial skills can also be acquired through skills development programmes organised outside general education systems. These programmes may include coaching and mentoring activities supplied by experienced trainers, entrepreneurs and business experts. Not only do these help to provide potential entrepreneurs with valuable business know-how, they also allow them to develop network of contacts with existing enterprises and entrepreneurs.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Finnish Ministry of Education (2009), Guidelines of entrepreneurship education, Helsinki.
Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2012), Entrepreneurship review 2012.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See Unesco and UNEVOC definition.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ C 214, 8.7.2014, p. 36.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Eurydice, April 2012, Entrepreneurship education at school in Europe.

5.5.3. Entrepreneurial skills training provided by chambers of commerce and industry across Europe demonstrates a variety of forms of teaching and practice that support people in the process of identifying and starting business ventures, identifying and organising the required resources and taking the risks associated with the venture: Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (Austria) ⁽¹⁹⁾, Startup@Campus (Belgium) ⁽²⁰⁾, Incuba' school (France), Long night of Start-ups (Germany) ⁽²¹⁾, New Entrepreneurs Day (Spain) and Bright and Young (Belgium) ⁽²²⁾.

5.6. Stakeholders and civil society organisations can play a key role in contributing effectively to the implementation and delivery of initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and fostering the entrepreneurial mindset. An example is the Finnish Startup Sauna Foundation ⁽²³⁾, which was founded by Finnish entrepreneurs in cooperation with several public stakeholders.

6. How to recognise entrepreneurial skills and make them more transparent

6.1. The continuing difficulties surrounding the recognition and transparency of skills and qualifications are hindering the development of the right mix of skills and qualifications as well as the mobility needed to achieve a closer match between skills and jobs to help boost competitiveness and prosperity.

6.2. A number of tools have been established at European level with the aim of facilitating cooperation through the transparency and recognition of skills and competences acquired through vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) across the EU ⁽²⁴⁾.

6.3. In addition to these tools, a number of initiatives aim to overcome skills mismatches, namely the European Skills, Competencies and Occupations Taxonomy (ESCO) and the Skills Panorama. To foster mobility, we also have the Europass framework, including the Europass CV and the European Skills Passport, and the recent revision of the Professional Qualifications Directive ⁽²⁵⁾.

6.4. Ensuring greater coherence between the European qualifications framework (EQF), European credit transfer systems (ECTS and ECVET) and the multilingual classification of European skills, qualifications and occupations (ESCO) would help ensure the recognition of qualifications, the validation of non-formal and informal learning and provision for lifelong guidance. This process must remain comprehensive and should be accompanied by an evaluation of the various instruments involved to ensure their effectiveness.

6.5. The communication on Rethinking Education ⁽²⁶⁾ also outlines the need to recognise, assess and validate the skills that people gather outside school, thereby providing a skills profile for potential employers. The recognition of skills developed outside the classroom is relevant when considering someone for a job; however, the onus should not be placed only on employers to assess and validate such skills.

6.6. Furthermore policies and frameworks supporting the portability of qualifications are generally related to existing EU legislation, and several are national initiatives for the validation of prior learning at Member State level. A systematic review and monitoring of such national initiatives should be geared towards identifying good practice and promoting mutual learning and common principles ⁽²⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (Austria).

⁽²⁰⁾ Startup@Campus (Belgium).

⁽²¹⁾ Long night of Start-ups (Germany).

⁽²²⁾ Bright and Young (Belgium).

⁽²³⁾ Teknologiaeollisuus (2012), Uusi Startup-säätiö vauhdittamaan suomalaisia kasvuyrityksiä (Helsinki).

⁽²⁴⁾ A central tool is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) which relates to all types and levels of qualifications; VET tools include the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). HE instruments, include the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

⁽²⁵⁾ Directive 2013/55/EU.

⁽²⁶⁾ COM(2012) 669 final.

⁽²⁷⁾ Based on forthcoming Eurofound (2015) report 'Youth Entrepreneurship in Europe', EF 1507.

6.7. The EESC supports the EC's proposal to develop a competence reference framework for entrepreneurship within the context of the Key Competence Framework, breaking down competences into their constituent parts, based on the EQF learning outcome descriptors and levels. This will help ensure a coordinated approach between the different levels of education and the process of taking account of non-formal and informal learning.

6.8. The EESC appreciates the following two collaborative initiatives of the EC and OECD:

1. **Entrepreneurship360** ⁽²⁸⁾, which aims to enhance entrepreneurship at schools and within technical and vocational institutions and provides a freely available self-assessment instrument that will support institutions and individual teachers by helping them to advance their strategies and practices to promote entrepreneurship, and the
2. **HEInnovate** online tool, which helps higher education institutions to promote a more entrepreneurial and innovative mindset in an international context ⁽²⁹⁾.

7. The role of teachers, trainers and educational leaders

7.1. Teachers and educators have a crucial role in facilitating learning and multiplying ideas. Integrating new educational processes and teaching technologies into the classrooms is no simple task and will require qualified teachers to spearhead the process ⁽³⁰⁾. They have to promote alternative and non-formal approaches to learning and apply an individual attitude.

7.1.1. The quality of teachers and mentors is essential for ensuring the success and effectiveness of entrepreneurial training programmes. In this regard, potential entrepreneurs who are in the early stages of their business life particularly value the experience and know-how of experienced teachers, more senior entrepreneurs, for instance who can share their own experiences ⁽³¹⁾.

7.1.2. One example of the effectiveness of entrepreneurial training programmes is the programme organised by the Irish National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship ⁽³²⁾ which provides intensive train-the-trainer training to equip secondary level teachers and youth workers with the necessary skills and resources to successfully deliver entrepreneurship training to young people. Participants who successfully complete this programme receive a Certified Entrepreneurship Trainers (CETs) qualification.

7.1.3. Another example is the Dutch Action Programme Entrepreneurship and Education ⁽³³⁾, which aims at enhancing entrepreneurial spirit and attitudes among students by anchoring entrepreneurial skills and knowledge within the Dutch education system. The programme is composed of different schemes whose aims are to offer a wide range of activities to develop students' entrepreneurial skills throughout the various stages of their educational careers as well as to provide training courses that facilitate entrepreneurship education for teachers.

7.2. Teachers, trainers and educational leaders should seek to develop their own creativity and innovative attitudes, while schools should offer a learning environment that promotes entrepreneurial mindsets and that is open to the wider community.

7.3. In June 2013, the Commission published *A guide for Educators* ⁽³⁴⁾ setting out a list of basic principles for entrepreneurial teachers, assessing qualitative learning outcomes, cross-curricular learning, pre-service and in-service teacher training, mentoring, innovation in entrepreneurial pedagogy, and putting forward key messages from practical examples.

⁽²⁸⁾ The OECD Entrepreneurship360 project.

⁽²⁹⁾ HEInnovate.

⁽³⁰⁾ OJ C 214, 8.7.2014, p. 31.

⁽³¹⁾ Based on forthcoming Eurofound (2015) report 'Youth Entrepreneurship in Europe', EF 1507.

⁽³²⁾ NFTE programme.

⁽³³⁾ Programmes: Voortgangsrapportage Programma onderwijs en ondernemerschap and Landbouw en Innovatie, Brief Onderwijs en Ondernemerschap.

⁽³⁴⁾ The guide prepared by ICF GHK for EC, DG Enterprises and Industry 'Entrepreneurship education — A guide for educators'.

7.3.1. Entrepreneurial teacher training institutions should develop a clear educational concept, to equip teachers with the ability to also teach for the labour market. Education supporting the entrepreneurial mindset needs to be integrated as a horizontal approach and a cross-curricular subject in the study programme.

7.3.2. Entrepreneurial teacher training programmes should motivate student teachers to develop their own entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes.

7.3.3. Support should be given to develop free and open digital and online tools that teach entrepreneurial skills and explore forms of cooperation with the open source community to promote free business tools as well as training for such tools.

7.3.4. The mobility of educators across Europe is important, particularly in higher education, through the EU Lifelong Learning Programme and/or other instruments specially designed for this purpose. Greater mobility and exchange of experience is needed in Europe, not only between universities, but also between academia, where appropriate, and the business world. Programmes need to be developed that allow educators to spend time at other institutions and/or in the private sector to allow them to truly engage, learn and develop.

8. The partnership principle

8.1. Business should be consulted regarding the formulation of education activities for entrepreneurship. This is necessary to ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills they need to succeed. Business should be invited to become more involved in training managers and workers in the fields of entrepreneurship, cooperation and participation in management of their organisations. Businesses should also train their workers in the necessary skills and new knowledge as well as in decision-making under working conditions enabling them to access these training programmes. In addition, they should work with the education community so that young people can learn about the labour market and find a place for themselves within it.

8.2. The link between trade unions and young people in the field of training is particularly important. Trade unions can take part in training young people in work environments other than schools or educational centres. The most experienced and professional workers can work with young workers, trainees and volunteers as mentors and tutors or become teachers at special apprenticeship facilities. These links with companies are important for teaching young people about the labour market process and industrial relations. Teacher trade unions are a critical resource with which to work for effective policy building in education and training, but the interface with business is vital.

8.3. Above all, in the context of social partnership, employers and employees' organisations have to be involved in designing national lifelong learning strategies and action plans for implementing Youth Guarantees. The EESC supports the Framework of Action on Youth Employment ⁽³⁵⁾, developed by the European social partners.

8.4. It is crucial to ensure the involvement of civil society organisations. This could allow the various CSOs (focused on women, young people, families, disabled people, migrants, minorities and other groups) to focus more effectively on the needs and priorities of specific groups of citizens in the education system and on the labour market.

8.5. The family continues to play an important role as was already mentioned in the Committee's opinion ⁽³⁶⁾.

⁽³⁵⁾ Framework of Action on Youth Employment.

⁽³⁶⁾ OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 1.

9. Effective use of both existing and new programmes

9.1. **Erasmus+** ⁽³⁷⁾, a new Commission programme for education, training, youth and sport 2014-2020 aims to boost skills and employability, as well as to modernise Education, Training and Youth work. The seven-year programme will have a budget of EUR 14,7 billion, which represents a 40 % increase on current spending levels reflecting the EU's commitment to investing in these areas. Erasmus+ will provide opportunities for over four million Europeans to study, gain work experience and volunteer abroad. This is an important step forward with significant potential in terms of supporting entrepreneurial education, for example by encouraging the mainstreaming of education-business cooperation in Knowledge Alliance for higher education and in Sectoral Skills Alliances for VET.

9.2. There are other programmes and instruments supporting entrepreneurship education in the EU: **ESF** ⁽³⁸⁾, **ESCO — European Skills, Competences and Occupations Taxonomy** ⁽³⁹⁾, **COSME** ⁽⁴⁰⁾, **HORIZON 2020** ⁽⁴¹⁾, **the Youth employment initiative** ⁽⁴²⁾ and **Creative Europe** ⁽⁴³⁾.

Brussels, 27 May 2015.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Henri MALOSSE

⁽³⁷⁾ Erasmus+, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50.

⁽³⁸⁾ ESF.

⁽³⁹⁾ ESCO.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/cip/cosme/index_en.htm

⁽⁴¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020/index_en.cfm?pg=home&video=none

⁽⁴²⁾ COM(2013)0144 final.

⁽⁴³⁾ Creative Europe.