



## WHITE PAPER

### **Education. Changing Times: Diversification of Learning**

*Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting in Kyiv on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2019*

***"The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity."<sup>1</sup>***

Education and learning play a crucial role in the personal development, but they also counteract the negative effects of unemployment and poverty. Education policy is primarily a national competence and should continue to be such, however high educational standards need to be maintained across the European union. European countries are held in high regard for the quality of education citizens receive, be it vocational or university. Regardless of this, there is a huge disparity across the European Union with the qualifications and skills that young individuals receive.

There is a discrepancy regarding the quality of skills that young people bring into the workforce. Statistics from Eurostat show that the European workforce has varying levels of education. Currently, across Europe, 56.8% of those in employment have a low level of education (i.e. early school leavers), 76.4% have a medium level of education (i.e. secondary completion) and 85.8% have a higher level of education (i.e. university education). In relation to individuals identified as having a lower standard of education, it has been shown statistically that young people across Europe are often failed by their education systems and often are not given a second chance. This is damaging to not only the individual's future and possible careers but, to the future economy and workforce of the EU.

The Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) believes that in order for young people within the European Union to partake in the betterment of the Union overall, be it economically, politically and socially, we need to avail of the vast talents and diversity that young Europeans have to offer. Thus, we propose to focus on three areas and call for more action on (1) Training & Skills (2)

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<sup>1</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europa.eu/files/docs/body/treaty\\_on\\_european\\_union\\_en.pdf](https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europa.eu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf)



Work Placement, Internships & Mentoring and (3) Unifying Education Requirements in Europe. The proposed are all viewed as being necessary in order to equip young people with the necessary skills and practical experience to survive and evolve in the ever-changing work environment.

## **Training and Skills**

In 2018 10.6% of 18 to 24-year old's in the European Union had not completed secondary education and had not enrolled in further education. This is something that must be changed across Europe (Eurostat, 2018). It is possible that young people who do not attend a form of further education, be it vocational or university, may fail to meet the skills and demands of the fast-changing working world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Early-school leavers are not the sole group lacking skills; often those who have completed university education are not prepared for the demands nor the quality of skills required in the workforce.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has outlined that on average 51% of people across Europe need in-house training to attain the necessary skills to perform their duties.

Multinational corporations as well as SMEs need incentives to hire young people, train them and invest in them to equip them properly in their professions.

Technological breakthroughs have seen a development whereby many tasks are now completed by machines and technology, which were previously done by people. This illustrates the possible improvements in work life such as increased and better jobs but may also pose a risk on the widening skills gap.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2018 stated that the current means of upskilling and reskilling are insufficient to meet the demand of changing roles. Hence the lack of training and skills, need to be combatted within the EU.

- We propose that the European Union would work with national governments to promote training programmes in collaboration with SME's and multinational companies. This would help to provide the skills needed in the ever-changing work environment and re-skill more young individuals across the European Union. Young people need to identify and meet the skills demand on a regional, but also on a European scale.

- The problem of early school-leavers must be addressed. We believe that this can be solved by making returning to education more attractive through the various life-long learning projects of the EU. In a fast-evolving environment, Member States need to ensure that their citizens are provided with those skills and qualities that will allow them to adapt and meet the needs of the new market. We need to adapt and update ineffective training programmes in the pursuit of equipping young people with the necessary transferable skills that will prepare them for the workforce now and throughout their working lives. We call for cooperation between schools and local employers to provide training and workplace insights to students. It is crucial that schools open-up and come closer to society; local, national as well as European.
- We need to consolidate the multitude of different programs, give greater autonomy and trust to each school unit and empower local governments to make decisions on the best uses of job training funds, considering local industry. The limited resources that are available from these training funds should be used for jobs in demand, driven by the local economies-
- One of the fundamental purposes of education is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to enable them to contribute to their local community and join the workforce. Although, their professional careers and behaviour as part of the workforce is crucial in this sense, we must never seek a solely skill-based educational system. In principle, we must maintain our focus on the values and virtues delivered through the educational system, and the efficiency of this process. It is also crucial to develop the media, financial and digital literacy of the citizens from a young age. As this mission cannot and should not be the content of yet another school subject to be taught within a classroom, we call for the inclusion of more projects based on practical learning. In this light, partnerships between school units and local, national or European institutions and organizations that are active and have a focus on social issues (e.g. elderly care, organizations against domestic violence etc.) must be sought.

## **Internships/Placement and Mentoring**

The Youth Guarantee was initially put into place as a means of tackling the issues of youth unemployment within the European Union. Since the start of the programme, youth unemployment has decreased from a peak of 24% in 2013 to 14% in 2019 (European Parliament, 2019), it has still failed to provide inexperienced young people with skills that match the fast-changing working environment and has failed to incentivise companies to maintain those hired under full-time employment; train them, invest in them and equip them sufficiently for their job.

In addition to this, younger individuals in secondary schools should be gaining experience through the school system of more practical based skills and experiences that would help prepare them for the changing working world. School can be too exam and results orientated at times. The apparent change in how education is taught, needs to be reflected in how skills and experience are gained and developed. Even though some secondary schools and universities have incorporated a certain element of a work placement/internship and mentoring programme, this is only for certain courses in third level education. If offered in Secondary schools, these are usually only for a two-week period of the entirety of a student's secondary level education. Internships/Placements equip young people with vital skills and additionally instills the importance of skills-development and self-reliance in students. Hence, a means needs to be found in order to incorporate this across the board.

- We propose that Member States would replace outdated policies and ineffective training programs with a plan to develop a twenty-first century workforce that makes the most of the skills of our population.
- We suggest that there should be credits recognition available given not only to secondary students, but also to university students for volunteering and extracurricular activities. This would allow for skill development, in addition to shifting the focus that has solely been placed on book knowledge to applied knowledge. In relation to this, YEPP urges universities to recognize students' achievements in the areas of leadership, voluntary service, arts and entrepreneurial skills.

- Undoubtedly, the field where the biggest advancements can be observed over the last 10 years, is that of sciences and technology. Although a lot of work still needs to be done when it comes to the development of digital skills in many European countries, it is essential that a focus is also placed on Research and Innovation within the mandatory curriculum of each member state's compulsory school training. Again, the involvement of other partners is of vital importance.
- YEPP calls for more work placements/internships to be made available in secondary schools as well as further education colleges/universities in collaboration with the private sector, in order to allow young people to gain experiences that will serve them in the future, enhance their Curriculum Vitae and skills that will allow them to excel in their chosen profession.

## **Unifying Education Requirements in Europe**

When looking at the statistics presented by Eurostat, it is clear to see that there is a disparity in the number of school leavers who attend further education. Thus, it is important that there is a basic skill level that all school-goers, be it those who only complete lower, medium or higher education, must possess. It is clear to see that there has been a rise in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), in addition there are more tech-based products available to enhance the learning experience. Our traditional ideas of learning and education are gradually evolving, with the incorporation of

tablets and electronic devices in some schools' curricula across the world. It's clear to see that there is a distinct correlation with the advancement of the digital world and the demand of the skills needed in order to be an effective member of the workforce. Thus, the European Union in partnership with the national governments of the Member States must work together in order to set the standard to achieve the necessary skills needed in the regions now and in the future and incorporate these in the education system.

- When looking at the general overview of various work-requirements there is an apparent trend, which is the need for language skills as well as IT skills. We propose that IT skills should be taught in primary schools, as a means of guaranteeing that the future youth of Europe have a foundation

in that field. We understand the obstacles with guaranteeing that every primary school in the European Union partakes in this, but with the support of the Union and support of each Member State; this can be done. It is understood that each Member State is in control of its own education and training system, yet with these common challenges across Member States, cooperation of Member States would help to resolve these issues.

- In relation to language skills, every European citizen should be encouraged to learn a second language. In 2015 the percentage of primary school students in the EU who learned 2 or more foreign languages was 4.8%, in comparison to this secondary school student's percentage was at 59%. With the present Erasmus programme in place sponsoring and allowing individuals to work and study in member states, there is also a certain element of natural language immersion. Yet we believe our young people should be targeted at an earlier age to learn a second language. It is not surprising that young children are able to absorb information quicker, thus starting language training at primary level would allow children to carry the basics of one of the recognized official languages of the European Union as well as their native language.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is clear to see that there needs to be an overall shift, a redirection and redefinition, of what we see as education. As outlined in the above paragraphs, the shortcomings of the current educational system are obvious; it does not provide sufficient support to students and this is demonstrated by the high numbers of early school leavers. Some education systems across Europe have failed young people and thus, need to be revised in order to prepare young people at an early age for the working world by instilling practical skills. With the implementation of the above proposals, YEPP believes that there can be a clear change for the better, not only in the skillset instilled in the youth but also in the level of common skills and practical knowledge. This will not only benefit the young people of today, but the Europe of tomorrow.