



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

3221st Council meeting

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

Brussels, 15 February 2013

President

Mr Ruairí Quinn
Minister for Education and Skills of Ireland

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

The Council adopted conclusions on investing in education and training, in response to the recent Commission communication "Rethinking Education".

It also held a policy debate on "Education and Skills for Jobs, Stability and Growth", in the context of the European Semester and in particular the education aspects of the 2013 Annual Growth Survey.

Over lunch, Ministers had an exchange of views with the social partners on some of the issues discussed during the Council meeting.

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

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Mertens

Czech Republic:

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Minister for Children and Education

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Finland:

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Minister for Education and Science

Sweden:

Mr Jan BJÖRKLUND

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education

United Kingdom:

Ms Shan MORGAN

Deputy Permanent Representative

.....
Commission:

Ms Androulla VASSILIOU

Member
.....

The Government of the acceding state was represented as follows:

Croatia

Mr Željko JOVANOVIĆ

Minister for Science, Education and Sport

ITEMS DEBATED

EDUCATION

Investing in education and training

The Council adopted conclusions on investing in education and training, which are a response to the Commission communication "Rethinking Education" ([14871/12](#)) and to the education aspects of the 2013 Annual Growth Survey ([16669/12](#) + [ADD 1](#) + [ADD 2](#) + ADD 3), as called for by the European Council of 13-14 December 2012 ([EUCO 205/12](#)).

The conclusions highlight priority areas for education and training reform with particular emphasis on improving overall skills and competence levels in order to boost employability and reduce youth unemployment. Moreover, they aim at strengthening the link between Europe 2020 goals and the open method of coordination (OMC) in the education field, seeking to promote closer collaboration with other relevant policy committees such as the Economic Policy Committee and the Employment Committee.

Member states are in particular invited to:

- restructure their education systems, for instance creating closer links to labour market;
- improve vocational education and training and focus it on potential growth areas or areas with skills shortages;
- identify young people at risk of early school-leaving and provide individualised support;
- reduce the number of low-skilled adults through access to adult training and lifelong learning; and
- optimise ICT-supported learning and access to open educational resources.

Some member states wished that the EYCS Council examine - in detail and on a regular basis - both overall and individual member state's progress in responding to country-specific recommendations (CSRs), while other member states preferred a less prescriptive procedure, contending that education's role in the European semester is already prominent enough and that education is an area of national competence. Most member states considered that the exchange of information and good practices was extremely important and useful.

The Commission considered these conclusions a "milestone" and underlined that the EU education ministers have an interest in being more closely involved in the debate about the reforms called for in the country-specific recommendations, since their policy relevance seems set to increase further: they are likely to play a key role in selecting priorities for future interventions under the structural funds.

The Commission highlighted in particular the importance of two initiatives proposed in the communication and soon to be implemented:

- the Alliance for Apprenticeships - aimed at improving work-based learning and involving closer partnerships between education and employment, in particular social partners, business and vocational training providers;
- the Agenda for modernizing education and training through ICT tools.

In addition, Commissioner Vassiliou called for a swift adoption of a language benchmark which could have positive effects for young people employability.

Education and skills for jobs and growth

In the context of the European Semester and in particular to enable Education ministers to respond to the recommendations in the 2013 Annual Growth Survey (AGS), ministers were invited to indicate, in public debate, what immediate and practical action their countries are taking in the field of education and training in order to improve skill levels and employability, considering also the urgent need to reduce youth unemployment.

They were also asked to briefly highlight one practical initiative in their member state, including any action that they may be taking in response to relevant country-specific recommendations.

With a view to making the debate more open and interactive, the Presidency invited two guest lead speakers: Lord David PUTTNAM, Chancellor of the UK's Open University and well-known film producer, and Mr Andreas SCHLEICHER, Director for Education and Special Advisor on Education Policy from the OECD.

Mr Schleicher addressed three issues:

- the global challenge facing Europe in terms of competition from North America, Asia, etc.;
- evidence of what skills employers are looking for;
- examples of good practice from Europe.

Lord Puttnam underlined that education is not a luxury: it is indeed a question of survival of our societies. It's poor education which is unaffordable.

He pointed out that there is a gap between our standard classrooms and the outside world and this could lead at a certain point to children blaming education in general since it didn't prepare them for the new challenges. But although digital competences must be mastered, he strongly argued in favour of the crucial role of teachers that must be properly trained and highly qualified. He also called on member states to encourage teachers to exchange information through Internet platforms and leave their experiences as legacy when they retire, which is already happening in the United Kingdom.

Although member states agreed in general that the role of education is not just about preparing young people for the world of work, the development of relevant skills for the labour market must clearly be a key concern, particularly in the current situation of a high rate of youth unemployment in Europe and the unacceptably high levels of early school leaving in several member states. However, it is estimated that there are currently more than 2 million vacancies that cannot be filled.

Most member states agreed that vocational education and training (VET) must be upgraded and positively valued and that the distinction between academic and vocational education and training should disappear. To this end, many member states underlined the importance of developing high quality vocational education and training and promoting adult learning, preferably in cooperation with the social partners in this field. A number of member states also recalled the need to align VET policies with national, regional and local economic development strategies.

A number of member states have already developed or are putting in place strategies to ensure a more efficient transition from school to work, anticipating the evolution of skill demands and working closely with businesses.

Several member states draw attention to the importance of mastering basic skills before developing other competences albeit useful. Mr Schleicher pointed out that what mattered most was not so much the skills acquired but the way we will use them.

The Commission recalled that this is a decisive year for member states plans for financing from structural funds: EUR 35 billion are available, in particular from the European Social Fund and this can make a difference if efficiently used.

Commissioner Vassiliou also welcomed the newly established framework for cooperation with OCDE, seeking complementarities that will improve the impact in member states. The cooperation will be developed mainly through country analysis, skills strategies and evaluation tools.

Furthermore, the Commissioner called on member states to encourage their universities to participate in the new U-multirank project which is being launched, aiming to establish a more realistic ranking for universities not only focused on research capacities.

Finally, most member states warmly welcomed the quality of the guest speakers interventions and thanked the Presidency for allowing for a richer and more dynamic debate.

Any other business

"ERASMUS FOR ALL"

The Council took note of oral information from the Presidency on the state of play concerning the proposal for a regulation establishing "Erasmus for all": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.

The Commission presented its proposal on 25 November 2011 ([17188/11](#)) + [ADD 1-6](#)). The Council agreed a partial general approach in May 2012 ([9873/12](#)), which excluded any provisions with budgetary implications, pending overall agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The proposed budget for the Programme is €19 billion.

Although it maintained the overall architecture of the Commission proposal, with emphasis on simplification and on different types of action rather than a purely sectoral approach, the Council did introduce a number of changes to the text, many of which have since been taken up by the Parliament.

The lead committee of the European Parliament (CULT) voted 273 amendments to the proposal on 27 November 2012. Four other committees - BUDG, DEVE, EMPL and ITRE - have also given opinions. The main areas of divergence from the Council's position can be summarised as follows:

- new name for the programme : the YES Europe Programme
- retention of the current 'brand names' for the sub-programmes (Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, etc.);
- detailed objectives for the education, training and youth chapters;
- inclusion of the indicators in (an annex to) the basic act;
- greater use of delegated acts.

A first informal meeting between the Council (represented by the Irish Presidency), the Commission and the European Parliament (trilogue), aimed at preparing an agreement on the proposal, is scheduled for 19 February 2013. The Presidency hopes to achieve an agreement before the summer, which would enable important preparatory work by the Commission to be completed in time for the programme to begin, as proposed, on 1 January 2014.

In its meeting of 7-8 February, the European Council agreed on a substantial increase of the financial means for future geared expenditure such as education, in order to promote growth and create jobs. In fact, the sub-heading "Competitiveness" had an increase of more than 37% compared to the MFF 2007-2013. In addition, the European Council also committed to increase the funding for the "Erasmus for all" programme, although the exact amount will be depend on further negotiations with the European Parliament

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS****Co-operation agreement between Liechtenstein and Eurojust**

The Council approved the agreement on co-operation between Eurojust and Liechtenstein ([5384/13](#)), following the opinion of the Joint Supervisory Body of Eurojust, as required by Council Decision 2009/426/JHA. The agreement aims at combating serious crime, in particular organised crime and terrorism.

FOOD LAW**Authorisation of food additives**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of the two following Commission regulations:

- a regulation authorising the use of sodium ascorbate (E 301) as an antioxidant in vitamin D preparations intended for use in foods for infants and young children ([17675/12](#));
- a regulation authorising the use of tricalcium phosphate (E 341 (iii)) as an anti-caking agent in nutrient preparations intended for use in infant formulae and follow-on formulae ([17677/12](#)). Tricalcium phosphate ensures that mixtures in powder form remain free-flowing.

The Commission regulations are subject to the so called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt them, unless the European Parliament objects.
