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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: New Skills Agenda for Europe
- Policy debate

Delegations will find attached a note from the Presidency outlining the context and providing guidance for the policy debate with a set of questions for the discussion by Ministers at the EPSCO Council on 13 October 2016.

New Skills Agenda for Europe

Steering note for discussion

On 10 June 2016, the European Commission adopted the New Skills Agenda for Europe, outlining its vision on the strategic importance of skills for sustaining jobs, growth and competitiveness. In the Agenda, the Commission invites national, regional and local authorities and all relevant stakeholders to join in shared commitment and work together to improve the level and quality of skills in the EU.

Skills, together with education and training are key to employability and sustainable employment growth. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will, to a great extent, determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth.

Job-relevant skills are acquired throughout life, starting from early childhood education, including all stages of initial education (primary, secondary - general as well as vocational - education, and tertiary education) but also adult learning (be it formal, non-formal or informal). A significant share of adult learning takes place on the job, while working.

Ongoing processes of globalization and technological change are changing the world of work that lead to different (and mostly higher) skills requirements. They also require more frequent changes in labour markets, imposing high demands on transferability of workers' skills across firms and sectors, and increasing the need for continued upskilling and reskilling of the labour force, and for effective policies in the field of lifelong learning.

The EU workforce is ageing and shrinking. Inclusive labour markets need to draw on the skills and talents of all, including the low-skilled and other vulnerable groups. Moreover, in the global race for talent, the EU needs to nurture its people, preventing brain drain, while attracting skilled workers from abroad and making better use of migrants' skills.

Concretely, the Commission has proposed 10 actions to be taken forward over the next two years, some of which have already been launched:

- a Skills Guarantee
- a European Qualifications Framework
- a "Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition"
- a 'Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills'
- a "Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals"
- the Europass Framework
- Making Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice
- a Recommendation on Key Competences
- an initiative on graduate tracking
- a proposal to address brain drain

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *The Skills Agenda for Europe represents a new impetus to make Europe both more inclusive and competitive by bringing the worlds of work and education closer together. What practical steps can employers, entrepreneurs and social partners do to cooperate better with educators and schools to help achieve this?*
2. *Are education and training institutions supplying the right skills that people need now and in future for interconnected, fast-changing labour markets and society?*
3. *Helping Europe's young people remains at the top of the EU's political agenda. What further efforts need to be made to help young people prepare for the labour market, for example through increased opportunities for mobility, and for voluntary and professional experience?*