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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: Draft Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016

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In the course of several meetings, the Education Committee has prepared the above text with a view to its adoption at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 24 February 2016.

The text now meets with the broad agreement of all delegations.

The Permanent Representatives Committee is accordingly invited to forward the text to the Council for adoption and subsequent publication in the Official Journal.

**Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the  
Member States, meeting within the Council,  
of 24 February 2016**

**on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education:  
the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

- The European Commission’s Annual Growth Survey 2016: Strengthening the recovery and fostering convergence<sup>1</sup>;
- The European Commission’s Education and Training Monitor 2015<sup>2</sup>;
- The 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) - New priorities for European cooperation in education and training<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> 14270/15

<sup>2</sup> ISBN 978-92-79-50621-5

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, pp. 25-35

## CONSIDER THAT

Europe finds itself confronted with multiple and simultaneous societal challenges.

Although on the whole the European Union's economy is experiencing moderate recovery, the impact of the financial and economic crisis on our societies persists. Disparities between and within Member States continue to increase, resulting in long-term imbalances. In many countries youth unemployment remains alarmingly high and levels of educational attainment insufficient.

The current refugee crisis poses considerable challenges to our societies and our education systems. It is our common duty to create an environment in which everyone's talents thrive, regardless of background or origin.

At the same time our societies face threats from increasing radicalisation, leading in some cases to violence and terrorism. This places additional emphasis on the important roles education and training play when it comes to promoting inclusiveness, active citizenship and common fundamental values, as set out in the Paris Declaration of March 2015.<sup>4</sup>

These key challenges are common ones with important implications for education policy. In order to achieve sustainable economic recovery and to reduce disparities and imbalances, a response is needed in which the Member States act together with the EU institutions and in conjunction with other international organisations, such as OECD, the Council of Europe and UNESCO<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, UN Sustainable Development Goal nr 4, which is devoted to education and life-long learning [UN Resolution 70/1 *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*].

## ACKNOWLEDGE THAT

Providing people with relevant skills, competences and knowledge drives innovation and growth and promotes personal fulfilment and well-being. It is the best means of preventing individuals from becoming unemployed, thus reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, in the transition from education to the labour market, considerable skills gaps and skills mismatches remain, with the result that European economies may be hindered by a lack of suitably skilled workers which in turn reduces their growth potential<sup>7</sup>. Equally unfortunate, however, is the fact that many highly skilled workers may find themselves in jobs that underuse their talents and that might reduce their individual potential to grow.<sup>8</sup>

Education and training have a strong contribution to make towards ensuring a cohesive society as well as a well-functioning labour market. Education and training should level the playing field for all and serve as a strong vector for the social and economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups by embracing diversity in all its forms. Similarly, education and training have a key role to play in developing the potential in every person and in fostering the ability to think critically and exercise fair and independent judgement, particularly - but not exclusively - in the context of social media.

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<sup>6</sup> Annual Growth Survey 2016 [14270/15, page 8]

<sup>7</sup> 39% of companies reportedly have difficulty finding staff with required skills – [Third European Company Survey (2013), Eurofound].

<sup>8</sup> Cedefop European Skills and Jobs Survey 2014

While education systems perform well in many respects and contribute substantially to Europe's growth potential and to ensuring open and democratic societies, some significant weaknesses remain. Particularly worrying is the considerable number of learners who fail to reach minimum standards in education, as reflected in recent figures on early school leaving rates<sup>9</sup> and levels of basic skills.<sup>10</sup> Socio-economic status, migrant background and gender are still important determinants of educational performance<sup>11</sup>, thus constraining the emancipatory effect<sup>12</sup> that education and training should have.

ACCORDINGLY SUBMIT the following contribution in the field of education and training to the March 2016 European Council:

1. Education and training should be a key element in a comprehensive approach aimed at fostering socio-economic development and inclusiveness. This calls for targeted reforms of education systems, with a view to improving their performance in terms of learning outcomes as part of the overall efforts needed to restore jobs and sustainable growth. Since it is growth-friendly and supports both short-term recovery and long-term economic growth, investment in education and training should be prioritised both at regional, national and EU level. This need not in all cases be a matter of increasing budgets, but may instead be one of better targeting expenditure and providing the right quality-enhancing incentives.

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<sup>9</sup> Education and Training Monitor 2015, part 2. In 2014, early school leavers in the EU represented 11.1% of the population aged 18-24, i.e. above the Europe 2020 target of 10%.

<sup>10</sup> Education and Training Monitor 2015, paragraph 1.1. According to the OECD's latest PISA survey (2012), in the EU the share of underachievement in reading stands at 17.8%, in maths at 22.1% and in science at 16.6%, i.e. above the ET 2020 benchmark of 15%.

<sup>11</sup> Education and Training Monitor 2015, paragraph 1.1

<sup>12</sup> i.e. empowering someone to overcome restrictions or limitations he or she might experience as a result of his or her personal or socio-economic background

2. The development of skills, competences and knowledge in a lifelong learning perspective is key to a well-functioning labour market in which individual talents can flourish. Ways must be found to prepare young people for the changing requirements of the labour market, while at the same time continually updating and upgrading the skills of those already in the labour market. Skills mismatches and skills gaps should be addressed as a matter of priority by both the education and the employment sectors. Amongst other things, this means that greater emphasis is needed on the development of transversal skills<sup>13</sup> and that work-based learning, the anticipation of future skills requirements and education-business partnerships should be promoted.

The importance of the development of skills and competences extends well beyond the labour market. Equally, it is about creating responsible citizens capable of playing an active part in society and democratic life. The two aims are complementary, since the skills and competences required in society are in many ways equally relevant to the workplace.

3. Structural reforms to modernise our economies should be carried forward with a view to fostering the development of people's skills, competences and knowledge, so as to stimulate innovation and productivity as well as to promote inclusiveness. Correspondingly, education systems should seek to increase their emancipatory effect, ensuring a level playing field for all regardless of socio-economic status, migrant background or gender. This means opening up education systems to respond to the increasing diversity of learners and forging links with all relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>13</sup> such as learning to learn, problem solving, entrepreneurial and digital skills, creativity and critical thinking

## AND EXPRESS THEIR COMMITMENT TO

1. Cooperate with a view to promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education by means of reforms, relevant policies and targeted investments. Policies that have proven successful should be identified and disseminated, and relevant support should be provided for their implementation in other countries that wish to draw inspiration from them to develop similar policies or reforms.
2. Monitor progress towards our common goals in education and training, and to pursue the exchange of knowledge and experience, notably in the framework of the recently revised "ET2020" priority areas and structures<sup>14</sup>. In doing so, consistency should be ensured with the Europe 2020 headline targets and governance arrangements in the framework of the European Semester, whilst fully respecting subsidiarity, education institutions' autonomy and pedagogical freedom.
3. Invest adequately in education at all levels, while incentivising it to increase educational attainment levels, to identify and address skills gaps and mismatches and to enhance the emancipatory effect of education and training. For this purpose, make full use of the opportunities provided by European instruments such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Youth Guarantee, the European Fund for Strategic Investment and the Erasmus+ programme.

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<sup>14</sup> including through the agreed concrete issues and newly established working groups [See 2015 Joint Report adopted on 23 November 2015 - OJ C 417, 15.12.2015]

4. Provide teachers through initial training and continuous professional development with appropriate, up-to-date pedagogical tools and methods designed to enhance skills and competences development and knowledge acquisition. Opening up education institutions to the outside world should be part and parcel of this approach at all levels of education and training. To achieve this, national, regional and local partnerships should be encouraged, involving relevant stakeholders such as social partners and representatives from the youth sector, and aimed at addressing specific challenges.
5. Actively reach out to young people with low educational and employment prospects based on their socio-economic status, migrant background or gender, with a view to ensuring that no-one is left behind. Young people's digital and media literacy as well as their ability to think critically, should be enhanced, along with their social skills and citizenship competences. Teachers and school leaders should be empowered to detect and signal early signs of disengagement with a view to improving educational attainment and preventing early school leaving, social exclusion and violent radicalisation.

#### INVITE THE COMMISSION TO

1. Continue to promote - within the context of the Erasmus+ work programme for 2017 - any initiatives that respond to the challenges described in this Resolution, making full use of the opportunities provided under the existing programme. In addition, the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework provides an opportunity to consider how these challenges can be supported through different existing EU instruments - including the Erasmus+ programme - in the most effective way.
2. Reaffirm the importance of education and training in any post-2020 European initiatives on growth, jobs and sustainability, also taking account of broader initiatives such as the United Nations' 2030 Development Goals. This is especially important in the case of education, a domain characterised by its long-term perspective.



3. Present, by the time of the May 2016 EYCS Council, its forthcoming proposal for a new skills agenda for Europe supporting Member States, which could consider, inter alia, ways of boosting skills development and knowledge acquisition in a lifelong learning perspective, with particular reference to the following areas:
- a. Increasing educational attainment levels, acknowledging that completing upper secondary level or equivalent tends to be considered as the minimum requirement for ensuring a successful transition from education to the labour market and for gaining access to further learning;
  - b. Improving the provision of key competences which are crucial for lifelong learning, employability and active participation in society and democratic life;
  - c. Enhancing Europe's capacity to anticipate future skills requirements and tackling skills gaps as well as skills mismatches, underlining the shared responsibility of the worlds of education and work, and building on initiatives from both sectors;
  - d. Promoting better transparency and use of available skills and qualifications of mobile EU workers and learners;
  - e. Renewing the process of modernising higher education in Europe, including by:
    - enhancing quality and relevance in curriculum development and delivery;
    - encouraging the role of higher education institutions as regional innovators;
    - improving links between the education and research functions of higher education institutions;
    - formulating a response to the impact of open and online higher education;
    - addressing the civic role of higher education institutions in engaging with the community;
    - ensuring that everyone with the potential to succeed in higher education should have the opportunity to do so, whatever their circumstances.

4. Support Member States in enhancing the role which education and training play in promoting active citizenship and fundamental values, as a follow-up to the Paris Declaration<sup>15</sup>. In this context, ensure synergy and cooperation with the Council of Europe on democratic citizenship.
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<sup>15</sup> Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.