

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Job creation through apprenticeships and lifelong vocational training: the role of business in education in the EU' (own-initiative opinion)**

(2013/C 161/05)

Rapporteur: **Ms DRBALOVÁ**

On 12 July 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Article 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

*Job creation through apprenticeships and lifelong vocational training: the role of business in education in the EU.*

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 26 February 2013.

At its 488th plenary session, held on 20 and 21 March 2013 (meeting of 20 March), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 83 votes to 1 with 6 abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The Committee welcomes the active approach of employers and businesses to a Europe-wide move supporting the development of skills and their adaptation to the needs of the labour market in order to rekindle growth, create jobs and, in particular, improve the situation of young people on the labour market.

1.2 Education and training are costly activities involving multiple beneficiaries. There are many models that can implement cost-sharing systems across Europe. Employers should be involved in them according to national practices and conditions.

1.3 The Committee calls on employers and businesses to support the principle of partnership and cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the reform of education systems, vocational training systems and in the development of lifelong learning strategies. In this context, the Committee recognises the role of social dialogue and the results to date of cooperation among social partners at all levels.

1.4 In the interest of maintaining and strengthening the position of industry in Europe, the Committee urges employers and businesses to help improve the image of industry, technical subjects and STEM skills<sup>(1)</sup> and to analyse, anticipate and communicate the needs of individual sectors, thereby helping match skills more closely to labour market needs.

1.5 Employers and business organisations should at the same time respect the specific needs of micro-enterprises and small

businesses – given their huge potential to create jobs – in order to help them to develop an overview of how these more flexible, dynamic businesses operate.

1.6 The Committee recommends that businesses, together with other labour market players, work closely with schools and educational institutes and get actively involved in preparing curricula and syllabuses for vocational training in line with their expected results. Such cooperation should also be reflected in the training given to teachers active in the area of vocational education and training.

1.7 The Committee believes that more effective cooperation between businesses and public and private employment services will help make in-house training more consistent with the principles of an active employment policy and therefore increase participation in lifelong learning.

1.8 Under the proposed European Alliance for Apprenticeships, employers and businesses should commit themselves to supporting quality apprenticeships and improving the image and enhancing the attractiveness of apprenticeships in Europe. They should take responsibility for creating a sufficient number of places for trainees and apprentices on the basis of dual systems that link school learning with in-house work experience, along with other means of acquiring practical skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, appropriate conditions need to be established for businesses at national level, along with incentive-based instruments.

1.9 The Committee is aware of the contribution made by employers under the social partnership to develop and

<sup>(1)</sup> STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

implement European instruments such as the EQF <sup>(2)</sup>, ESCO <sup>(3)</sup>, ECVET <sup>(4)</sup> and Europass, as well as other instruments at national level. It once again highlights the need to tailor these instruments to the situation of small and micro-enterprises and craft companies.

1.10 The Committee also calls on employers and businesses to tap into the potential of women and to encourage them to study STEM subjects in particular in order to increase their employment prospects and facilitate their transition onto the labour market.

1.11 The Committee urges employers and businesses to make more efficient use of the EU's funds – ERDF, EAFRD and above all the new generation ESF <sup>(5)</sup> and Erasmus for All. It also calls for greater resources to be allocated to the COSME and HORIZONT programmes.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 This opinion follows on directly from the Committee's opinions on the Europe 2020 strategy and the relevant flagship initiatives <sup>(6)</sup> and its opinions on skills development and the role of vocational education and training <sup>(7)</sup>.

2.2 This opinion welcomes the Commission's call <sup>(8)</sup> to build strong partnerships of trust among all stakeholders, which respects the role of civil society and the autonomy of the social partners <sup>(9)</sup> and therefore dovetails with the Committee's opinions on this topic <sup>(10)</sup>.

2.3 The aim of this EESC opinion is to highlight the active contribution of employers and businesses in implementing the measures adopted at EU level in the area of employment, education and youth opportunities. This will therefore involve comparing the policies and measures adopted with the realities and demands of business practice. Businesses in Europe are central to efforts to overcome the employment crisis <sup>(11)</sup>.

2.4 Europe must mobilise all its drivers of growth, which include a skilled labour force of the right size and structure to meet current labour market needs. This is why the focus must also be on practical work skills (results), vocational training, apprenticeships and technical subjects.

2.5 The EESC has stepped up its activity in recent years to support closer and better ties between education systems and the needs of the world of work <sup>(12)</sup> in order to increase workers' employability, provide employers with access to more skilled workers and facilitate the transition from school to working life. The Committee has formulated a series of recommendations for employers and businesses:

- Participate, through tripartite negotiations with the government and social dialogue, in the reform of the labour market and modernisation of education systems
- Take part in drawing up forecasts of future labour market needs
- Contribute to the formulation of effective strategies for lifelong learning
- Together with other labour market players, launch and boost cooperation among businesses, schools and educational institutes
- Promote the validation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning
- Collaborate with institutions active on the labour market, particularly private and public employment services, and get actively involved in the provision of vocational orientation schemes for young people and jobseekers
- Improve the image of industrial sectors in particular and offer more apprenticeships and opportunities for practical work experience and traineeships
- Organise work placements for teachers and trainers
- Work together with families and individuals to help adapt people's ambitions to businesses' needs

<sup>(2)</sup> European Qualifications Framework.

<sup>(3)</sup> European Skills, Classifications and Occupations taxonomy.

<sup>(4)</sup> European Credit System for Vocational Training and Education facilitating the validation, recognition and accumulation of work-related skills and knowledge.

<sup>(5)</sup> European Regional Development Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development, European Social Fund.

<sup>(6)</sup> COM(2010) 682 final, 23.11.2010, COM(2010) 477 final, 15.9.2010, COM(2010) 614 final, 28.10.2010, etc.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 1–10, OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 142–149, OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 11–14, OJ C 132/55, 3.5.2011.

<sup>(8)</sup> COM(2012) 727 final.

<sup>(9)</sup> Framework agreement on inclusive labour markets (2010) and Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications (2002).

<sup>(10)</sup> OJ C 143, 22.5.2012, p. 94–101, OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 69–75, OJ C 11, 15.1.2013, p. 65–70.

<sup>(11)</sup> OJ C 11, 15.1.2013, p. 65–70.

<sup>(12)</sup> The EESC has launched a series of actions focusing on good examples of cooperation between schools and businesses, links between vocational education and training and practice, as well as on support for young entrepreneurs: Nunc Thermo Fisher Scientific, Roskilde, Denmark, 6.2.2012: "From school to work"; Guarda Polytechnic, Portugal, 5.6.2012: "Forum for the new millennium"; ESC Versailles, France, 29.8.2012: conference entitled "European Youth: Hope or despair for the new generation?", and forums to support young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs.

- Create the structures and conditions enabling workers to pass on their know-how and experience to apprentices and trainees or to act as temporary teachers in vocational education and training
- Help increase the mobility of workers, students and teachers between different education systems and vocational training schemes as well as between different countries (through instruments such as EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass etc.)
- Take part in initiatives promoting the introduction of the *National Qualification Framework (NQF)* and the *National Occupational Systems (NOS)*
- Use EU funding to support education and the mobility of pupils in Europe
- Promote voluntary work in education and apprentice training
- Make effective use of the Structural Funds, in particular the ESF.

### 3. Ongoing initiatives at EU level

3.1 The *Agenda for new skills and jobs* highlights the need to invest in education and vocational training systems, to anticipate which skills are needed and to improve lifelong learning. It also proposes the formulation of comprehensive strategies in this area.

3.2 The *Youth on the move*<sup>(13)</sup> initiative stresses the importance of quality education, successful integration into the labour market and greater mobility. It proposes raising the attractiveness, diversity and quality of vocational education and training, improving access to high quality traineeships and encouraging companies to act as good host organisations.

3.3 The communication entitled *Towards a job-rich recovery*<sup>(14)</sup> focuses on the creation of jobs, particularly in sectors with a strong potential for growth, on restoring dynamism to labour markets, the development of lifelong learning, guaranteeing job security and on the creation of opportunities for young people.

3.4 In a period of rising unemployment and weak economic growth, it is vital to make use of new learning opportunities, including those outside the formal system of education. In this context, the Council's recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>(15)</sup> is a contribution at EU level to speeding up reforms.

<sup>(13)</sup> COM(2010) 477, 15.9.2011.

<sup>(14)</sup> COM(2012) 173, 18.4.2012.

<sup>(15)</sup> COM(2012) 485, 5.9.2012, Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

3.5 The EC communication on *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*<sup>(16)</sup> sets out a series of specific proposals and innovative approaches, including in the area of vocational education and training, apprenticeships and support for education, entrepreneurship and mobility. European VET must aim at world excellence, both as regards its standards and as regards its actual performance<sup>(17)</sup>.

3.6 The Commission communication on *Moving Youth into Employment*<sup>(18)</sup> is based on existing proposals such as the European Quality Framework for Traineeships<sup>(19)</sup> and the Youth Guarantees, and recommends the creation of a European Alliance for Apprenticeships<sup>(20)</sup>.

3.7 The *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan – Reigniting the Entrepreneurial Spirit in Europe* covers entrepreneurial education and training and the creation of a pan-European entrepreneurial learning initiative<sup>(21)</sup> which aims to develop business knowledge and essential skills and attitudes.

### 4. The role of employers and businesses

4.1 Action to strengthen the position of industry and related services in Europe will require changes in the structure of qualifications and related skills in all sectors based on clearly defined results.

4.2 Restructuring in a range of sectors, which is a natural feature of a dynamic economy, involves both job losses and job creation. However, the number of new jobs created is markedly lower than the number of jobs lost<sup>(22)</sup>. This means that employers must be able to anticipate and manage change, in

<sup>(16)</sup> COM(2012) 669 *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*.

<sup>(17)</sup> SWD(2012) 375 *Vocational education and training for better skills, growth and jobs*.

<sup>(18)</sup> COM(2012) 727 *Moving Youth into Employment* see SWD(2012) 406 *Quality Framework for Traineeships*.

<sup>(19)</sup> On 5 December 2012 saw the start of the second stage of the consultations with the European social partners in accordance with Article 153(5) of the TFEU.

<sup>(20)</sup> The education ministers met in Berlin on 10 and 11 December 2012 and adopted a memorandum supporting the alliance and outlining ten specific proposals for raising the attractiveness and quality of vocational education and training and for the development of dual systems.

<sup>(21)</sup> COM(2012) 795 *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan – Reigniting the Entrepreneurial Spirit in Europe*, 9.1.2013.

<sup>(22)</sup> European Restructuring Monitor (ERM) Eurofound: from July to September 2012, it recorded 274 cases of restructuring, which represents a loss of 105 076 jobs and the creation of 30 520 new jobs.

cooperation with governments and as part of the social dialogue process, in order to cushion the social impact and increase the positive effects of restructuring. This will entail significant involvement in investments in education and re-skilling.

4.3 It is therefore vital to anticipate future labour market needs. Although specialist international studies reveal how difficult it is to accurately predict the long-term future needs of the labour market in view of the dynamic nature of global development, employer and business organisations should carry out short- and medium-term analyses of individual sectors, identify regional disparities and respond to the changing need of businesses for skilled manpower. These analyses and forecasts cover all types of enterprises, including cooperatives and craft companies.

4.3.1 The optimal approach would be to fix strategic objectives and elaborate action plans. Such plans generally involve strengthening marketing in the given sector, proposing an educational concept and identifying requirements, sharing responsibility and getting the state and other stakeholders economically involved in education and graduate training, fostering cooperation between businesses and schools and other stakeholders in order to link theory with practice, setting up student trainee schemes at companies and developing a culture of company mobility.

4.3.1.1 This educational approach could include assessing the quality of graduates of the various disciplines relating to a given sector, specifying which occupations may be supported through re-skilling, cooperation among sectors and with other branches of industry and establishing a list of cooperating primary and secondary schools. This process could also involve participation on the part of careers guidance experts as well as the organisation of questionnaire-based surveys on final year students' motivation and ideas for their professional careers.

4.3.1.2 It is important to provide student training within companies. This would involve, *inter alia*, setting up dedicated training programmes, preparing companies to get students involved in their business activity and establishing rules for assessing the effectiveness of student training. Businesses should support the mobility of students and apprentices and organise exchange programmes.

4.3.1.3 Education and training are costly activities involving multiple beneficiaries<sup>(23)</sup>. Public authorities take on considerable co-financing responsibility for supporting adults in acquiring basic skills, as well as the necessary skills and competences for entering/re-entering the labour market. Employers are expected to take over the prime responsibility for financing the development of job-specific skills. Individuals should also bear the responsibility for obtaining and developing employability and personal skills.

4.3.1.4 In many Member States, the state is involved – including financially – in the implementation of education and re-skilling programmes. This public accountability is vital and could be improved by providing funding opportunities through EU funds or ensuring that it is possible to utilise and link projects together. Financing from public sources, however, should never be a substitute for the accountability of each stakeholder, including employers.

4.4 As part of the social dialogue, employers should be more effectively involved in the design and implementation of national education policies to improve the accessibility of pre-school education, and modernise and rehabilitate secondary and tertiary vocational education and training.

4.4.1 A good quality and accessible system of pre-school care for children forms an integral part of an individual's initial education. Employers may work together with pre-school facilities and encourage the development of talent e.g. by providing technical toys in a wide variety of subjects, in cooperation with training centres and parents.

4.4.2 Starting at primary school level, education should offer basic practical skills for a wide range of professions, including technical occupations, and examine the prospects of various branches of industry and services and current requirements in terms of skills and qualifications. Without any progress on STEM and practical skills, it will be difficult to improve VET and apprenticeships. This could be one of the ways to facilitate the integration of young people into today's labour market.

4.4.3 The most recent report published by Cedefop<sup>(24)</sup> reveals that a number of European countries have already adopted measures to make VET more appealing. Nevertheless, this report shows that there has been insufficient effort in a number of key areas – improving pathways for the transition from VET to higher education, revising and updating syllabuses, improving the infrastructure of vocational education and training centres, promoting access for specific groups, introducing structural changes and improving cooperation among the different levels, improving the apprenticeship system and, in particular, ensuring greater involvement on the part of employers and the social partners.

<sup>(23)</sup> <http://adult-learning-investment.eu/docs/BackgroundReport.pdf>.

<sup>(24)</sup> Workshop 9-10.10.2012, Brussels: Attractive vocational education and training: what really matters? Study by SKOPE, University of Oxford, [www.cedefop.org](http://www.cedefop.org).

4.4.4 The potential of European higher education institutions to fulfil their role in society and contribute to Europe's prosperity remains underexploited<sup>(25)</sup>. The knowledge economy needs people with the right mix of skills: transversal competences, e-skills for the digital era, creativity and flexibility and a solid understanding of their chosen field. For this reason, higher education is another area in which appropriately chosen schools and businesses must work together. Employers cannot simply wait for schools to start producing made-to-measure graduates for them. They should get involved in the curriculum in line with their skills and improve facilities and equipment at schools. At the same time, there is also a need to respect the independence of schools, which also fulfil a number of other important roles for society at large.

4.5 The shortage of STEM skills will become one of the greatest barriers to economic growth. These sectors have an ageing workforce; a change of generation is a reality for a number of STEM professions, with highly experienced employees leaving companies to go into retirement. It will be several years before the schools systems have adapted to supply the labour market with the skilled specialists that are so urgently needed.

4.5.1 That is why employers must fight the myth that STEM skills have no future. They must show that, on the contrary, the development of STEM subjects at schools of all levels will mean greater opportunities in the future and more flexibility in terms of career development. They need to inform people more effectively about the future skills needed by companies and must contribute to the process of lifelong learning among teachers<sup>(26)</sup>.

4.5.2 The blame should not be laid on education systems alone. Employers must anticipate future developments in good time, respond to global and technological challenges, modernise their operation sites and create job opportunities for graduates that enable them to acquire world class skills.

4.5.3 Employers should also fight the myth that women are not suited for work in certain sectors and fully tap into the potential of women e.g. by supporting career talent development, mentoring schemes, sponsoring programmes, vocational training and examples of best practices. There are still significant differences between men and women in terms of the type of education they receive. Women continue to be under represented in STEM professions.

4.5.4 As the technical schools disappear so too do the teachers of vocational training. It is therefore vital to ensure that there is a sufficient number of good quality teachers and

trainers. They should be aware of the changing needs on the labour market and be able to pass on their technical know-how to their students. Lifelong learning and placements within companies should be encouraged for teachers and trainers. This is why employers should allow appropriate employees who have the necessary skills and desire to work as teachers in-house to do so and ensure they have appropriate training in teaching and psychology.

4.6 Above all, in the context of social partnership, employers must get involved in designing national lifelong learning strategies and creating the right conditions for recognising the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. Competences and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning should be supported and validated in order to increase the capacities of young people and their role on the labour market<sup>(27)</sup> <sup>(28)</sup>. Lifelong learning strategies, in parallel with rural development strategies, should also address the issue of access to further education and re-skilling for those in rural areas who are interested.

4.6.1 Employers have a right to expect the education system to provide them with graduates who are keen to continue learning and who have a range of broadly applicable skills which ensure that their on-the-job training is neither long nor expensive and may be continually developed by further training.

4.6.2 Employers must shoulder their share of the responsibility for vocational or professional training which is specific to their company or which is related to a temporary demand for skills in certain narrowly defined occupations.

4.6.3 In addition, micro-enterprises, small companies and craft companies need a more dynamic and flexible education system which is able to respond to the actual needs of both new and older workers, who wish or need to follow additional education or training (lifelong learning).

4.6.4 The low rate of participation in lifelong learning may also be explained by the absence of any link between in-house training and the principles of an active employment policy or between current re-training methods and employers' actual needs. Such shortcomings in the area of further training are

<sup>(25)</sup> COM(2011) 567, 20.9.2012, Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems.

<sup>(26)</sup> BUSINESSEUROPE publication entitled Plugging the skills gap: the clock is ticking (2011).

<sup>(27)</sup> CEDEFOP Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

<sup>(28)</sup> OJ C 181/154, 21.6.2012 Erasmus for All: "[T]he EESC calls for an operational and clear definition of lifelong learning and more targeted policies for improving accessibility for each learner group."

making it increasingly difficult to adapt to the accelerating pace of technological change, which is transforming technical equipment at companies and the related comparative economic advantages.

4.6.5 Continuous cooperation between employers and employment services is absolutely vital. The capability, infrastructure and methodology of employment services all play a pivotal role in promoting demand for further training and impact on the further education available.

4.7 There are several ways in which employers can bring a greater influence to bear on making the education system more effective in strengthening growth and employment and adapting it to the needs of the labour market which vary according to the opportunities and practices existing in different countries.

4.7.1 As part of the social partnerships, employers either work with state or private schools in the local area or region through joint forums involving schools and businesses or regional or sector-specific councils or agreements to promote employment and skills, or – alternatively – they join together to set up and run schools and apprenticeships or found their own schools or apprenticeship centres.

4.7.2 This applies to all types of enterprises, including micro-enterprises, small companies, associations and craft companies. These initiatives must therefore be developed at the optimal level for boosting their impact and must be organised in cooperation with state and local government bodies as it is necessary to take account of the public interest, take part in active employment policies and maintain quality and sustainable jobs.

4.8 Traineeships (work placements) are an important part of the training process.

4.8.1 Employers view traineeships as a process which aims to provide young people with hands-on employment experience and working practices. It is in the interest of employers to facilitate young people's transition from the education system to the labour market, to not exploit the position of trainees and to give them work that meets the requirements of practical training by ensuring appropriate working conditions.

4.8.2 The EESC therefore welcomes the preparatory work on the *Action plan for youth employment* underway within the framework of a joint programme of European social partners<sup>(29)</sup>, which, as part of its jointly defined objectives, will also address traineeships, work experience and apprenticeships.

<sup>(29)</sup> Joint Multiannual Programme of the European Social Partners for 2012-2014, which provides for the preparation of a Framework for Action on Youth Employment.

4.9 Know-how and experience gained through non-formal and informal learning through voluntary work can increase employees' creativity and innovative capacity and help increase their employment prospects and facilitate their transition onto the labour market. Businesses support the voluntary activities of their employees as part of their CSR strategies. However, the absence of a legal framework, the lack of instruments for assessing and recognising skills already acquired and, above all, the existence of financial and taxation barriers all prevent employers from providing systematic support for voluntary work<sup>(30)</sup>.

## 5. The contribution of employers to the implementation of European instruments at national level

5.1 In the ambit of the social partnership, employers take part in the design and roll-out of common European principles (in such areas as guidance or the identification and recognition of non-formal and informal learning) and related instruments<sup>(31)</sup> (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass). The aim of these common principles and instruments is to help increase the mobility of workers, students and trainers between different systems of education or vocational training as well as between different countries.

5.2 The EU Member States have adopted the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**<sup>(32)</sup>, which defines eight levels of qualifications on the basis of general knowledge, skills and competences. Each Member State is required to classify every national qualification into one of these eight levels.

— Descriptions of qualifications for occupations that exist in a given sector may be drawn up by employer representatives through sector based councils, together with other stakeholders, for example. Such national qualifications frameworks (classifications) or standards represent a foundation for education and a criterion to be used for the validation of qualifications. They can also serve as a basis for the creation of national syllabuses at schools or educational programmes for other educational institutes. This will enable the creation of National Occupational Systems, which monitor and register the demand for individual occupations on the labour market and in this way constitute an important source of information in the field of human resources and vocational education at all levels.

5.3 One of the measures outlined in the Agenda for new skills and jobs was the completion of the Classification of European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) by the end of the year 2012, which would serve as a

<sup>(30)</sup> COM(2011) 568, 20.9.2011, Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Crossborder Voluntary Activities in the EU.

<sup>(31)</sup> EQF (European Qualifications Framework), ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training), EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training), EUROPASS (a set of documents supporting professional and geographical mobility).

<sup>(32)</sup> The recent Bologna Process Implementation Report (2012) shows that only a minority of the EU member states has already fully implemented national qualifications in compatibility with the EQF.

joint platform in the area of employment and vocational education and training. The ESCO project should replace or complement the existing national and international occupational classification systems and become an instrument facilitating the development of a dynamic labour market, characterised by smooth transition from, firstly, one job to another or from education to a first job.

5.3.1 The ESCO is not, however, relevant for micro-enterprises and small businesses as the ESCO standards assume that all persons holding a specific job and having the same qualification all perform the same list of tasks irrespective of the company they work for. In today's rapidly changing workplace factors such as the wide range of technologies, customer requirements, working practices and the availability of skilled employees all mean that the share of tasks given to employees requires that they be flexible in what they do and that they be willing to adapt their working practices to meet the ever changing technological and ICT world in which businesses actually operate.

5.3.2 It is essential that employers and business organisations take account of the specific needs of micro-enterprises and small businesses to help them to develop proper mappings that detail how these more flexible, dynamic businesses operate. This mapping must ensure that "outcomes" are expressed as tasks and not generic functions. The developments of training and qualifications can then be constructed from the task mappings, thereby producing a clear audit trail from workplace to final qualifications.

5.4 Employers and businesses and other stakeholders should use all projects financed from national budgets and the EU's structural funds, particularly the ESF and Erasmus for All. As part of their active employment policies, the Member States are currently launching a series of projects to keep people in employment, update and increase workers' skills and to promote the transition of young people onto the labour market<sup>(33)</sup>. The adoption of a new Multiannual Financial Framework will also enable a series of new programmes supporting education, mobility and innovation such as Erasmus for All, COSME and Horizon 2020.

## 6. Prospects and challenges for dual systems in Europe

6.1 Europe is, for good reason, today pinning all its hopes on the promotion and development of dual systems. It is

<sup>(33)</sup> In the Czech Republic, this included projects such as "Education is an opportunity", "Learning for growth", and "Traineeships at companies".

absolutely clear that those Member States which operate such systems over the long-term obtain good results and have a level of youth employment which is significantly below the EU average<sup>(34)</sup>.

6.2 In its opinion on the Employment package, the EESC specifically states that one of the ways of bridging the gap between the needs of the labour market, education and the expectations of young people is to encourage and support the development of high-quality apprenticeship schemes.

6.3 A European Commission study on the apprenticeship system in the EU<sup>(35)</sup> highlights certain challenges which such apprenticeship systems must contend with. It notes, for example, that rapid transition from education to the world of work usually leads to only a temporary advantage. Employment prospects over the long-term, however, are less evident. Another issue concerns the extent to which skills and qualifications acquired at one company may be "transferred" to another business (in the same or different sector).

6.4 This study also highlights the fact that as a result of the global economic crisis, there was an increase in 2008 in the number of students in vocational education and training which was accompanied by a fall in the number of apprenticeships and other traineeships in numerous Member States due to the unstable business climate. This situation provides the trigger which can encourage all stakeholders to share their responsibilities for the creation of new apprenticeships or alternative schemes supported by the state.

6.5 The BUSINESSEUROPE<sup>(36)</sup> survey, which looked at actual practice in this area at national level, outlined the various approaches used when creating schemes that link work placements to school education. This survey spawned a series of recommendations, including those addressed to employers themselves, such as:

- to get involved in organising apprenticeships under the dual system and to help draw up programmes and adapt them over time, which is an important factor for ensuring that they are in line with the needs of the labour market, while at the same time taking into account the need to cut red tape for businesses.
- to keep businesses informed and to encourage them to take part in dual systems, to provide them with advice and to promote cooperation among businesses.

<sup>(34)</sup> Example of best practice: Brussels, 3.12.2012: Joint seminar by the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber "Dual system: what works" as the employers' contribution to the European and national discussions on the employment prospects for young people in Europe.

<sup>(35)</sup> EC study entitled Apprenticeship supply in the Member States of the European Union, January 2012, IKEI Research & Consultancy, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en>.

<sup>(36)</sup> BUSINESSEUROPE publication: Creating opportunities for youth: How to improve the quality and image of apprenticeships, March 2012.

6.6 Employers have therefore welcomed the Commission's call for Alliances to support quality apprenticeships and improve the image of and raise the attractiveness of apprenticeships in Europe. They are prepared to shoulder their share of the responsibility for creating apprenticeships on the basis of dual systems which link school learning with in-house work experience <sup>(37)</sup>.

6.7 Apprenticeship schemes not only provide employers with a handy way of testing out potential candidates prior to employing new workers, they also provide broad economic advantages over the long-term and are an expression of social responsibility.

Brussels, 20 March 2013.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Staffan NILSSON

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<sup>(37)</sup> On a global scale, this commitment can take the form of a joint project, "Global Alliance for Vocational Education".