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### **COMMISSION GREEN PAPER ON “PROMOTING THE LEARNING MOBILITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE”**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. On 8 July 2009, the European Commission published a Green Paper on "Promoting the learning mobility of young people".
2. The Commission considers learning mobility to be part and parcel of its policy to build Europe's skills and ability to innovate and compete at international level. It should also help to ensure a better match between demand and supply on Europe's labour market.
3. The Green Paper raises a number of questions linked to the learning mobility of young Europeans in all different learning contexts, such as at school or university level, as well as in internships, apprenticeships, vocational training, etc. The Commission intends to explore how existing or new instruments or mechanisms can be better mobilised to promote mobility and how partnerships between authorities and stakeholder can be mobilised.
4. The scope of the Green Paper is wide, touching on a great variety of issues. In the following, BUSINESSEUROPE will mainly focus on all issues of the Green Paper that are of most relevance for employers.

#### **II. General comments**

5. The working-age population in the EU will grow older and smaller. The EU will move from having four people of working age for every person aged over 65 to a ratio of 2 to 1. In view of a shrinking workforce over the coming decades, investing in the human capital of young people will become even more important than today for stimulating economic growth.
6. BUSINESSEUROPE considers that learning mobility plays an important part for both the functioning of the single market and for the European integration.



Geographical learning mobility is crucial for deepening the sense of European identity, in particular within its youth. It helps to guard against protectionism and xenophobia by fostering respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. Moreover, learning mobility to other countries encourages linguistic pluralism. As another benefit, it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions.

7. Professional learning mobility contributes to the strengthening of Europe's competitiveness by building its knowledge-intensive society. It is important because it helps young people to gain competences that are needed in today's world. It equips young people with the right mentality including an entrepreneurial mindset and sense for self-initiative, making them outward-looking and confident.
8. Educational learning mobility need to be promoted between the different educational levels. Links need to be built between general education, vocational training and higher education. Moreover pathways should be developed connecting initial and continuing training, valuing all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal.
9. Greater professional mobility between the worlds of education and business is needed. Internships, research mobility programmes and collaborative projects, which allow students to work with or within a company, need to become an integral part of learning programmes in all disciplines and should carry European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits.
10. To encourage greater mobility, policies need to be based on a range of practical measures which relate to the funding of mobility, recognition, available infrastructure, visa and work permit regulations. Flexible study paths and active information policies, full recognition of study achievements, study support and the full portability of grants and loans are necessary requirements.
11. The Commission and Member States should increase their efforts to promote mobility, to eliminate barriers to mobility and to exchange best practices.

### **III. Specific comments**

#### **1. Obstacles to mobility? (1.4)**

12. In order to increase mobility in higher education, it is important to leave room for mobility in the structure of degree programmes. Joint degrees and programmes between higher education institutions as well as the integration of mobility in curricula need to become more common practice at universities.



13. Moreover, the lack of recognition and validation of competences acquired abroad belongs to the main obstacles to learning mobility (see answer to question 2.2).
14. Another major obstacle to take the decision to learn abroad, in particular for young people, is the lack of language knowledge. For the integration in a foreign university, school or at a work place, communication is indispensable. Language teaching should therefore become a priority in the curricular of education and training institutions at all levels. Language as a barrier to mobility should increasingly be addressed at lower educational levels.
15. In some cases, obstacles are created by the unclear legal status of persons enrolled in vocational education and training (VET). Especially in countries with a dual VET system (where vocational training is mainly delivered at the work place), there is no consistent legal status for young people who want to do a placement in different VET system abroad.
16. The status of a young person is not only important for the right to stay and work, it also has significant consequences for social security, health and safety and liability insurance, especially at the workplace. There is a need to clarify the status of a young person abroad by social security rules. Moreover, such an unclear status during their mobility period generates an administrative barrier for companies and young people by creating the necessity to define the status through specific contracts.
17. A lack of information can also be a barrier for the decision to become mobile. Generally, the opportunities for organised learning mobility other than in the area of higher education (such as Erasmus) are too little known by many young people. A better use of existing networks (e.g. national guidance services) and a provision of more and better information can help to improve the visibility of mobility programmes. In particular EURES and its new complementary instrument "Map & Match" need to play an important role to foster learning mobility.
18. There is often a lack of awareness of the advantages of having a mobility experience. It is important to make young people fully aware of the positive relation between learning mobility and employment or career development. Teachers, trainers, managers and other persons who work with young people should be encouraged to promote mobility.

## **2. What should be done to promote more mobility from and to the EU? (1.6)**

19. The EU needs to increase its efforts to lure the best and the brightest students and young researchers from outside the EU. In order to attract them, the EU needs to have the best universities in place. Promoting the excellence of higher education institutions by giving them more autonomy will be crucial in this respect. Moreover,



marketing strategies to attract talents including worldwide campaigning for EU universities and research centres should also be promoted.

20. These actions are also part of the policy response needed to resolve the considerable “brain drain” in Europe. Today, for example, there are about 400,000 Europeans with scientific and technical education living in America and nearly 10% of the 1.5 million people with a PhD in the USA are EU students who moved across the Atlantic.
21. To benefit from global learning mobility, it is also important to set up the right strategies to win talents from outside of the EU for the local labour market once they have finished their studies in Europe.
22. Easy access and handling on visa questions are important for Europe to attract more mobile learners. BUSINESSEUROPE therefore expects the future proposal for a directive on the entry and residence of remunerated trainees not to create unnecessary burdens or legal uncertainty for companies taking up such remunerated trainees.

### **3. Recognition and validation of periods of learning mobility (2.2)**

23. It is essential to guarantee the recognition of learning outcomes acquired abroad as far as possible. There is a great concern of young people to have a blank spot on their CVs due to a lack of recognition of their placement abroad and which could lead to repercussions for their further career.
24. The recognition of skills and competences and the validation of experience gained abroad are therefore one of the most important elements for the promotion of learning mobility. Several European instruments have been developed in the last years which have the potential to improve the transparency and facilitate the recognition of qualifications and credits.
25. BUSINESSEUROPE believes that the European CV is an important contribution to foster learning mobility. It provides a comprehensive standardised overview of education attainments and work experience of an individual, thus facilitating candidate applications across EU borders. The European CV is a useful mechanism for assessing European-wide applicants’ competences notably as it also covers informal and non-formal learning and can be accompanied by the Certificate Supplement (for vocational training) and Diploma Supplement (for higher education).
26. In the higher education area, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been developed as a tool for the recognition of learning outcomes. The ECTS makes study programmes readable and comparable and thus facilitates mobility



and academic recognition. The allocation of credit points is based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of the programme, which are expressed in terms of learning outcomes. However, the use of ECTS is not yet the rule. In some member states, it often depends on the decision of the university teacher if learning outcomes are recognised.

27. In the context of vocational training, the situation is even more complicated in countries with a dual VET system, where vocational training is mainly delivered at the work place. The training is then defined by a training contract and enterprises are responsible for training. Because the training contract normally is not suspended during the mobility period, all duties and rights that can be derived from the training contract (duty to provide training and remuneration) remain unchanged during that time. This leads to a situation in which only the time spent abroad can then often be recognised, not the content of training (learning outcomes acquired abroad). Legal possibilities need to be created to recognise learning outcomes which has been validated abroad.
28. The new European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) can significantly contribute to foster mobility in VET. However, the merits of this system have to be assessed in the context of the existing EU-level tools to see if it can bring real added value and would be compatible with the other mechanisms. As ECVET will be applied by a variety of different stakeholders, such as training institutions or SMEs, it must be ensured that the application of ECVET is kept simple and does not contain too many bureaucratic obstacles. This entails the formulation of user-friendly and easily comprehensible guidelines.
29. ECVET could usefully complement the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) if it permits the recording of competences acquired by experience or during vocational training (before obtaining a qualification). Ensuring the coherence between EQF and ECVET is therefore vital for the future development of European tools.
30. Apart from enhancing geographical mobility, ECVET and ECTS should also promote educational mobility. Creating permeability between VET and higher education will be crucial in this respect. ECVET and ECTS need to be compatible in order to allow the use of credits of one system in the other. In the long term, the focus must be on a common output-oriented system which will enable a VET graduate to move to higher education and vice-versa.
31. The possibilities to recognise non-formal learning in member states are still very limited and must be improved.



#### **4. Mobilisation of actors and resources in the interest of youth mobility (3.1)**

32. Adequate and sufficient incentives are needed to increase learning mobility rates. Without sufficient financial support, it is difficult for the individual to become mobile. Businesses for their part also need adequate support. Without any additional funding, it is even difficult for larger enterprises to afford the costs of a mobility period – for SMEs it is nearly impossible. SMEs often do not have the capacity to organise mobility projects. Under the Leonardo da Vinci programme, free movers are not eligible and many SME's do not have the capacities to go through the whole application procedure and administration for only one participant.
33. Hence, SMEs that want to give their apprentices the chance of an international experience have to rely on mediating organisations. The new Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) introduced the possibility of pool projects. This is an improvement, but it often does not solve the core of the problem: A pool project means that an institution organises mobility project and any young person interested in participating can apply to take part in a project (with limited influence on the content). These projects are often limited to a special sector or target group and are not open for all applicants.
34. The EU should therefore be streamlining mobility in all relevant policies, notably the Structural Funds and the R&D Framework programme. The Marie Curie Programme which enables the provision of industrial training and experience to young academic researchers could be a good example for a funding scheme for projects targeting young people.
35. The ESF should become an additional source of funding, complementing the existing funding by the Lifelong Learning Programme which is well established and should be continued.

#### **5. Involvement of business to promote mobility (3.2)**

36. All young persons in initial vocational education and training who take part in a mobility project need the support of their training company. Although there is an impact of the crisis, business is strongly involved in youth mobility in many member states. There are many companies which regularly send a fixed number of their apprentices abroad. Companies consider mobility periods as an important part of the development of personal competences of the future workforce.
37. In countries in which the training contract with the company is not suspended during the absence of the apprentice, the company is funding the mobility by continuing to pay the training remuneration.



38. Employer representatives should regularly inform about the growing importance of mobility experiences with regard to the future success of the labour market. For them, language skills and international experiences are key competences which will raise the employability of young people in the labour market. BUSINESSEUROPE contributed the Leuven Communiqué to promote mobility in the European higher education area.

#### **6. The usefulness of mobility targets (3.5)**

39. The use of a limited number of focused targets could be useful. Improved comparable statistical data and indicators in order to ensure more rigorous progress monitoring and evaluation of the efficiency of the policy measures are needed. However, it should be kept in mind that target indicators should also allow for an assessment of the different progress in member states. Moreover, quantitative targets for mobility should not lead to losing track of the quality of mobility periods.

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