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## **BELGIAN PRESIDENCY CONFERENCE ON “YOUTH ON THE MOVE – ACHIEVING MOBILITY FOR ALL”**

### **WORK SHOP 5: EMPLOYABILITY AND THE LINK TO THE LABOUR MARKET**

#### **ADDRESS BY HELENA STRIGÅRD, 5 OCTOBER 2010**

Thank the organisers for the invitation. Mobility between the different national education systems in the EU as well as between our labour markets is of great concern to BUSINESSEUROPE.

In addition to specific skills, employers increasingly value generic competencies, like language skills, being able to take initiative, creativity, adaptability, etc. This is precisely the kind of competencies that studying abroad could contribute to.

However, when discussing employability, we should not forget that the key factor in whether students are employable after graduation is whether their studies are relevant to the needs of the labour market. In order to ensure this, involvement of employers in education and training should be encouraged. It has been shown in a study by Swedish Enterprise that students at educational institutions who collaborate with business find a qualified job sooner after graduation. It also results in more money in the monthly pay cheque.

In the background paper for this workshop, it was reported that formerly mobile students transit more smoothly and faster into the labour market than non-mobile students and that their job satisfaction is higher. These findings are well in line with the value employers attribute to the generic competencies, that either categorise students which take the step to go abroad or that they acquire from the experience.

The paper also concluded that the labour market advantages of being mobile diminish with duration of employment. This is to be expected, as the initial education no longer functions as a one-time investment that in itself keeps the individual employable throughout the entire career. Skills and competencies need to be updated and at the time of graduation, lifelong learning has only just begun.

However, formerly mobile students could benefit from a competitive advantage also in the long run in the sense that the experience from studying abroad could make them more likely to take up a job abroad. If so, it means in turn a broader labour market with more jobs to choose from.



Studies show that a very small share of Europeans move to another Member State, for either work or studies. Although attitudes towards geographical labour market mobility are positive among a majority of Europeans, less than 2% actually take the step to move to another Member State, according to a 2009 Eurobarometer survey.

Efforts are needed to make it easier for EU citizens to exercise their right of free movement, for both studies and for work. There are several instruments in place for this, for instance the EURES network. The Bologna and Copenhagen processes are also important means to facilitate and promote mobility of learners.

For these frameworks of European cooperation in education and training to deliver stronger results on mobility, it is vital that they focus on the shift towards a learning outcome approach in national qualification and credit systems. Such an approach increases transparency, which will facilitate mobility between Member States as well as between different types of education (from VET to HE for instance).

Furthermore, rewarding the outcome of education and training rather than input values, like duration of the studies, makes it easier for employers to assess what competencies students actually possess, regardless of *where* they undertook their education. A shift towards the learning outcome approach in vocational as well as higher education would make education systems better aligned with the world of work. Employers do not reward qualifications. They reward performance.

Finally, there is certainly an untapped potential both among employers and in society at large to make better use of the experiences of people who have lived, studied and/or worked abroad. This does not only include nationals who moved to another country for some time, but also immigrants and foreign exchange students.

To conclude, studying abroad *does* give an advantage in ones career. However, the key factor for attaining employability is whether the skills and competencies are relevant to labour market needs. Increased collaboration with employers is therefore something that should be welcomed in the education system, at all levels. To further encourage mobility of students and workers, a shift towards the learning outcome approach is necessary in national credit and qualification systems.

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