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A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE: EUROPEAN VET POLICY 2002-2010

SPEAKING NOTES FOR HELENA STRIGARD

BUSINESSEUROPE has taken active part in the Copenhagen process from the very start. Increased transparency and cooperation between our education systems, both in vocational education and training (VET) and higher academic studies, is a key priority for us. This is demonstrated by the fact that we participate in over 30 working groups, committees, steering groups etc. linked to the implementation of the Copenhagen and Bologna processes.

Copenhagen is young in comparison with Bologna but has already launched important instruments like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). We are strongly supportive of a shift towards a learning outcome approach in national qualification and credit systems, since it will make it easier for employers to assess what an individual is actually capable of doing after finishing an education. This will facilitate transfers from education into the labour market, but also promote geographical mobility between our labour markets and education systems. For this reason, we welcomed the launch of EQF.

It is clear that there are already positive developments due to the steps taken. We believe that the process has led to increased trust between national VET systems and a willingness to cooperate. However, we are still in the stage where we are waiting for instruments to be implemented and show results. This concerns in particular the EQF.

It is therefore concerning that the pace by which new tools in the education and employment field are launched by the European Commission does not correlate with the implementation capacity on the national level. ESCO is one such example where we question how it will complement the instruments already in the Copenhagen pipeline.

In the upcoming decade, the Commission should focus on the successful implementation of instruments already launched and *evaluate* their results. By 2020, a significant increase in the mobility of learners should have been achieved, the shift towards the learning outcome approach completed and the attractiveness of VET improved by increasing the quality and labour market relevance of such educations. BUSINESSEUROPE will stay committed to advance this work by taking active part in the governance structures.

I also wish to highlight what companies are doing to develop initial and continuous training. It's clear that employers are investing more and more in this. According to 2010 data from Eurofund, training paid for by employers was at its highest level since 1995 for EU15. Over the same period, on the job-training increased as well.



There is a strong willingness from business to collaborate with education providers. For instance on the design and content of courses and on how to evaluate skills and competencies acquired. In view of the acute skills shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), companies are also active in raising the attractiveness among scholars for these subjects.

BUSINESSEUROPE will soon publish a report that describes what business can, and is already doing, to this end. There are numerous examples of partnerships where companies provide a “real life” context for how STEM comes into practice, for instance by inviting students and scholars to carry out science experiments or projects at the company.

The publication also sets out what actions that are needed from the side of governments and educational providers. In order to encourage companies to take an even more active role in initial training as well as providing more opportunities for continuous training, it is crucial to:

- Cut red tape for the provision of apprenticeships and other kinds of initial training taking place at a work place. According to UK employers, this is the main reason of why they chose not to accept apprentices.
- Provide easily accessible information to guide companies through the arborescence of providers of initial and continuous VET.
- Develop systems for recognition of the informal and non-formal learning that can take place at a work place.
- Examine the possibility of positive financial incentive mechanisms, both for companies to involve in education and for education providers to collaborate with business.

The main actions are for the national governments to undertake. However, the Copenhagen process could contribute by focusing on the targets mentioned on mobility, learning outcomes and attractiveness of VET. We are looking forward to a continued discussion on how to achieve these results.

