

23 September 2014

Joint position paper to the Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU

The **European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE)** and its Italian member **ARAN** welcome the Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Herewith, we would like to provide our input on the Programme of the Presidency and the priorities for Education and Training from a European Education Employers' perspective.

Education, economic growth and employment

EFEE and ARAN share with the Italian Presidency the need to discuss at political level the future role of education and training in national and EU growth programmes, highlighting the impact of investment in education on economic growth and the role of education in fostering competitiveness and job creation.

We are of the opinion that **modernising education and training systems** will help to raise skill levels and also boost the transversal skills and competences needed by labour markets, such as digital, language and entrepreneurial skills and competences. It is very important to closely link the future Education and Training 2020 priorities with the EU's overall growth and jobs strategy.

However, we need to bear in mind that completely reforming education systems will not be the answer to the current economic and financial situation in Europe. National education systems are based on national cultural, socio-economic values and decades of work and experience of educational professionals. We need to be prudent not to harm our education systems by quick changes triggered by the demands of the labour market or the media, or politicians wanting a quick fix for the current unemployment rates. Providing education for our children, our youngsters and adults is more than training them to be employees. Education should instead provide key skills and competences that give all Europeans the capacity to go on learning for the whole of their lives so that they may be able to adapt effectively to the changes that will affect all aspects of their lives – in the family, in the community and in the workplace.

EFEE and ARAN therefore welcome the initiative of the Presidency to advance the Europe 2020 Strategy's educational agenda, with a focus on youth empowerment and employability. We also agree with the special attention that the Presidency wishes to pay to the issue of integrating education and training systems with the labour market by enhancing work-based learning pathways (such as apprenticeships, traineeships, etc.).

But, as everybody knows, employability and a good education involve more than excellent PISA results, or adapting our current school systems to the labour market of tomorrow. It is about both the education of civilised human beings and also about giving them the right transversal skills and competences to be able to **adapt to the ever-changing demands of 21st century living, including but not exclusively the demands of the labour market.**

As education employers, together with the teacher unions, we have a dual role to play; we need to make sure that the **skills and competences of our teachers, our professors, our researchers and our school leaders** are **of the highest quality, evidence based and up-to-date.** EFEE works collaboratively with its members in facilitating the development of a culture that creates the best possible teaching and learning climate and fosters a culture of openness and continuous learning for all. At the same time, we as social partners in education must ensure that those we educate have the competences required by a modern society.

Opening up Education & professionalisation of teachers and school leaders

EFEE and ARAN are as committed as the Italian Presidency to raise awareness on the potential of digital education, in line with the EC Communication 'Opening up Education'.

We are putting enormous effort to contribute to the **modernisation of the education sector and its personnel** as we believe that, in order to respond to the changes in demand, all 21st century education providers (schools, colleges and universities) should be up-to-date and modern and should provide for a **professional working environment** for all their teachers, professors and researchers and provide an interesting learning community for all pupils and students.

In this regard, we consider the following areas of major importance for further European cooperation.

1) Opening up education

1a) Teacher acquisition of digital skills is an important step towards the efficient use of the possibilities created by new digital technologies. We, as education employers, see such development of digital skills as a necessary investment in our teachers, an investment that will deliver real benefits for pupils, students, and the future of Europe. It provides an opportunity to increase quality, efficiency and equity in education. However, the resources necessary for acquiring 21st century digital skills can be significant and we need to be realistic in the current economic and financial situation where we as employers are under pressure from national governments to freeze or downsize educational budgets. One should also be mindful that acquiring and further developing digital skills is not the sole responsibility of education providers, but rather a joint effort between the key players in the education sector - national and local authorities, teacher training institutions, education providers, teachers, employers, trade unions, schools, school leaders and other stakeholders. Therefore, the financial burden needs to be divided between these stakeholders. Together, we need to be innovative in providing training: peer learning and train-the-trainers might provide welcome learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders.

Needless to say, like any other employee in any other job, teachers themselves have an important role to play in their own professional development. They have the first responsibility for their own suitability in the labour market.

1b) Connecting classrooms and deploying digital devices and content is a step towards a more efficient and open educational sector. However, it should be recognised that the digital situation in schools and universities varies across EU member states and across educational institutions within states. Therefore, the necessary steps to take are very diverse. Again it is a shared task and all stakeholders in education will need to be innovative and entrepreneurial in making sure that every school is digitally connected.

1c) Mobilising all stakeholders to change the role of digital technologies in education institutions is a challenge and an opportunity for our sector. Employers, trade unions, school leaders and others can contribute to the creation of an atmosphere that stimulates teachers to see the utilisation of new technologies as an opportunity rather than as a threat. We already mentioned the importance of finding new and innovative solutions (e.g. peer learning) to support the switch towards digital teaching and learning.

2) The professionalisation of teachers and school leaders is critical to improving the quality of the teaching profession and attracting and selecting the best candidates for teacher training in the first instance. However, it is not sufficient to attract the most academically able teaching. We must also recruit to teaching those with the dispositions most suited to teaching. Furthermore, we must put appropriate continuous professional development programmes, peer learning programmes and self-evaluation processes in place to facilitate teachers and school leaders continuously updating their competences – most particularly in respect of using ICT effectively to continuously improve learner and school outcomes. While ultimately school leaders and teachers must be accountable for their work and their continuous professional development, education providers must facilitate them in this regard.

Contribution of the social partners to implementing the future priorities

EFEE and ARAN observe that the Italian Presidency explicitly mentions the involvement of third-sector organisation in achieving its priorities in the Education and Training area, whereas the involvement of the social partners in education is not mentioned.

We are of the opinion that there is a real need for continuous **involvement** of social partners, both at national and European level. If the Italian Presidency wishes to mobilise Education and Training stakeholders, increase their ownership, harness their expertise in support of the Presidency Programmes' priorities and improve the governance of the decision-making, the Italian Presidency should take seriously the involvement of the **European sectoral social partners** in education as well as national social partners in education.

We therefore hope receiving invitations for up-coming activities, in order to be able to positively contribute to your Programme "Fresh Start". The high-level meeting on *Education in the digital era* that is foreseen for 27th of October would, for example, be of our interest. We are convinced that EFEE will bring added value to your work and meetings, our members being the representatives of employers in education and representing a whole variety of divers members; ministries of

education, local and regional authorities, national education councils, associations of colleges and universities, etc. EFEE can also, through its members and networks offer excellent access to national education experts across the European community.

Yours sincerely,

For EFEE

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. Stege'.

Bianka Stege
General Secretary

For ARAN

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S. Gasparrini'.

Sergio Gasparrini
President