



EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF EDUCATION EMPLOYERS

VISION STATEMENT 2020-2024

EUROPEAN EDUCATION EMPLOYERS PRERARING FOR THE FUTURE

EFEE VISION STATEMENT 2020-2024

POLICY CONTEXT

The European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) welcomes the Political Guidelines of the new European Commission for 2019-2024. The rapid societal, technological, environmental and demographical developments of today's society require "A Union that strives for more"¹, as Ms Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, titled her agenda for Europe. EFEE also endorses Von der Leyen's main vision for the EU: "Europe must lead the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world. But it can only do so by bringing people together and upgrading our unique social market economy to fit today's new ambitions. As we embark on this journey, we must make the most of all of our strengths, talent and potential. We must focus on equality and creating chances for all", she underlined in her political guidelines. For EFEE it is clear that these ambitions can only be reached by high quality education and training systems with an inclusive, value-based, lifelong-learning, an innovation-driven approach. It is EFEE's overall goal to realise quality education for all by improving the quality of teaching and school management through European cooperation and dialogue.

EFEE is a dynamic organisation established in 2009 to represent the interests of employers in the strategic and highly diverse European education sector. We represent 45 (public and private) education employer organisations from 21 European countries in all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and research. This includes different national organisations, such as education councils and ministries of education, associations of independent schools, VET colleges and universities, and local and regional authority employers' organisations. As a recognised European Social Partner for the Education sector, EFEE operates at the crossroads of the policy fields on education, training, research, social affairs and employment. This provides EFEE with a unique opportunity to generate change and to make a positive impact on these fields, which are all pivotal for fulfilling the new ambition for Europe. With this vision statement, EFEE wishes to set out how we, education employers in Europe, can contribute to making "A Union that strives for more" a reality. Herewith we will focus on the four headline ambitions of the Political Guidelines on which we can make a genuine impact: 1. A European Green Deal, 2. An economy that works for people, 3. A Europe fit for the digital age, and 4. Protecting our European way of life.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf

POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS

1. A European Green Deal

Introduction to the EU initiative

The European Green Deal was set out by the Von der Leyen Commission as an integral part of this Commission's strategy to implement the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals. It is a "new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use"². As the Political Guidelines clearly state, achieving this goal will, however, prove to be impossible without "a just transition for all" that leaves nobody behind as well as an adjusted education model. In this regard, the Political Guidelines propose a European Climate Pact, "bringing together regions, local communities, civil society, industry and schools. Together they will design and commit to a set of pledges to bring about a change in behaviour, from the individual to the largest multinational. This will be a key part of the just transition for all".

EFEE's contribution to envisaged actions

EFEE is enthused that in its Communication on the Green Deal (hereafter, Green Communication), the European Commission directly addresses the activation of education and training as one of the key instruments which will be crucial for the success of the European Green Deal. Four main priorities are highlighted in the Green Communication, underlining the importance of the education and training sector in Europe's ambitious ecological transition:

- i. Providing people with green skills and attitudes. A successful transition will require large-scale programmes concerning the change in attitude and skills for people of all ages. Consequently, EFEE warmly welcomes the Commission's proposal to prepare a European competence framework for schools, training institutions and universities to help develop and assess their students' knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable developments. Education and training providers are well placed to engage not only with their students but also with parents and the wider community to promote sustainability as a core attitude and prepare people of all ages for green jobs. EFEE emphasizes that this transition will therefore require new ways of learning as well as teaching, which is why we support the Commission's plan to provide support materials and facilitate the exchange of good practices in EU networks of teacher-training programmes. This will need to be reflected in ESCO, the European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations.
- ii. Sustainable learning environments. It is EFEE's mission to contribute to a modern and sustainable European education sector. This includes on the one hand that the infrastructure of education institutions becomes more sustainable, and on the other hand that education providers adapt their learning environments to the needs of today's students. EFEE encourages the Commission's initiative on the former objective to at least double or even triple the renovation rate of public buildings, including schools, so they become more sustainable. Regarding the latter objective, EFEE reaffirms that open learning environments require the leaders and management of educational institutions

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf

to play an active role by providing a strategic vision transforming institutions into connected learning communities and stimulating professionals to strive for innovative teaching approaches. 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 empowers educators to make use of innovative and digital tools, among others by continuous professional development courses, achieving inspiration via peer learning, and networking with colleagues. At the same time, we see the need to jointly explore how the introduction of digital tools, but also Artificial Intelligence and Learning Analytics will impact on educational infrastructures and the role of management, teachers, and other education staff.

- iii. Pro-active re-skilling and upskilling of the European workforce. As the **New Circular Economy Action Plan** clarifies, it is clear that the green transition towards a sustainable future will force some sectors out of the economy while others will grow and flourish. In order to achieve a just transition for all, the European Social Fund+ will have to invest in helping Europe's labour market to acquire the skills they need to transfer from a declining sector to a growing one. EFEE therefore encourages the European Commission to update the **Skills Agenda**, which is scheduled for the first quarter of 2020, and the **Youth Guarantee** accordingly in order to enhance employability in the green economy. We furthermore highlight the important role that vocational education and training as well as apprenticeships plays to meet the changing needs of the labour market. Having this in mind, EFEE was pleased by the Social Communication's proposal to include a European Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the update of the Skills Agenda.
- iv. Fostering disruptive innovation and research. In order to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal, investment in new technologies and sustainable solutions will need to increase significantly. Consequently, EFEE encourages the European Commission to not only support conventional innovation and research across higher education and post-secondary vocational education and training (VET) institutions but also to include secondary VET institutions and partnerships with industry through innovative entrepreneurship in their research calls. It is undeniable that to be at the helm of the next wave of innovation and to breath new life into the **European Research Area**, which will be spearheaded by Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, a wide range of education levels will need to be activated. There is not only a need to invest more in research and innovation but also to teach and train EU citizens to work with these new technologies. Effective innovation begins and ends with education. EFEE furthermore recognizes the need for more and closer collaborations between individual research and European funding programmes. Therefore, we urge the European Commission to create strong synergies between different funding schemes, including **Horizon Europe**, Erasmus+ and ESF+. Moreover, under the guidance of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, the European Commission should promote stronger links and interchange of knowledge between all education levels in order to foster wide-range research. Lastly, EFEE believes it is paramount that the European Green Deal includes the work on **Green Erasmus**, which was announced by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, more prominently in their priorities for not only innovation and research but also for the sustainable learning environments.

2. An economy that works for people

Introduction to the EU initiative

The priorities of a European “economy that works for people” are built upon the aim of strengthening the EU social dimension by achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This aim is clarified in the Mission Letter for Valdis Dombrovskis, Vice-President of the European Commission for an economy that works for people, by declaring that “Europe’s social market economy helps ensure that social fairness and prosperity go hand in hand. We should preserve and improve this unique model, which puts people’s welfare above all else. This is all the more important at a time when we are redesigning our industry and economy in line with societal, environmental and technological changes”. This statement clearly underlines the Commission’s desire to achieve this by not only using EU economic and industrial policies to support the green and digital transformations but also by accompanying these transformations with effective social policies to build a more inclusive society.

EFEE’s contribution to envisaged actions

Firstly, EFEE warmly welcomes the Commission’s Communication for a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions (hereafter, Social Communication), which sets out the road towards an Action Plan to implement the **European Pillar of Social Rights**. It is clear to us that economy is not just about efficiency and competitiveness leading to a profit regardless of the socio-cultural context. In order to achieve a fair transition for all towards a green social market economy, the European Commission needs to support its citizens in giving them the education and opportunities they need to thrive. Providing people with new knowledge, skills and attitudes will prove to be crucial in creating an efficient and future-ready workforce. Re-skilling, upskilling and lifelong learning will become a reality for every European individual who enters the labour market, which is why the **Modernisation Fund** and the **InvestEU Programme**, proposed in the Social Communication, are initiatives with significant importance. EFEE’s unique position as an education employers’ organization with close ties to the cross-sectoral employers’ organization implies that we will play a pivotal role in this. More specifically, EFEE can offer these education providers with a direct link to cross-sectoral employers and bridge the gap between education institutions and the labour market. We encourage the Commission to support and foster these sustainable partnerships between those who look for new talents and those who educate and train them more strongly.

Regarding the work in creating an inclusive and sustainable society, EFEE deems it crucial to include the significant role of education and training institutions of all levels more prominently in the policy proposals. Growing diversity of our societies poses challenges to the governance of education and training systems. It calls for greater emphasis to be placed on promoting inclusion and common values, starting at early age. Quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) can play an important role here. EFEE therefore warmly welcomes the Commission’s initiatives regarding ECEC, including the introduction of the **European Child Guarantee** (which was announced in the Political Guidelines), the permanent status of the **Youth Guarantee**, and the raised investments by the **European Social Fund+**. Moreover, EFEE is enthused that the strongly reinforced budget for the **Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027** will allow young people with fewer opportunities to more easily access the opportunities of this Programme. It, furthermore, requests flexible learning pathways that respond to the different needs and capacities of the diverse group of

learners, including (newly arrived) migrants, but also those pupils with special educational needs. Herewith also special attention should be paid to gender equality in education both at pupil/student level as (academic) staff level. Lastly, it asks for effective investment that supports the development of equitable, and sustainable education systems.

Considering the many future challenges that the EU and its citizens face, the “Council conclusions on the key role of **lifelong learning**”, emphasize the fundamental part that lifelong learning policies play in addressing them. The technological and digital transformation as well as the green transition and demographic changes require a strong European education policy landscape that is underpinned by the lifelong learning continuum, from early childhood education and care to post-retirement learning. Such a cohesive and solid policy landscape will not only raise the level of education but will also assist in reducing the divide between high-skilled and low-skilled workers in the labour market. By promoting lifelong learning in all levels of the education landscape, EFEE furthermore aims to support inclusive learning options such as vocational education and training (VET) as well as upskilling and re-skilling in adult learning. If European countries want to remain inclusive and competitive at the same time, we need to find ways to offer more tailor-made and flexible programmes (including apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities) at all levels and forms of education and training and at all stages of life in order to make participation in lifelong learning more attractive, feasible and accessible to all European citizens (irrespective of their socio-economic and educational background).

EFEE aims to strengthen **effective social dialogue** at European level and foster cooperation at multiple levels in order to jointly address these imminent challenges and create fair working conditions. Concerning the latter, EFEE welcomes the Commission’s commitment to review the occupational safety and health strategies and address the new risks alongside the more traditional ones. A strong social dialogue is, furthermore, indispensable when promoting quality education not only with regards to content but also staff. A strong dialogue between social partners in the education sector based on good will and mutual trust is in our view essential for achieving quality education, which is one of the cornerstones of the **European Education Area**. EFEE therefore agrees with the Social Communication’s statement that “to find out what skills we need, national and regional governments have to work with those who know best: employers, workers, teachers and trainers”. Having this in mind, EFEE is enthused that the focus of the **European Semester** is shifting more towards the United Nations sustainable development goals. In the 2019’s country specific recommendations it is underlined that access to quality education and training is key to provide skills and competences to all citizens. All Member States have a recommendation in either education, training or skills. This highlights the importance of these fields for the economic and social development in Europe and raises EFEE’s commitment to become more involved in this policy area.

Lastly, since this ambitious plan covers several policy areas, EFEE encourages all the responsible Commissioners to combine their knowledge and take on a holistic education approach which fosters cooperation within learning environments and with the broader community so as to make an effective and long-lasting impact on EU policy.

3. A Europe fit for the digital age

Introduction to the EU initiative

As described in the Political Guidelines “Digital technologies, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), are transforming the world at an unprecedented speed. They have changed how we communicate, live and work. They have changed our societies and our economies.” This is echoed in the Mission letter for Margrethe Vestager, Vice-President of the European Commission for a Europe fit for the Digital Age, in which it is stated that “Europe must focus on maintaining our digital leadership where we have it, catching up where we lag behind and moving first on new-generation technologies. This must cut across all of our work, from industry to innovation. At the same time, we must ensure that the European way is characterized by our human and ethical approach.” In the Political Guidelines it is appropriately underlined that investment in education is crucial for Europe to get up to speed with digital skills and to drive herewith Europe’s competitiveness and innovation (which links to the Mission of Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth). Nevertheless, EFEE is convinced that more educational aspects need to be stressed here in order to empower everyone to join the transformation to the digital age.

EFEE’s contribution to envisaged actions

First of all when talking about education contributing to the digital transformation, it is crucial to take into account all three key issues, which are:

- i. Providing people with the skills they need for the digital age (as correctly mentioned). Herewith it is key to not only focus on digital skills and competences (such as coding, computing and computational thinking) in a restricted way, but to clearly realize that other basic and transversal skills are also crucial for life and work in a digital age, such as: mathematics, literacy, communication, critical thinking, entrepreneurship skills. These should thus also be taking into account when tackling the skills-question for the digital age.
- ii. Using digitalisation in education. It is clear that the use of technology could have (and will have) a big impact on teaching and learning. This ranges from the use of ICT-tools within the classroom to the introduction of Artificial Intelligence, Learning Analytics, and big data for education purposes, which might have a radical impact on the way our current education systems are organised. Many initiatives are available in Europe in this field and we welcome EU funds that promote the development of digitalization (including ICT infrastructures) in education. We also welcome the SELFIE-tool developed by the European Commission as a useful tool for schools and would applaud an extension to other education levels as well (such as VET and HE). However at the same time we want to stress that not much is known about the most effective use of the tools and initiatives and their genuine impact on educational infrastructures, working environments in education and on the role of management, teachers, and other education staff. More research needs to be done here. We also have to be conscious about the related ethical questions. As an education employers’ organisation we aim for safe and conducive working environments in education and for improving teaching and learning outcomes. We have thus a pivotal role to play here. Therefore we would also like to call upon the European Commission to make the aggregated data from the SELFIE-tool also available to education employers (besides public authorities) to enable them to use them for improvement purposes within their education institutions.
- iii. Professionalisation of all people working in education (and training) institutions. The potential of the education sector to contribute to the digital transformation highly

depends on the ability of the people working in the sector to guide this journey. Professionalisation of teachers, leaders and other staff working in education (and also training) institutions at all education levels is herewith key and thus deserves a place high on the EU agenda in this context (in particular also in view of the ageing teaching force in Europe).

Regarding the **review of the Digital Education Action plan** (envisaged for the second quarter of 2020), we deem it crucial that all three mentioned key-issues are well reflected in order to make the transition to the digital age a reality. Furthermore we want to stress again that the whole education sector including early childhood education, primary, secondary education, higher education and research, and vocational education and training should be taken into account, since all levels are inter-linked and have a pivotal contribution to make in preparing people for living, working, and acting as active (and critical) citizens in a digitalised society. Moreover, in order to make the transition to the digital age successful and inclusive (by ensuring that no-one is left behind) the policy initiatives need to be underpinned by sound and sustainable investments. EFEE therefore very much welcomes the establishment of the **Digital Europe Programme**, which aims to support advanced digital skills development to enable the deployment of these technologies throughout the economy as well as reinforce the digital capabilities of education providers. We are very pleased to see that 'education providers' are singled out here as one of the main target groups. At the same time we want to emphasize the important role of education employers, representing the management of education providers, in preparing education and training institutions for the digital age.

Concerning the work on the **European approach on artificial intelligence, including its human and ethical implications** (as announced in the Mission letter of Vice-President Vestager) we want to stress the need to include the education sector in this study. The introduction of AI in education could change how we learn, work, and assess the world around us and has herewith a big impact on our society. Furthermore it is the sector that contributes to preparing people for the digital age, as stated above, including the labour market of the future. Last, but not least, as it is a sector dealing with pupils therefore ethical implications need to be considered with extra great care.

4. Protecting our European way of life

Introduction to the EU initiative

From the Mission letter of Margaritis Schinas, European Commission Vice-President it becomes clear that 'Protecting our European way of life' has to do with "making sure workers are equipped to thrive in our evolving labour market. A declining workforce and a digital and basic skills gap brings into sharp focus the need to equip people with the tools and knowledge they need. It also highlights the need for well-managed legal migration, a strong focus on integration and ensuring our communities are cohesive and close-knit."

EFEE's contribution to envisaged actions

EFEE welcomes the strong focus in Schinas' Mission letter on skills, education and integration as important players in the aspiration to protect our European way of life, as these aspects are barely highlighted in the Political Guidelines of Von der Leyen. It is of course clear that education and training are crucial for promoting inclusion and common European values (including the rule of law), as also underlined in the Paris Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination

through education, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, and the European Pillar of Social Rights. However we deem it crucial to also include here the promotion of **democratic citizenship** principles. Living in a constantly changing world does not only mean adaptation and assimilation to change. Active citizenship based on democratic principles requires that citizens can actively shape and change society. Each generation needs to learn and have opportunities to exercise democratic principles, values, ideas and underlying concepts of rights and responsibilities.

Growing diversity of our societies poses new challenges to the governance of education and training systems. In EFEE's view this requires flexible learning pathways that respond to the different needs and capacities of the diverse group of learners, including (newly arrived) migrants, but also those pupils with special educational needs. Herewith also special attention should be paid to diversity and gender equality in education both at pupil/student level as (academic) staff level. Furthermore it asks for effective investment that supports the development of equitable, and sustainable education systems.

EFEE is pleased to see that the work on the **Skills Agenda** (identifying and filling skills shortages and supporting reskilling as part of the just transition) is planned to go hand in hand with the work on the **European Education Area** (and making education more accessible and inclusive, encouraging lifelong learning, re-skilling and cross-border learning). Skills, reskilling, vocational education and training (VET), and lifelong learning are all part of the broader education landscape, although they are of course also clearly linked to labour market affairs. As an organisation representing employers in education we are operating in both policy fields and we are truly convinced that if European countries want to remain inclusive and competitive at the same time, we need to find ways to offer more tailor-made and flexible programmes (including apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities) at all levels of education and training and at all stages of life in order to make participation in lifelong learning more attractive, feasible and accessible to all European citizens (irrespective of their socio-economic and educational background). Personalised learning accounts could be an effective tool to promote such participation.

When talking about 'skills' and an 'education area', we want also to stress the importance of investing in continuous professional development of all working in the education and training sector, as these are the people that need to convey the spirit of learning a life long, an attitude that will become more and more important in our fast changing society. Furthermore we want to emphasise the importance of cross-border learning and mobility for education professionals, not only as a way to broaden horizons towards other (EU) countries and to learn from peers, but also towards other (business) sectors. This will strengthen the link between the world of work and education, which is not only beneficial for learning outcomes being relevant for the labour market, but it could be also an effective tool to improve the attractiveness of career pathways in education by offering circular or hybrid positions combining work in business and education. An enlarged **Erasmus+ programme** could be a useful instrument to foster such cross-border learning for education professionals. Furthermore we see a clear potential for this funding programme to link learning abroad with promoting European values at local level, strengthening herewith the social impact of the Erasmus+ programme.

Regarding the work on the **integration of migrants and refugees** into society we want to stress the need for an holistic, integrated and well-structured approach among all relevant Commissioners and Directorate-Generals as well as among national governments and Council formations, as it touches upon several policy fields, such as home affairs and justice, education and training, employment and social affairs, housing and health care.

Furthermore our work in this area has shown that in order to effectively foster integration of migrants and refugees it is pivotal to:

- Enhance support-based inclusion, encompassing the development of a EU-wide policy framework that protects and promotes inclusive access to quality education regardless of the legal status of minors and (young) adults throughout a full educational cycle. Promoting fast-track inclusion in mainstream education and learners' resilience through support-based inclusion, based on high expectations boosting self-esteem, second language acquisition and learning;
- Ensure that adults with a migrant background have access to lifelong learning opportunities, including host country language acquisition and promote flexible learning pathways for adults matching their specific needs, which enables them to combine working and learning at the same time and to foster this way their swift transition to the labour market;
- Recognise and incorporate the view of social partners and of other relevant stakeholders into policies aimed at reducing the potential for school segregation according to the area of residence of migrants and refugees.

In order to make this a reality, we advocate increasing the share and coherence of European funds dedicated to manage diversity in education and training institutions and to ensure the educational inclusion of migrants and refugees' learners. These should contribute to all the necessary costs for targeted measures at community level to be put in place for an effective reception and educational support.



With the support of the ERASMUS+ Programme of the EU