

Reaction to the Communication on Union of Skills

12 March 2025

The Union of Skills is the European Commission's strategic vision to strengthen Europe's workforce, supporting competitiveness, resilience, and social cohesion. At its core, the initiative recognises that Europe's economic future depends on its people — their education, skills, and ability to adapt to change. EFEE welcomes the Union of Skills and is glad to see **education and skills considered as investment** and gains political momentum they deserve. We are also aligned with its objective to empower people to build **solid skills foundations** and engage in lifelong upskilling and reskilling, as mentioned in the European Pillar of Social Rights. EFEE supports the development of initiatives outlined, such as:

- Basic Skills Action Plan
- 2030 Roadmap on the Future of Digital Education and Skills
- European Strategy for VET
- STEM Education Strategic Plan
- EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda
- European School Alliances
- European VET Diploma
- AI in Education

Additionally, EFEE wants to highlight the role of quality education as common good, to which everyone should have a **free and equal access**. The focus on skills should not only be oriented towards current and future labour shortages but needs to be viewed in long-term perspective as **investment in human capital** through skills provision for life and preparing people for their **civic duties**. Therefore, quality education should be on the forefront of European policies and programmes since it is also linked to safeguarding European values such as **democracy, freedom and equality**.

It goes without saying that high-quality basic education is extremely valuable for the **social and economic stability and welfare** of Europe. Therefore, basic skills should be understood as fundamental skills crucial for one's development. EFEE recognises their importance and would also like to draw attention to shortcomings related to orienting a curriculum primarily to basic skills, as it can significantly narrow the scope of educational programmes. Additionally, the focus on skills provision and skills shortages for labour market might overshadow other persisting challenges in education, particularly **shortage of teachers and other education professionals**. We would like to highlight that the teaching profession and teachers' career progression are of utmost importance for development of future generations.

Besides, EFEE acknowledges that VET students and professionals play a vital role in society, and therefore, VET must receive **equal recognition in policy and funding**, placing it on the same level as university education. This includes improving pay equity — particularly in public and social sectors — eliminating educational discrimination and reshaping the narrative to reflect the expertise of VET professionals. Strengthening their representation in EU policymaking and institutions, along with expanding **Erasmus+ opportunities and mobility for VET** and adult education students, will be crucial in fully integrating vocational education into Europe’s skills ecosystem. To fully unlock Europe’s innovative potential, VET must be systematically integrated into the **innovation process**. VET professionals work at the final stage of innovation, where they test, apply, and refine new technologies in real-world settings. We urge for acknowledgement of VET’s contribution and actively support its role in innovation ecosystems through targeted funding, policy initiatives, and strategic partnerships. **Centres of Vocational Excellence** can serve as key drivers of this effort, particularly when effectively aligned with broader policies and programs within the new Competitiveness Fund.

Furthermore, we also advocate for more funding of the Erasmus+ programme and strengthened funding commitment in education and skills, including minimum 20% of the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF). What is more, investment in terms of time, financial resources and knowledge in mitigating current and future transitions, e.g., digital or green in education needs to be stressed. We call for a 3% investment in Research and Development in education, similar to the EU-norm for the private sector.

Finally, the main elements of the Union of Skills governance, including a European Skills Intelligence Observatory and particularly a European Skills High-Level Board must be joined by **sectoral educational social partners**. Given the expertise and range of stakeholders present, the educational social partners should be actively involved in the governance and dialogue between all the parties.