

‘RETHINK EDUCATION, BUT DO IT TOGETHER WITH INDUSTRY’

industriAll and CEEMET welcome Commission’s renewed efforts to speed up and facilitate education reform, but stress the need to properly involve sectoral and local level social partners and caution against oversimplifying benefits of dual systems.

CEEMET and industriAll welcome the communication “Rethinking Education” and its focus on renewing efforts to reform education and training across Europe. The communication successfully pins down the problems that are found in education systems around Europe, including not being able to provide the right skills, lack of cooperation with business and employers, absence of a lifelong learning culture, and the resulting youth unemployment which, coupled with the economic crisis, has made it virtually impossible for young people in some countries to find work.

The Commission estimates that the proportion of jobs requiring tertiary level qualifications will increase from 29 % to 34 % in 2020 which underlines the need to develop a world class system for lifelong learning in Europe. Such a system must, in cooperation with the social partners, look to future skills needs to make European industry competitive and innovative. As such, CEEMET and IndustriAll agree with the Commission that greater efforts must be made to highlight science, technology, engineering and mathematics as priority areas of education at all levels. Attention must also be focused on transversal skills such as the ability to think critically, take initiative, problem solving, group work and innovation.

Regarding education systems, industriAll and CEEMET in particular fully support the recognition of **vocational education and training (VET)** as essential to jobs and growth in Europe. As the biggest sector of the manufacturing industry in Europe, dependent on good quality vocational training, we have for long time fought for the promotion of VET in policy (albeit not always successfully). The approach taken in the communication of highlighting excellence in VET is absolutely correct and absolutely crucial in meeting labour market needs. Nevertheless, there are still some areas of the European policy on education – and especially VET - reform which require further ‘rethinking’ in order to be able to respond to competence demand and industry needs, and thereby support the growth and jobs desperately needed in Europe today.

- ***Excellent VET requires social partner involvement***

First and foremost, evidence shows that successful vocational education involves sectoral and local industry representatives at all levels. Sectoral social partners and local industry are able to judge quality of VET from different perspectives and bring knowledge about company systems which policy makers often lack. The European Commission also recognises this in the communication. Yet, national and European policy makers often do not consult the sectoral social partners regarding education policy and analysis thereof, thereby missing out on evidence-based input.

Consequently, CEEMET and industriAll recommend the European Commission to habitually consult the major sectoral social partners on education policies in general, and VET policies in particular, if the aim is to promote good quality education fit for the labour market.

- ***Time for concrete action on permeability***

industriAll and CEEMET have earlier pointed to the importance of *permeability* in enabling excellence in VET and attracting young people to choose this educational pathway. It is clear that still more

focus and progress on this issue is required at European level. The Commission has ample opportunity in their 'Agenda on Modernisation of Higher Education' to look at how Member States best could open up pathways between VET, Higher Learning and continuing education, but so far there has been little action on this issue.

- ***Dual learning is not a panacea for youth unemployment***

Good quality vocational education and training which has a strong component of work-based learning increases employment prospects and industriAll and CEEMET are very pleased that this is finally being recognised at policy level. However, there is a real danger in the rhetoric coming from the European Institutions that dual systems are being touted as a panacea for youth unemployment around Europe. The benefits of the dual principle are real, but the implementation of such systems requires proper governance and a number of conditions to be fulfilled. Creating well-functioning dual systems is not simply a question of introducing work-based learning into VET – primarily you need companies with job and training vacancies and the confidence to take on learners. You need this to attract young people to VET. And this requires more than reform in education and training, including support for SMEs, a policy environment that makes a country a competitive place for companies to operate and invest in, and often a change in mindset about the purpose of education and training.

- ***Do not forget career guidance***

CEEMET and industriAll note that there is very little mention of career guidance in the communication on 'Rethinking Education'. However, well-planned career guidance is absolutely central in ensuring excellence in VET and in guiding people towards education that will lead to jobs. It should be a policy priority at both national and European level to promote the establishment of high-quality, easily accessible guidance for pupils from an early age, involving both schools and industry. This can be done by, for instance, setting up independent career centres, ensuring high quality training (including industry experience) for counsellors and teachers, and capitalising on the possibilities offered through web-based resources and social media.

- ***Further efforts needed to understand benefits of work-based learning***

CEEMET and industriAll are very pleased that training and learning in the workplace finally is viewed positively in EU policy. All advantages of work-based learning are not yet fully understood or recognised though, which is one of the reasons why it is difficult to convince young people about its benefits. industriAll and CEEMET would in this context suggest to the Commission to consider setting up a dialogue with stakeholders on how to communicate the benefits of VET and work-based learning to students, teachers and parents.

- ***To meet demand, focus on impact of CET***

Attracting more people to good-quality vocational education and training is essential, but it is not enough to fill the competence demands of industry. This is why lifelong learning and continuing education and training (CET) today is vital for both companies and employees. While much of the discussion on CET centers on increasing uptake, we would like the debate – at all levels - to focus more on the *impact* of CET. It is absolutely essential that CET supports growth and jobs, and will only do so if better understood and targeted to the needs of the labour market and learners.

Overall, the VET situation in Europe is clearly uneven and sharing of best practice at European level is very useful and important in this context. Many of the recommendations that have been put forward in the communication have already been trialed by some Member States and social partners. With their comprehensive overview of the situation, the Commission is in a beneficial position to analyse the outcomes of these actions and discuss with governments and other stakeholders what has worked, what has not worked, and why. CEEMET and industriAll believe that this would greatly help provide evidence-based incentives to mainstream excellence in VET.