

## New Education Forum Recommendations: opening for discussion

### Why does Europe need educational transformation?

Industry 4.0, as well as instantaneous communication, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, digital technologies, and low-carbon emission policies gain influence over the functioning of our societies at a radical pace. **This groundbreaking innovative impact is observed in the manners in which we conduct daily work activities, but also affects the way we realize our social roles.** The changes we observe do not occur in a linear mode, but often simultaneously bring challenges to different segments of our lives, forcing us to instantly adapt to them.

However, formal education provided by the Member States for the last 150 years exists in its own static universe. No wonder, that generation after generation is unequipped with the tools to help them cope with arriving these challenges. The European societies do not understand:

- Why vocational learning should be the primary choice for at least half of the European youth?
- Why our children will not obtain one job for their whole lives? and
- Why for new generations job security means having possibility to choose working hours rather than receive employee perks?

As a result, young people are cheated through being convinced there are prestigious, secure, well-paid jobs and the colleges will provide them with career paths “fixing everything” for them. But most of all, **the youth are not prepared to live lives in transition**, where life-long learning is a must to survive and where the only certain thing is uncertainty. The societies, and most directly **the youth, their parents and business communities, suffer the consequences of inadequate education.**

### What are the aims of Recommendations?

The New Education Forum is to provide a space for discussing **Recommendations, which tackle the transition gap.** Created on the basis of the Best Practices of the New Education Forum 2016, the Recommendations identify educational transformation priorities. Within the Forum they are subject of evaluation and enhancement by Forum’s international experts as well as by the Members of the European Parliament and the European Commissioners.

Under guidance of the New Education Forum, **evaluated Recommendations will allow educational transformation stakeholders to form a road map on enforcement of crucial learning strategies.**

**Parents and employers cannot afford to wait to challenge the pace of civilizational changes.** They engage in actions, which now can help new generations to cope with constant instability and facilitate entering the adulthood. These “programs” often lead to tangible results in the form of independent living through employability.

The Best Practices of the New Education Forum 2016 are examples of actions responding to rapidly changing labor market, but addressing this issue on a much broader scale. Based on their experience in 6 EU countries: Spain, United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Poland, these models show that civic engagement is the only path for the new learning approach to succeed. **The Recommendation aim at building education strategies, which tackle transition gap issue in diverse European cultures.**

## New Education Forum RECOMMENDATIONS

### Sustainable development

Learning strategy should be embedded within the local community, but should address global issues. Responsible citizenship begins with knowledge about our neighborhood and proactive approach towards confronting its challenges. Furthermore, as early as in preschool children should learn what are the global consequences of actions undertaken by their local community.

The UNESCO 18-nation study found that *“schools exercising Education for Sustainable Development promoted acquisition of additional relevant knowledge and skills, as well as perspectives and values, and helped prepare students for an uncertain future by instilling flexible competencies, empathy and creativity.”* Quoting Scotland’s practice “Learning for Sustainability”, young people *“should develop capacities to become successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; effective contributors”*.

Also, **wider knowledge of the local community functioning is a capital allowing the youth to better understand expectations of the home-based employers as well as possibilities of the market niche.**

### Active Citizenship and Inclusion

XXI century, holistic education should address the issues of social engagement, citizen responsibility, inclusion and tolerance starting from the early education. **Through active citizenship young people obtain important qualities, such as creativity, co-responsibility, team working, problem-solving attitude, communication skills including feedback and leadership skills. All of these competencies are later on highly valued on the labor market.**

Inclusion is the task of the whole society, not just social workers. As shown in the Flemish Best Practice, the whole school system proactively adapts to the crisis situation making educational environment friendly to the refugee minors. Through them there is also a possibility to reach their families, making them part of the learning and adaptation process.

### Development of potential

Fast-changing global economy introduces new technologies in a rapidly rising speed. Therefore, new learning strategies should take into consideration:

- Interdisciplinary learning, which boosts innovations among the learners equipping them with ability to think and act across different subjects, whether in the fields of science, arts, humanities or all of these areas at once. This is the actual adaptation to the present civilization.
- Parallel learning paths allowing for comprehension of different education topics at individual pace. The scheme is based on a proven fact that everyone in the same age learns in different manner at a different speed.
- The learning environment, which should not be limited to school spaces. Involvement in the community and learning in nature should be promoted in order to enhance development of diverse talents among young people.

The above listed solutions are found in i.e. the German initiative Schulle im Aufbruch bringing personal fulfillment and development of students. As a result **they are more aware of their potential and are better prepared to make mature career decisions based on their individual strengths. Thanks to such learning strategies labor market benefits from strongly motivated workers understanding necessity of the life-long learning.** Moreover, individual talents drive innovation, which is an important factor for Europe to compete with other markets.

### Vocational learning and training

Taking to the account CEDEFOP's observation that currently around 48% of STEM-related occupations require medium level qualifications, which VET can play a key role in providing, we support making vocational learning and training (VET) as a first choice for young Europeans. For such idea to be put into practice, three conditions should be met:

- **VET needs to be understood by parents and their children as a different (not better or worse), more independent path** for the young people allowing attainment of actual job as early as at the age of 16/17. VET education must be made attractive to the youth at the age of making career choices (at 15 the latest) as well as to their parents.

- **Member States as well as entrepreneurs need to develop paths and invest in the further development of skills by employees** so they are always equipped with up-to-date and transferable skills and are willing to continue education course for their own benefit as well their employer's.
- As strongly emphasized by BusinessEurope, the largest European employers' organization, vocational education and training should be based upon **factual employers' needs**.

### Up-to-date skills

In the age of robotics and artificial intelligence, it is essential that **children acquire basic numeracy, reading and writing skills as well as digital skills as early as in preschool. This process should be commenced in an attractive and motivating manner**, which has impact on further development of these skills.

The Austrian Best Practice allows self-organized, competency-based learning and development of personal competencies on the basis of e-learning tools in the lower and upper secondary vocational schools in Austria. The model of CoOperative Open Learning Usage of digital media, mobile devices and open pedagogical settings enable acquiring individual competencies using individualized competence grids as an innovative way attractive to young people. Presently this community initiative has been institutionalized on national level and expended to another program: eEducation initiated at elementary schools all the way to upper secondary schools.

Across diverse economy sectors of Member States employers declare their growing expectations for all of their employees to possess digital skills. By 2025 CEDEFOP forecasts increase of employment in STEM-related sectors by 6,5%, as compared to 2013. As majority of graduates fulfilling such terms are coming from higher education, we must ensure these institutions provide relevant, practical skills and training similar to those provided in course of VET.

### Key stakeholders

Last but not least, quoting European Parents' Association: "good practices or inspiring ones become best only when all stakeholders are involved". **To implement best learning strategies students, their parents, teachers, principals, local communities as well as business have to work together**. This should constitute a paradigm shift in order to introduce factual educational transformation moving from XIX century model to present.

Cooperation in such critical task requires mutual trust and partnership. These two factors boost motivation among all stakeholders and are necessary to deliver new quality at school. Such constructive cooperation formation is described within the Spanish Best Practice: School Renewal Process. Active and motivated partners in

educational change are the best allies supporting each other's efforts to create new learning environment. Some partners may still need support in converting from "old" thinking to new reality. If such issue is addressed allies become natural promoters of necessary changes in education.

In order to put the Recommendations into practice, the New Education Forum forces to strongly emphasize preparation of teachers. **Most education providers understand their roles require further recognition than delivery of knowledge, which is now easily accessible through e.g. smartphones.** They are willing to fulfill other, more important task as students' mentors. Polish Best Practice aims at preparing teachers to hold such role. During MENTOR Program educators learn self-motivation methods, practice tools helping define strengths in every child and supporting development of individual education and career paths of the youth.

## Conclusions

Recent European Union initiatives on the integration of the long-term unemployed, the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee, already showing some positive results, need to be acknowledged. They are supported by this year's New Skills Agenda for Europe addressing the issue of adequate acquisition of skills when entering the labor market. Within its' two key competencies to be promoted are: entrepreneurship and transversal skills.

In order for these schemes to fully succeed in their potential, **there is a necessity of holistic approach to education.** Such approach is reflected in the above Recommendations. Taking to the account European Union institutions may only foster actions within education and training as these lie within Member States' competences, the Recommendations aim at opening dialogue on identified priorities of necessary educational transformation and issuing a road map for implementing learning strategies most effectively with support at the EU level.

Rising divergences across European Member States, seen on economic (i.e. unemployment among disadvantaged groups, increasing income disparities) as well as social scales (e.g. approach to such crucial solidarity tasks as inclusion of refugees) are another proof that strengthening common European human capital is necessary. **Learning strategies for children and youth should be placed in the center of our agenda.**