



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

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Commission presents new Rethinking Education strategy

The youth unemployment rate is close to 23% across the European Union – yet at the same time there are more than 2 million vacancies that cannot be filled. Europe needs a radical rethink on how education and training systems can deliver the skills needed by the labour market. The challenge could not be tougher in the context of widespread austerity measures and cuts in education budgets. Today, the European Commission is launching a new strategy called Rethinking Education to encourage Member States to take immediate action to ensure that young people develop the skills and competences needed by the labour market and to achieve their targets for growth and jobs.

Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, said: *"Rethinking education is not just of question of money: whilst it is true that we need to invest more in education and training, it is clear that education systems also need to modernise and be more flexible in how they operate to respond to the real needs of today's society. Europe will only resume sustained growth by producing highly skilled and versatile people who can contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship. Efficient and well-targeted investment is fundamental to this, but we will not achieve our objectives by reducing education budgets."*

Rethinking Education calls for a fundamental shift in education, with more focus on 'learning outcomes' - the knowledge, skills and competences that students acquire. Merely having spent time in education is no longer sufficient. In addition, basic literacy and numeracy still needs to be significantly improved, and entrepreneurial skills and a sense of initiative need to be developed or strengthened (see [IP/12/1224](#) on call for stronger focus on new skills in schools).

To ensure that education is more relevant to the needs of students and the labour market, assessment methods need to be adapted and modernised. The use of ICT and open educational resources (OER) should be scaled-up in all learning contexts. Teachers need to update their own skills through regular training. The strategy also calls on Member States to strengthen links between education and employers, to bring enterprise into the classroom and to give young people a taste of employment through increased work-based learning. EU Education Ministers are also encouraged to step-up their cooperation on work-based learning at national and European level.

Other proposed measures include a new benchmark on language learning, guidelines on the assessment and development of entrepreneurship education, and an EU-level impact analysis on the use of ICT and OER in education to pave the way for a new initiative in 2013 on Opening-up Education, aiming to maximise the potential of ICT for learning.

Background

Skills are key to productivity and Europe needs to respond to the worldwide increase in the quality of education and supply of skills. Forecasts show that more than a third of jobs in the EU will require tertiary level qualifications in 2020 and that only 18% of jobs are expected to be low-skilled.

Currently, 73 million Europeans, around 25% of adults, have a low level of education. Nearly 20% of 15 year olds lack sufficient literacy skills, and in five countries more than 25% are low achievers in reading (Bulgaria, 41%, Romania, 40%, Malta, 36%, Austria, 27.5%, and Luxembourg, 26%). Early school leaving remains at unacceptably high levels in several Member States: in Spain it is 26.5% and in Portugal 23.2% (EU target is under 10%). Less than 9% of adults participate in lifelong learning (EU target is 15%).

The recommendations outlined in Rethinking Education are based on the findings of the 2012 'Education and Training Monitor', a new annual Commission survey which outlines skills supply in the Member States.

Rethinking Education in brief:

- There needs to be a much stronger focus on developing **transversal skills and basic skills** at all levels. This applies especially to entrepreneurial and IT skills.
- A new **benchmark on foreign language learning**: by 2020, at least 50% of 15 year olds should have knowledge of a first foreign language (up from 42% today) and at least 75% should study a second foreign language (61% today).
- Investment is needed to build **world-class vocational education and training systems** and increase levels of work-based learning.
- Member States need to **improve the recognition** of qualifications and skills, including those gained outside of the formal education and training system.
- **Technology**, in particular the internet, must be fully exploited. Schools, universities and vocational and training institutions must increase access to education via open educational resources.
- These reforms must be supported by well-trained, motivated and entrepreneurial **teachers**.
- Funding needs to be targeted to maximise the return on investment. Debate at both national and EU level is needed on **funding for education** - especially in vocational education and higher education.
- A **partnership approach** is critical. Both public and private funding is necessary to boost innovation and increase cross-fertilisation between academia and business.

[Erasmus for All](#), the Commission's proposed €19 billion programme for education, training, youth and sport, would aim to double the number of individuals receiving grants for skills-enhancing opportunities for study, training and volunteering abroad, to 5 million people in 2014-2020. More than two-thirds of the programme's budget would support individual learning mobility of this kind, with the remainder allocated to projects focused on cooperation for innovation, policy reform and sharing good practices.

On 5 December, the Commission is due to present a Youth Employment Package including a proposal for a youth guarantee. This would request Member States to ensure that every young person received a quality offer of employment or training or further education within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. The proposal would foresee full use of EU funding and in particular the European Social Fund.

For more information

[Rethinking Education strategy and annexes](#)

European Commission: [Education and training](#)

[Androulla Vassiliou's website](#)

Follow Androulla Vassiliou on Twitter [@VassiliouEU](#)

Contacts :

[Dennis Abbott](#) (+32 2 295 92 58); Twitter: [@DennisAbbott](#)

[Dina Avraam](#) (+32 2 295 96 67)