

## Recommendations

### The relation between education and the labour market

*Adopted by the Council of Members 2016, Dublin*

#### Introduction:

These recommendations come as result of the project *“Convention: Education and Work”*<sup>1</sup>, organised by OBESSU the Organising Bureau of European School Students Unions.

The alarmingly high rates of youth unemployment, as well as the high rates of Early School Leaving (ESL), with the consequent impact on the social inclusion of young people in Europe, have clear implications on the current discourse on education. Important European strategies like Europe 2020 and ET2020 have emphasised the role education can assume in overcoming the youth unemployment: The idea is that providing young people with the proper skills will allow employers to hire competent young people, so the unemployment rate would decrease.

The connection between education and employment is evident and important, but not completely unproblematic. Firstly, there is no guarantee that providing young people with the skills required today will ensure them the skills required hereafter. Secondly, high rates of youth unemployment also correlate with a lack of quality jobs for young people, which won't be solved through upskilling, especially considering that many are already highly skilled. Thirdly, it should be questioned whether or not the employment aspect should be priority over other aspects of education, such as democratic participation, citizenship education and acquiring social competences. Furthermore, one of the most important actors in this discussion on education - young people themselves - is often not involved in the decision making process: young people need to have a primary role in this debate and the project *“Convention: Education and Work”* aimed at giving them a chance to influence the decision-makers directly.

The project included a specific activity, a meeting aimed at fostering dialogue between young people and policy makers, implemented in Brussels from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. The meeting foresaw the participation of:

- Young people active in school student organisations in Europe at various levels, from activists in grassroots organisations to young people with political responsibilities in their national organisations;
- From the DG Employment of the European Commission experts on the relation between the labour market and education, as well as on the focus on skills for employment that the European Commission is promoting;
- Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) representing different political groups, with experience and interest in the fields of Education, Training and/or Employment;
- Members from Culture and Education (CULT) and Employment (EMPL) Committees;
- Members from the European Youth Forum (YFJ), European Students Union (ESU), CSR Europe and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE).

During the days of the Convention, five main topics have been identified as priority in analysing the connection between education, employment and ESL:

1. The skills mismatch debate;
2. Policies that facilitate the transition from education to work;
3. The role of Vocational Education and Training;
4. The rights of young people in the labour market;
5. School student participation in policy-making related to education and work.

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<sup>1</sup> Ref. 2015-3-BE05-KA347-001792, granted by JINT the Flemish Belgian National Agency, in the framework of the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Commission, KA3 - Stakeholder dialogue and policy promotion.

47 Each topic has been analysed starting from the current situation (the problems that have to be  
48 faced), and then recommending concrete policies that will promote a real change in this situation:  
49 these are the final recommendations.

## 50 **1. Reflection on the skills mismatch debate**

51 OBESSU welcomes the current attention to young people at risk of unemployment, poverty and  
52 social exclusion and the recognition that well designed education systems can make a difference.  
53 However, we are concerned that the dominant approach in the New Skills Agenda<sup>2</sup>, and in particular  
54 the discourse on the so-called “skills mismatch”, is very much coloured by the thought of education  
55 being a means for providing the labour market with ready-to-go workers. There is an unbalanced focus  
56 on the adaptability of young individuals to the needs of the labour market by providing them with a  
57 set of market-defined skills, which might be needed today but not in ten years.

58 The need for high-quality education as a long-term investment in the future of Europe is evident.  
59 However, without changing structural labour market conditions the problems of youth unemployment,  
60 poverty and social exclusion cannot be solved. The tendency to blame these conditions solely on the  
61 “skill-set” and “mindset” of young people is problematic.

62 OBESSU demands building inclusive, learner-focused education systems where school students  
63 from all backgrounds can develop as critical democratic citizens, along with ensuring sustainable and  
64 fair conditions in the labour market where they can find fulfilling work.

65 It is crucial to emphasise that the purpose of education is much broader than just supporting  
66 labour markets. We believe in education as the foundation for active citizenship, peace-building and  
67 fostering solidarity<sup>3</sup>. Education should provide young people with competences and skills for their life  
68 as active citizens, which includes but should never be limited to being innovative workers.

69 School students should thus never be reduced to being human capital. Their right to high quality  
70 education needs to be recognised and invested in. Education systems should be flexible to suit  
71 individual learning paths, instead of following market-dictated curricula. OBESSU supports the  
72 attention to learning transversal skills, as also stated in the New Skills Agenda, such as critical  
73 thinking, problem solving, and the ability to learn independently. Those should be at the heart of the  
74 New Skills Agenda instead of short-term labour market demands. Modern curricula and pedagogical  
75 innovation is needed to ensure that these crucial competences are acquired in formal education.  
76 Information technology can be a good tool for interactive learning while also helping students to  
77 gain key information and technology skills<sup>4</sup>.

78 It also needs to be acknowledged that non-formal education helps young people acquire many key  
79 competences and skills which are crucial for active citizenship. The work of youth organisations in  
80 this field, and in particular school student organisations thus needs to be validated and supported by  
81 governments.

82 *OBESSU therefore demands:*

- 83 • *Investment in high quality education in all parts of the education system;*
- 84 • *Modern curricula including pedagogical innovation to teach transversal skills such as critical*  
85 *thinking and independent learning;*
- 86 • *Better recognition of skills acquired through non-formal education.*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/1-2016-381-EN-F1-1.PDF>

<sup>3</sup> OBESSU Political Platform, line 764-766

<sup>4</sup> OBESSU Policy Paper on ICT Education

## 87 **2. Policies that facilitate the transition from education to work**

88 Currently, the transition from secondary education to work is very difficult for school students.  
89 There is a lack of information and guidance provided for young people to evaluate the variety of  
90 pathways to choose from. In many European countries there is no, or limited career guidance provided  
91 in schools. Often it is forgotten that the aim of career guidance should be to help students realise  
92 their full potential in life, not just the labour market. It furthermore needs to be recognised that  
93 leaving secondary schools requires a lot of information to be processed and decisions to be taken  
94 which go beyond which career the student will pursue. Quality mentoring and counselling services  
95 thus need to be available in all schools and ensure holistic support.

96 Often considered the first step into the labour market, internships and apprenticeships present a  
97 great opportunity for young people to gain some working experience and develop their interests and  
98 competences, before entering formal employment. However, while this seems ideal in theory, in  
99 practice young people's internship and apprenticeship conditions are often highly insecure. Unpaid  
100 low-quality internships taking place outside formal education are frequently used to replace quality  
101 employment for young people – making their entry to the labour market more difficult rather than  
102 easier. Apprenticeship conditions also vary greatly all over Europe and in some countries legal  
103 regulation is missing, posing young people at risk of exploitation.

104 When young people manage to get into formal employment, their potential is often not fully used.  
105 Companies fail to recognise many skills that young people already have when entering the labour  
106 market. These include skills from formal education, but also those that they acquired during their  
107 non-formal education or various activities outside of their formal education. This means we are losing  
108 out on a lot of innovation.

109 Schools need to prepare the students for key future transitioning periods. These include  
110 transitions from education to labour markets, but also between different educational paths and job  
111 sectors. It is therefore key that they get the tools to take the best decisions for themselves.  
112 Information and help has to be provided from the institution they are about to leave. High quality  
113 and accessible career guidance or mentor counselling has to be adopted in all schools to support  
114 students in their transitioning. Educational institutions need to have a more holistic approach to  
115 students' future pathways and life decisions, and support them in any ways possible. It is crucial that  
116 the approach is learner centred.

117 We expect policy makers and educational institutions to ensure that competences and skills are fully  
118 recognized between different educational and labour market sectors. Further education and training  
119 opportunities must be accessible to learners at all stages. Only in this way we will allow young people  
120 to choose the paths according to their needs, leaving space for flexible transitioning.

121 Concerning internships and apprenticeships, we believe that they should mainly be a learning  
122 experience, and not be used as an opportunity for employers to have low-paid, unprotected workers.  
123 They thus need to be protected by legally binding contracts and decent payment needs to be ensured  
124 by law. Social partners in cooperation with youth stakeholders such as school student unions need to  
125 monitor the compliance with such a quality internship and apprenticeship framework.

126 The private sector should be open to listening to learners' expectations and needs, to ensure that  
127 transitions are smooth for both sides. Best practice exchanges and consultations with educational  
128 institutions are thus beneficial. This would also enable a better understanding of the skills and  
129 competences young people have in the labour market, to ensure that employers are providing better  
130 opportunities to applying them. It is crucial however, that the private sector's cooperation with  
131 schools should be limited, as education is first and foremost a public good and should remain an  
132 independent sector.

133 *OBESSU thus demands:*

- 134 • *High quality life and career counselling and guidance to be provided by all schools;*
- 135 • *Legal frameworks and monitoring of quality internships and apprenticeships;*
- 136 • *Competence and skills recognition across education and labour market sectors*

- 137 • *Consultations of employers to ensure a better understanding and usage of young*  
138 *people's existing skills and competences*

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### 140 **3. The role of Vocational Education and Training**

141 The general discourse about Vocational Education and Training (VET) and its students is what  
142 often counteracts students reaching their full potential. It is commonly seen as a “second-choice”  
143 education, which is also reflected in VET schools being underfunded. This leads to fulfilling the  
144 prophecy of VET being less “attractive” education. Schools often have not enough money to provide  
145 the newest tools and equipments, which is essential to get the best possible education.

146 When VET is not prioritised and not given enough funding, the “continuing professional  
147 development” (CPD) of teachers is lacking widely<sup>5</sup>. One of the keys to high quality education is  
148 teachers who are up to date with the newest information and technologies that exist in the field.  
149 When schools are underfunded, the CPD is not ensured and the courses remain outdated resulting in  
150 low-quality education.

151 The role of education for personal development and democratic citizenship is often forgotten in  
152 VET, where a labour-market focus dominates. We believe that high school-leaving rates in Vocational  
153 schools can be attributed to a lack of learner-centred education, counselling and student  
154 participation. The labour-market tailored education should thus be part of a more holistic and  
155 participatory educational approach which allows students to become active citizens, not just workers.

156 OBESSU thus demands substantial investments in the VET system. It needs to be secured that  
157 curricula and educational material are updated and that teachers are provided with regular CPD. If  
158 VET is prioritised and given resources to provide quality education, VET students can finally fulfil their  
159 true potential.

160 Better funding of VET will also allow providing better student counselling and creating more room  
161 for student-centred learning and education in democratic citizenship, which is crucial for student  
162 wellbeing.

163 *OBESSU believes there is a need to:*

- 164 • *Investments in VET;*  
165 • *Secure quality CPD of teachers;*  
166 • *Update educational material;*  
167 • *Strengthen or put in place quality student counselling;*  
168 • *Limit labour-market influence;*  
169 • *Promote student-centred learning.*

### 170 **4. The rights of young people in the labour market**

171 The situation of young people in the labour market is characterised by high rates of temporary and  
172 part-time jobs which often come with underemployment and precarious working conditions<sup>6</sup>. Whilst  
173 about half of those aged 15-24 say the reason to work part-time is because they are in education and  
174 training, a third cannot find a full time job. This correlates with young people being amongst those  
175 with the highest rates of at risk of poverty and social exclusion<sup>7</sup>. Insecure jobs are becoming the norm  
176 rather than an option for Europe's youth.

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<sup>5</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/publications/monitor15\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/monitor15_en.pdf)  
p.54-55

<sup>6</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being\\_young\\_in\\_Europe\\_today\\_-\\_labour\\_market\\_-\\_access\\_and\\_participation](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_labour_market_-_access_and_participation)

<sup>7</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe\\_2020\\_indicators\\_-\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion)

177 It appears that young people have had to bear the burden of increasingly deregulated labour  
178 markets, which have created more insecurity for them than for older workers<sup>8</sup>. Especially the most  
179 vulnerable such as young people with disabilities and youth from ethnic minority and migrant  
180 background have been the most excluded from quality work<sup>9</sup>. OBESSU is thus concerned that the  
181 current debate on the New Skills Agenda seems to be dominated by an “any job for young people is a  
182 good job” approach. The focus when discussing employment lies on the side of young people’s  
183 individual skills while the conditions for young people in the labour market are hardly considered.

184 Young people are entitled to the same rights to decent work as older workers, but this has long not  
185 been recognised. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states that “every worker has the right  
186 to working conditions which respect their health, safety and dignity”<sup>10</sup>, and the Universal Declaration  
187 of Human Rights holds that “everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration,  
188 to favourable conditions of work and protection against unemployment”<sup>11</sup>. The current characteristics  
189 of young people in the labour market indicate that their rights are not fulfilled. More action from  
190 policy makers is needed to ensure that all young people have access to high quality work. As  
191 unemployment, poverty and social exclusion of young people has negative long-term impacts<sup>12</sup>, it  
192 should be avoided through all possible measures. Furthermore, they need to be informed about their  
193 rights and have easy access to legal support if these are violated.

194 Policies to improve the conditions of young people in the labour market include the Youth  
195 Guarantee<sup>13</sup>, the stimulation of quality job creation and minimum wage reform. The Youth Guarantee  
196 is a promising way to avoid youth unemployment, but needs to be implemented and monitored fully  
197 across all countries. Governments furthermore ought to stimulate job creation for young people which  
198 support individual growth and fulfilment. Finally, young people's wages and working conditions need  
199 to be monitored more, with a particular attention to disadvantaged groups. A country's minimum  
200 wage must apply to all people, including the young and must provide enough for a living. Working  
201 conditions should be flexible to individual's needs, but yet secure and provide space for self-  
202 development. This is crucial for young people's wellbeing, autonomy and active participation in  
203 society.

204 *OBESSU believes that there is a need to:*

- 205 • *Inform young people of their labour rights and monitor compliance;*
- 206 • *Introduce stronger anti-discrimination measures;*
- 207 • *Stimulate creation for quality jobs;*
- 208 • *Implement the Youth Guarantee fully;*
- 209 • *Ensure young people's access to a decent living wage*
- 210 • *Monitor the working conditions of young people*

## 211 **5. School students' participation**

212 In the public and political debate about education and work, the interests of the target group,  
213 school students, are often forgotten. If we want to tackle the aforementioned problems, students and  
214 young people have to be a part of the debate and the decisions-making process, on a local, national  
215 and European level.

216 On a local level, there is a need for a legal framework ensuring student representatives in school  
217 boards. Instead of solely teaching about the principles of democracy, schools must practice

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<sup>8</sup> <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12290-013-0277-z>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/generation\\_lost\\_touchstone\\_extras\\_2012.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/generation_lost_touchstone_extras_2012.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 4, Article 31.

<sup>11</sup> Article 23.

<sup>12</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/multiple-scarring-effects-of-youth-unemployment/>

<sup>13</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426(01)&from=EN)

218 democracy as well. With regards to policy making on transitions from education to work, a student  
219 perspective needs to be secured when negotiating cooperation with apprenticeship and internship  
220 providers. This is essential to guarantee that these respect the rights of young people concerning  
221 wages and decent working conditions. Students must also be involved when discussing needs for  
222 school counselling to ensure that proper guidance is available when it comes to transitioning to  
223 further education and the labour market.

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225 On a national level, we call for students to be a part of shaping national educational reforms to ensure  
226 that their interests and demands for future education and labour market policies are heard.

227 On a European level, school student representatives need to be granted participation in the  
228 formulation and implementation of policies and strategies concerning education and labour market  
229 such as Education and Training 2020 or New Skills Agenda.

230 *OBESSU believes that there is a need to:*

- 231 • *Create legal framework for student participation in school boards;*
- 232 • *Involve students in shaping of content of guidance and counselling services;*
- 233 • *Guarantee students' participation in the making of educational reforms;*
- 234 • *Cooperate with young people when discussing legal rights for workers;*
- 235 • *Include young people when discussing international youth-strategies.*

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