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Subject:	Council Recommendation on tracking graduates

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates, adopted by the Council at its 3577th meeting held on 20 November 2017.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 20 November 2017

on tracking graduates

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) The employability of graduates leaving education and training is a matter of concern in many Member States, in particular because the employment rate of recent higher education graduates in the Union has not fully recovered after the 2008 financial crisis¹ and the employment situation of graduates of vocational education and training programmes varies across Member States.
- (2) Therefore, Member States, in cooperation with social partners, were encouraged, through the Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States for 2015², to promote productivity and employability through an appropriate supply of relevant knowledge, skills and competences.

¹ COM/2015/0690 final.

² Council Decision (EU) 2015/1848 of 5 October 2015 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States for 2015 (OJ L 268, 15.10.2015, p. 28).

- (3) To achieve that objective, good quality information about what graduates do after obtaining their qualification or leaving education and training is essential, in order to both understand the causes of graduate employability problems in particular regions, economic sectors or for graduates from particular higher education or vocational education and training disciplines, and to identify solutions for those employability problems. The value of such information is highlighted in both the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)³ and the European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)⁴.
- (4) However, since the systems for collecting, analysing and using data on the outcomes for graduates from higher education and vocational education and training are not well developed in many parts of the Union, better information is needed for students to make informed choices about what to study, or for the design of educational programmes or government policy.
- (5) Moreover, transitions to the labour market are largely driven by the economic context, level of qualification and field of study. They are also influenced by socio-demographic factors and socio-economic background of the family⁵. Therefore gathering data on the impact of those various factors is essential to address the issue comprehensively.
- (6) Although many Member States are developing systems for tracking, the exchange of knowledge, good practice and mutual learning is limited.
- (7) Since existing comparable data are limited in scope and data collected nationally are not comparable to that collected in other Member States, it is challenging to draw any conclusions from differences in trends or outcomes across countries and regions.

³ ISBN 952-5539-04-0.

⁴ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (OJ C 155, 8.07.2009, p. 1).

⁵ On the impact of the sex and migration background on transition from school to the labour market, see OECD/European Union (2015), *Indicators of Immigration Integration 2015 – Settling In*, Chapter 13.

- (8) The results of the public consultation⁶ on the Union's modernisation agenda for higher education revealed concerns that higher education is not providing graduates with the knowledge, skills and competences that they need to thrive in a rapidly evolving educational and employment environment, and that there remain continued skills mismatches in some Member States.
- (9) Member States have called for action at Union level, aimed at improving the flow of information about employability, skills mismatches and labour market needs. In particular, the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)⁷ proposes the promotion of the relevance of higher education to the labour market and society, including through better intelligence and anticipation about labour market needs and outcomes, for example tracking the career of graduates.
- (10) Member States also committed themselves to ensuring continuous information and feedback loops in the Riga Conclusions of 2015 on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015 – 2020, through actions such as the use of data on VET graduate employability and a combination of data on learning, labour market entry and career, developing capacities of actors at national level to use graduate data for adapting curricula, occupational profiles and the content of VET qualifications to new economic and technical requirements.
- (11) Subsequently, in the Resolution on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016⁸, Member States highlighted the importance of addressing skills mismatches and skills gaps as a matter of priority.

⁶ SWD/2016/0195 final.

⁷ OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25.

⁸ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 24 February 2016 on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016, (OJ C 105, 19.3.2016, p. 1).

- (12) This built on previous work. Member States agreed, in the Council Conclusions on entrepreneurship in education and training⁹ from 2014, to make use of tracking information, wherever possible, when assessing the quality and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education and training.
- (13) In 2013, Member States agreed, in the Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Higher Education¹⁰, to facilitate the provision of information on educational and labour market-related opportunities and outcomes.
- (14) Member States also agreed, in the Council Conclusions on the employability of graduates from education and training¹¹ of 2012, to establish a benchmark that by 2020 82% of 20-34 year-old graduates, having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year, should be employed and to monitor the share of employed graduates from education and training, with a view to enhancing the evidence base for policy development on the interface between education and training and employment, while Member States and the Commission agreed to collect qualitative information and good practices, in order to complement quantitative monitoring and enhance the foundation for evidence-based policy making.
- (15) Therefore, the European Commission, in the Communication on a New Skills Agenda for Europe¹², has prioritised the improvement of skills intelligence and information for better career choices by proposing an initiative on tertiary graduate tracking to support Member States in improving information about the transition of graduates to the labour market. In this context this Recommendation provides a complementary approach to Member States' initiatives, and commitments are of voluntary nature.

⁹ OJ C 17, 20.1.2015, p. 2

¹⁰ OJ C 168, 14.6.2013, p. 2.

¹¹ OJ C 169/15.6.2012, p. 11.

¹² COM(2016) 381 final.

RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:

In accordance with relevant national and Union law, in particular Directive 95/46/EC concerning the protection of personal data¹³, available resources and national circumstances, and in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders:

1. Improve the availability and quality of data about the activities of graduates¹⁴ and, where appropriate, people leaving higher education and vocational education and training without graduating, including making progress by 2020 on the establishment of graduate tracking systems that may include:
 - (a) the collection of relevant anonymised administrative statistical data from education, tax, population and social security databases;
 - (b) the development of longitudinal graduate surveys at education system and, where appropriate, institutional level, in recognition of the importance of qualitative data on people's transition to the labour market, or to further education and training, and their subsequent career paths; and
 - (c) the possibility for public authorities to link, on an anonymised basis, data from different sources, in order to build a composite picture of graduate outcomes.

¹³ Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 281, 23.11.1995 p. 31).

¹⁴ For the purposes of this Council Recommendation, 'graduate' refers to a person completing any level of higher education or vocational education and training (at EQF level 4 and above). It is recognised, however, that some Member States have initiatives to track school leavers also.

Content of data to be collected

2. In recognition of the ambition behind this Council Recommendation of improving the comparability of data, Member States should collect data in the following areas:
 - (a) socio-biographical and socio-economic information
 - (b) information on education and training
 - (c) information on employment or further education and training
 - (d) relevance of education and training to employment or life-long learning
 - (e) career progression

Longitudinal graduate surveys

3. Encourage a high, representative and continued response rate to longitudinal graduate surveys, and, when possible, the tracking of graduates who have migrated, whether for the purposes of education and training or on completion of their education and training.

European Cooperation

4. Participate in a network of experts, which encourages cooperation and mutual learning among Member States regarding tracking systems and their further development. This network will explore options for developing comparable data and common definitions, as referred to in paragraph 2. With regard to longitudinal surveys, as referred to in paragraphs 3 and 9, the network will explore options for developing common principles, optimal frequency and how to track graduates who have migrated.
5. This network is to be organised in line with existing governance structures for cooperation within the Education and Training 2020 framework, without prejudice to any new structures which may follow it.

Dissemination and exploitation of results

6. Take steps to ensure the timely, regular and broad dissemination and exploitation of the results of graduate tracking analysis, with the objective of:
 - (a) strengthening career guidance for prospective students, current students and graduates;
 - (b) supporting the designing and updating of curricula to improve acquisition of relevant skills and employability;
 - (c) improving skills matching to support competitiveness and innovation at local, regional and national level, and to resolve skills shortages;
 - (d) planning for and forecasting of evolving employment, educational and social needs; and
 - (e) contributing to policy development at both national and Union level.

Funding

7. Ensure the sustainability of graduate tracking initiatives by allocating adequate and multi-annual resources, making use of national or European sources of funding, such as Erasmus+ or European Structural and Investment Funds, where appropriate and in line with existing resources, legal basis and priorities defined for the period 2014-2020, without any prejudice to negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Reporting

8. Within two years from the adoption of this Recommendation, and regularly thereafter, assess and report to the Commission, through the network of experts, on progress in the implementation of this Recommendation.

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT THE COMMISSION:

9. Develop the pilot phase of a European graduate survey in tertiary education¹⁵, which aims to improve the availability of comparable information on graduate employment and social outcomes taking into account the results of the Eurograduate Feasibility Study^[16] and the experiences of Member States with their graduate tracking systems. Within three years from the adoption of this Recommendation present a report of the results of this pilot study to the network of experts. Should the pilot phase prove successful, the Commission will consult Member States about whether to proceed to a full roll-out of a European graduate survey in tertiary education.
10. Provide capacity building support as needed, for the establishment of graduate tracking systems, based on good practices. In the case of vocational education and training, this will include a comprehensive mapping across Member States, that addresses options for cooperation at Union level and could serve as a basis for exploring the feasibility of a European graduate survey in vocational education and training, if deemed necessary. In the context of capacity building, support will also be provided for cooperation among authorities, providers of vocational education and training and guidance services with a view to improving the availability, comparability and reliability of graduate tracking data.
11. Promote mutual learning and exchange of best practices, strengthen cooperation by establishing and supporting the network of experts, and cooperate with other relevant expert groups, international organisations and EU institutions and agencies.
12. Ensure that results of graduate tracking analysis are made available for use by Member States and stakeholders.
13. Support the use of European sources of funding, such as Erasmus+ or European Structural and Investment Funds, where appropriate and in line with their financial capacity, legal basis, decision-making procedures and priorities defined for the period 2014-2020, without any prejudice to negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

¹⁵ At EQF level 5 and above.

¹⁶ The Eurograduate Feasibility Study covers only higher education.

14. Report to the Council on the implementation of this Recommendation within five years of its adoption.

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION:

Done at Brussels, 20 November 2017

For the Council

The President

M. REPS
