

MINUTES OF MEETING: The European Year of Skills – What Comes Next? (closing conference)

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Minutes taken by:	Tereza Čechová, Lucie Münchová – Consultants for Education

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Opening speech

Margrethe Vestager, *Executive Vice President of the European Commission for a Europe fit for the Digital Age*

- today we are marking the end of the **European Year of Skills (EYS)** – the aim of the conference is to look back at what happened and what was accomplished during the year, but also reflect on future steps
- changing job or starting a new job is always difficult, but it is also a possibility for improvement and learning something new (learning new professional and personal skills, stepping out of our comfort zones)
- changes in the economy are happening faster and faster and the digital transition is a crucial part of the process – it is already difficult to find a job where people do not need digital skills and soon it might be impossible to find a job where AI is not used at all
- people are changing jobs more and more often, therefore adaptability and new skills are crucial
- there is a need to enable ourselves to trust technology and to use it to the benefit of all
- all EU policies connected with digitalization are also about people and people-centered approaches to digitalization
- digitalization is also a crucial aspect of green transition – the green and digital twin transitions together create jobs and prosperity and only if we succeed in this regard, we can also create socially equal society
- therefore, EU competitiveness depends on skills development and skilling people need to be a core strategic priority
- skills are at the intersection of social justice, strong economy and the digital and green transition
- there are still huge gaps in hiring the people that businesses need (70% of SMEs report that their biggest challenge in growing and scaling-up is hiring talented people)



- some good practice examples:
 - [J.O.B. vert training programme](#): employing people in Belgium in the area of landscape gardening and ecological farming, co-financed by the ESF
 - [Cybersecurity Skills Academy](#): streamlining the processes in the area of cybersecurity and offering clear definition of skills needed in this field
- the European Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) also put a lot of resources into skills
 - total spending in member states is almost 18 billion EUR on vocational education and training, adult education and skills recognition (e.g. focusing on labour market reforms, allowing people to get skills they need)
 - RRF is also ensuring that spending is more effective, strategic and brings the right skills
- to support skills development cooperation on all levels is essential (organization level, local level, regional level, national level, European level) – in the context of EYS more than 2000 events were organized which shows this cooperation and great interest in the topic

National Coordinators: Conversation on skills

Belgium: *Guibert Debroux, Head of Department “Skills & Training, Business Services and Operational Partnerships” - Le Forem (Walloon Public Employment and Vocational Training Service)*

3 national coordinators in Belgium (for Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels)

- first the 3 BE coordinators had to find a common ground and common goals
- under the BE PRES Belgium initiated the joint **European Year of Skills statement of national coordinators** to show cooperation and leave a legacy of the EYS
 - focus on up/re skilling to manage labour market shortages and the impact of twin transition
 - focus on work-place learning, apprenticeships and traineeships (while maintaining inclusive approach)
 - Flanders coordinator’s point of view:
 - there is a need for skills in all policy areas and fields, because we are facing serious shortages in occupations and we need to focus on finding talented people
 - important steps in other policy areas are needed to get people into the labour market (e.g. improving childcare services), which is why we need to cooperate across all sectors
 - Brussels region coordinator’s point of view:
 - the joint statement highlights the idea of inclusivity – current labour shortages are an opportunity to involve more all groups of disadvantaged people, but high-quality training is crucial to make this happen
 - there are many job opportunities in Brussels, but also many young people with qualifications not recognized by the authorities – there is a need for all stakeholders (public and private) to work together to remove these barriers and to promote inclusion and gender equality

Bulgaria: *Natalia Efremova, Deputy Minister – Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

- notable changes happened in the skills policy in the context of EYS – there are 3 main highlights:
 1. skills emerged very high on the political agenda – unified and focused policy on skills was created (including legislative changes), focusing specifically on reforms of vocational education and training and adult education
 2. together with OECD the analysis based national action plan of skills was developed with the aim to improve skills of young people and adults and to improve to governance of skills policies in Bulgaria (the plan will be finalized soon, including specific activities, initiatives and indicators for monitoring)



3. conditions for easy access to different types of training were created (mostly funded from ESF and RRF) in cooperation with training organizations, academia and social partners – curricula were updated, new modern training methods were created for secondary education, higher education and the short-courses for adults (including the introduction of micro-credentials)
 - recently also started a massive project for digital skills (over 60 000 people are to be trained)

Finland: Teea Oja, Chief Specialist – Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland

- EYS joint responsibility of two ministries: Education and culture, Economic affairs and employment – together focusing on training of employees, learning in workplaces
- establishing Service Centre for continuous learning – focusing on up/reskilling
- maintaining continuous dialogue with all relevant stakeholders (e.g. via forums and working groups)
- focusing also on guidance services while taking holistic approach to skills – digital matching of skills and jobs is already in place together with digital study service (providing information about studies, offering possibility to apply for studies, etc.)
- currently the two ministries are developing digital services for continuous learning (to be launched in 2025) – people will be able to create individual skills profile, check their current labour market status, find inspiration for career plans and next steps, etc. – the service will offer opportunities for further development and training and a match making tool between employers and employees

France: Marianne de Brunhoff, Project Director – Ministry of Labour

- responsibility for EYS activities shared by ministry of labour and the APEC employment association – in addition also working with ministry of education, higher education, social partners and companies
- EYS gave overall coherence and visibility to both already running initiatives and new initiatives started during the year
- focusing on: digital and green transition, demographic transition, promotion of validation of skills, mobilities, apprenticeships
- EYS as a possibility to compare approaches and situation on a broader EU level and learn about other EU initiatives
- Individual learning accounts: France as a leader and a good practice example on this initiative, success based on 3 main factors:
 1. ensuring universal right of everyone to access lifelong professional learning and training
 2. close dialogue and cooperation with social partners (via national agreements)
 3. very simple use of the created portal - each person has an account and has 500 EUR per year to access/buy training courses (800 EUR in case of people without qualifications), can be used for 10 years for each person, in 2022 used by 1,8 million people, in 2023 used by 2 million people (approximately one third are job seekers, the rest are employed people who want to up/reskill; approximately 30% are over 45 years old)

Spain: Maria Antonia Agudo, Deputy Director General for Institutional Relations and Judicial Assistance – Spanish Public Employment Service (SEPE)

- close cooperation with regions, social partners, education providers, etc. in the context of EYS
- organized a high-level conference on active job market policy last year in Barcelona
- examples of good practices developed during the EYS:



- [TandEM](#) programme for youth employment which aims to improve the employability of young people between 16 and 29 years of age (slogan “learn by working, work by learning”)
- digital literacy programme for women in rural areas which aims to offer basic digital skills training
- programme offering free digital training for workers (cooperation of public and private entities)

Q&A:

Q: How can we improve coordination and the work with national coordinators on national levels?

- NE (Bulgaria): In Bulgaria, there is a specific website for year of skills, which will continue working and all information, initiatives and programmes are published there, including contact information.
- MAA (Spain): collaboration is absolutely crucial and we need to ensure that every relevant stakeholder (public and private) is invited to the table

Q: What were the main milestones and what has changed during the EYS?

- MdB (France): sharing a common goal was very beneficial, EYS stimulated action and cooperation in various areas (e.g. developing lifelong training a professional transition, motivating people with the lowest qualifications to up/reskill)
- TO (Finland): motivating disadvantaged people was crucial, because increasing up/reskilling opportunities is not enough if people do not want to take part in them – in Finland focusing on outreach activities and piloting new ways how to raise awareness about all created opportunities

Q: How to deal with the issue of quality assurance in the context of Individual learning accounts?

- MdB (France): we are working on the issue now and need to focus on it more in the future also in cooperation with the training providers
- NE (Bulgaria): We are starting to work on the initiative now and we see that there are a lot of issues (including financial ones), the mapping has started in Bulgaria

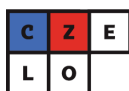
The European Year of Skills: a stepping-stone towards Europe’s skills revolution

Caroline Mancel, *Chair of the European Network of Public Employment Services and Deputy Director General of Actiris (Brussels Public Employment Service)*

- in the context of EYS focusing on multiplying initiatives and projects (e.g. in Portugal they increased the training of migrants and launched a new assessment of language and digital skills),
- the Network adopted an opinion paper promoting successful approaches, examples and recommendations
- focus on training of disadvantaged groups is also part of the Network’s agenda
- 27 public employment services across the EU signed a memorandum with a lot of activities (e.g. proposals on skills intelligence, data collection and analysis and pooling of resources on data and IT tools while ensuring their protection and respecting ethical standards, more focus on synergies, creating common definition of “labour shortages”, etc.)
- would like to declare the “decade of skills” instead of “just” a year

Paolo Nardi, *Executive Director of the European Forum for Vocational Education and Training (EfVET)*

- EfVET’s focus is primarily outside of the EU - supporting and fostering cooperation, internationalization, international mobilities, networks with international institutions
- in May co-organizing a conference in Brussels [The EVENT 2024: The European Agenda for the Future of VET](#)



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- EfVET's approach to inclusion:
 - promoting opportunities and exchanges, e.g. via open group on LinkedIn and various webinars with the aim to share good practice examples
 - general quality task force
 - looking at what is happening on the ground and collecting good practice examples (e.g. integration of refugees in hospitality sector, training for digital and cybersecurity skills, etc.)

Fernando Sigchos Jimenez, *Secretary General of the European Builders Confederation (EBC)*

- construction as a transitional sector – need to look at how the twin transition (and the skills transition) is changing the approaches to construction and how it is impacting the sector
- there is a horizontal need within the sector to change and to upskill (e.g. skills in energy efficiency, in using technologies, etc.)
- among other things focusing on generation Z and how they see the changes and the sector as such and showing them what they can expect if they go work in the construction (combatting stereotypes)
- actively working on reaching out to various target groups (e.g. via practical sessions), starting from a very low age and continuing at higher levels of education
- focusing on the promotion of the sector among women and trying to attract more women (e.g. creating a podcast with women already in the field, implementing an Erasmus+ project on the topic, etc.)

Per Schrøder, *Executive Vice President of Operations of the Danish State Railways (DSB)*

- huge focus and campaign to attract more women – creating a completely new programme which is more inclusive, modern and more focused on women, including changes in recruitment procedures (e.g. changes in wording and less use of “male dominated words”)
- adjusting a curriculum (shortening training programme from year to approximately 2 months) – need for a very close cooperation to make this possible (including the use of AI)

Giuseppina Tucci, *Representative of the European Apprentices Network (EAN) & Secretary General of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)*

- the EAN started to fill a gap and it focused on how to make apprenticeships more visible and to take into account apprentices views and opinions
- focusing on engaging more broadly, while tackling two main issues for young people: mental health and mobility, furthermore, focusing also e.g. on skills related to the AI and upcoming European Parliament elections
- EAN working as an enabler of young people, amplifying their needs, bringing them closer to the EU institutions and providing information about relevant opportunities
- Erasmus+ programme used for the promotion of mobilities

Brikena Xhomaqi, *Director of Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)*

- LLLP involved in a recent policy experimentation project on validation of transversal (soft) skills – results: validation of these skills and tools for validation almost don't exist and there are almost no processes to validate these skills – some good examples include e.g. psychometric studies or psychology tests, but they are not very well known and widely spread, which is a problem if we want to focus on these skills more (we need to be able to validate and evaluate transversal skills better to include them more fully into e.g. work interviews)
- adult learning rate is currently around 39% in the EU, but the targets are much higher – LLLP members are implementing a lot of inspiring projects, one of the main points being promoted is the right for lifelong learning (regardless of whether people are employed or not – skills are



not only about people on the labour market, but also about retired people, or very young children and pupils)

- there is a need for a holistic approach and proper guidance for all target groups – the supporting mechanisms need to be developed further and need to become stronger

Q&A:

Q: Can you give some examples of projects focused on inclusion?

- PN: E.g. one of the Erasmus+ Centres of Vocational Excellence projects: [GIVE](#) – aiming to change training for trainers to change their approach to inclusion

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Q: Should we focus more on skills or competences?

- GT: We want competent citizens with capacity to learn and we want to nurture their talent. Once we make them realize this, then we want to offer them relevant training. In general, we are focusing more on labour markets and jobs, but we should also focus on being decent citizens.
- FSJ: I don't see this as "either or" – both should go together and they should not be separated
- CM: To increase employment rate, we need competent citizens and ensure access to training for everyone

Q: How do we integrate empathy into training and education and what methods do we use to teach it?

- CM: The education system is crucial in this regard; we need to show children by examples how important empathy is and that they can't think only about themselves.
- BX: Yes, there is a need to start early, but then to also continue throughout whole life (which is a process which can be applied to all transversal skills – we need to continue their development regularly).
- GT: Teaching empathy is also connected with evaluation – e.g. building empathy by non-standard evaluation methods (giving relevant feedback to children and students rather than "standard scoring")

Spotlight: The 'Pact for Skills' in action

The Skills Partnership for Offshore Renewable Energy: Mariana Batista (*Senior Advisor Education & Skills*) & **Elisabete Pinto da Silva** (*Steel structures specialist*), *WindEurope*

- MB: currently running an Erasmus+ project focused on career awareness raising, launching pilot actions to share knowledge, to support skill development, the Pact helps up/re skilling opportunities, but there is still the need to scale-up, to further build the partnerships and cooperation and to focus on talent finding and retention
- Elisabete: study in metallurgy, traineeship in Belgium, later PhD in Belgium specializing in steel technology, key success factor: a lot of specialized training and concrete work experience

2500th Pact member: Mike Kaminaris (*AGENSO*)

- AGENSO = environmental company in Greece (team of 15-20 people), started in 2016, involved in around 30 EU projects on various topics (agriculture, smart cities, water management, circular economy of water), using AI based solutions
- involved in both Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ projects
- the Pact enhanced AGENSO's previous activities, help to up/reskill and to grow new company's activities



Spotlight: EU Agencies driving progress and impact

Manuela Prina, *Head of Skills Identification and Development Unit, European Training Foundation (ETF)*

- ETF and Cedefop are sister agencies, but ETF is focusing outside of the EU (mostly Neighbourhood, Central Asia, African union, etc.) - supporting dialogue on skills, comparison, validation, etc.
- there is a need to address the labour skills shortages together with our neighbours, because some labour shortages are common (e.g. green and digital skills are in demand everywhere)
- solving problems of EU should not be at the price of transferring the problem somewhere else (e.g. take talented people from outside to the EU, therefore adding to the "brain drain in some areas) - this should be part of European Pillar of Social rights
- in the future we should be talking about the global decade of skills, rather than just one year
- request to all to keep the international dimension in mind and make their participation easier,
- organizing survey among stakeholders about what they expect from EYS and skills agenda in general

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Jürgen Siebel, *Executive Director of Cedefop*

- Cedefop working inside the EU offering insights for policy making (skills intelligence, skills credentialing, etc.)
- technological changes are enhancing productivity and work life of people, but are also taking away some tasks and understanding this is crucial for the future and policy developments
- several studies and surveys show that those who require training the most are those that participate the least (this leaves untapped opportunities, which also aggravate labour shortages) – there is a need to make learning standard at work, need to reach out to these disadvantaged groups
- EYS showed that skills are in the centre and connecting all areas (no skills means no projects, no twin transition and no solving of challenges)
- beneficiaries of learning: individual, employer and society (they all must invest in the process)
- in the future we have to improve government structures, become much better at skills mismatch management

Discussion group - The human edge: leveraging transversal skills in the AI-driven workplace

Introduction to the topic by the Malta's national coordinators (the National Skills council)

- study from 2023 (Eloundou, Manning, Mishkin, Rocks) - how AI and large language models influence jobs - science and critical thinking have strong negative association with exposure, programming and writing skills have strong positive association with exposure
- influencing factors: not only technology, but also political instability, environmental sustainability, demographic change, urbanisation, globalisation, increasing inequality,
- there is a need to change terminology and use not "hard" but rather "technical" skills, not "soft" but rather "transversal" skills
- education is often blamed for not preparing students well enough, but technical skills are quite difficult to predict, therefore it is difficult to adapt their teaching quickly; on the other hand, transversal skills remain valid across any job for a long period of time and therefore in this regard, transversal skills are easier to teach
- UNESCO Competence framework and "How to conduct effective employee skill assessment?" publication – stressing the importance of collaboration with HR departments, because there is a need to first train and upskill people who are then selecting employees (companies need to be able to identify competencies they need so that they can then hire the right people)



- survey done in Malta - 80% of organisations said that they recognise the importance of transversal skills and they invest in promoting them
- innovative pedagogies and training methods to foster transversal skills include e.g. coaching, experiential learning, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, design thinking
- HR learning and development model shows the division of learning methods: 70% workplace learning (informal, on the job), 20% social learning (nonformal near the job learning), 10% structured learning (formal off the job learning)
- most requested competencies based on research in Malta: basic competencies (literacy, applied STEM, digital literacy, learning to learn, etc.), technical competencies (broad competencies like project management, design thinking, data analysis, specific on the job training), transversal competencies

Small groups discussion on the topic of transversal skills in the AI driven workplace:

- identification of transversal skills is mostly based on personal discussions and contact, peer-feedback, self-evaluation
- there are no specific strategies and tools applied so far to specifically identify and train transversal skills
- maybe there could be the possibility to use AI in the hiring process to automatically compare and look at the more “technical” and clear criteria (e.g. attained level of education), leaving more time for transversal skills to be discussed during personal interviews (AI cannot evaluate transversal skills, not now and probably not even in the future)
- AI is already changing some workplaces - mostly in the area of writing texts - e.g. students in schools quickly learned to use ChatGPT to write homework
- importance of digital literacy, openness and not seeing AI as something negative (organization which see AI as something negative will be left behind eventually, because AI is here to stay)
- main takeaways: transversal skills are the most beneficial skills in the AI driven world, there is a crucial need to balance between AI and human factor and to create culture of sharing and of encouraging transversal skills, there is also a need to focus on critical and ethical thinking
- the human factor still remains (and will remain) the most important (we are not only employees/workers, we are human beings in the first place) – therefore we need to think how we can use AI to further our humanization

Skills revolution: an imperative for the Europe of today and tomorrow

Nicolas Schmit, *European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights*

- the EYS was a great and very beneficial topic, there are lessons to be drawn from the year’s activities
- a lot of initiatives, agendas and policy documents integrated the EYS
- EYS raised awareness about the topic and gave an optimistic view on skills
- skills are definitely a horizontal issue which needs to be dealt with across all sectors and throughout our whole lives - what we learned at schools is no longer valid and helpful, we need to learn on the job, to have an open mind and to take the horizontal holistic approach
- right to be skilled/upskilled/reskilled needs to be generalized, there is a need to teach that failure is all right and that people can rebound (e.g. via reskilling)
- skills are here to ensure more inclusive societies, but also to help people develop further both professionally and personally



João Albuquerque, *Member of the European Parliament, Member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs*

- skills (and trainings to acquire them) have to be available to everyone throughout all life – we can look at citizenship as an example - a lot of tasks are digitalized today, we need to make sure that everyone has access to public services so that we do not leave anyone behind in accessing these services, basically leaving them out of citizenship
- there is a need for close cooperation of public/private sectors and individual people - e.g. a lot of companies are already exploring training options for employees, which can have immediate benefits for the company and can benefit the employers in both short and long-term periods
- context of the green and digital transition – we need to identify what skills do we actually need to achieve the transition and then not only modernize the companies, but also train the workers at the same time
- it is also crucial to train the trainers, because being a programmer is not the same as teaching programming and different skills are needed for teachers/trainers
- Europe should and can be the strongest social block in the world (we are no longer the strongest in economy or in defence, but in social rights we can be)

Maxime Cerutti, *Director of Social Affairs of Business Europe*

- curricula changes at schools are slow and cannot keep pace with the business, therefore the next step should not be about “creating” and stressing the European right to training for everyone, rather we should focus on providing quality training on a larger scale (currently 47% adults are regularly in training, but the target is 60%) – there is a need for relevant high quality training and for public/private cooperation to ensure quality trainings (e.g. apprenticeships are very good example - maybe we can have use this model to also train more adults)

Tea Jarc, *Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)*

- collective agreements are a good tool to support lifelong learning - we can anticipate the change on the labour market and give signal to workers that there is a place for them, even if workplaces change or specific jobs will change (agreeing on what the workers will need to keep the job they have or to take another job relevant to them)
- studies showed that trainings offered to workers are not equally distributed among them (majority of trainings’ participants are high skilled men with permanent contracts) – e.g. women, short-term or temporary contract workers, migrants and young people usually do not have the same opportunities
- there need to be work-based training, because no single HEI is able to offer training relevant for many different companies
- we have an action plan for disadvantaged groups - 30 mil. people in Europe are unemployed, but a lot of them can be employed, if there are high quality jobs with sufficient support system (e.g. offering support for young parents, making jobs attractive, accessible, improve working conditions, adapting jobs for disadvantaged workers, etc.)
- today’s workers are changing – e.g. young people nowadays are the most educated generation we have seen, often they already have 2 or 3 degrees, but then they work in unpaid internships – this can lead to young people being tired of having to prove they are willing to up/reskill (one of the solutions is to ban unpaid internships)

Benjamin Calice, *Chief of Cabinet of the Vice-President of the Walloon Government and Minister for Employment, Training, Health, Social Action, Social Economy, Equal Opportunities and Women’s Rights (Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU)*

- there is a need to be flexible and adaptable, because there is no single "magic solution" for all issues



- there is an issue of attractiveness of information about jobs which is directly linked to attractiveness of the job – we need to work together with companies on how to make jobs and information about jobs more attractive
- the focus should be on working conditions, but also on personal development and ambition of workers to ensure work-life balance

Valeria Ronzitti, *General Secretary of SGI Europe*

- we still don't see fully the transversal potential of skills, currently we are very much focused on workplace, but the "skills journey" starts much sooner (e.g. if workers are "scared" or unwilling to go back to training during their adult life and to be evaluated, then we have a problem at schools' level - there is need to approach the reform from the earliest stages of education)
- digitalization brought many positive changes in services (e.g. telemedicine in health sector due to fact that in some places there are no hospitals)
- digitalization is also leading to need to reskill workers who are already in the companies – it is not about firing people due to disappearing jobs, but about needing people for different jobs and positions (e.g. automotive sector – there is more automation, but at the same time there is greater need for controllers)

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Véronique Willems, *Secretary General of SME United*

- already the European Year of Youth was a trigger to discuss skills (focusing e.g. on entrepreneurship), EYS was and is a way to continue the debate on up/reskilling - the views on how education is set up are changing, more open-minded approach and focus on progression instead of "just grades" is more and more common
- there is a need to focus on vocational education and training (VET) and on the general perception issue on some professions (e.g. plumbers, electricians, etc.) – we need to work on the image of VET and esteem of VET in the society, so that it is seen as a quality and "socially more acceptable" profession
- apprenticeships: many entrepreneurs are investing a lot in the apprenticeships; studies show that the rate of employment of people who went through apprenticeships is much higher than that of people without this experience (this is true for both VET and higher education students)

Wrap up by Nicolas Schmit (Are there any further topics which were not mentioned so far and which you would like to highlight?):

- there is a need for guidance: many people do not know what skills they need, what are the current trends and what they can ask for - we can use the individual learning accounts initiative to support this
- there is a need for strengthened social dialogue: many workers feel they are not informed enough and they are afraid to lose their jobs – we need to motivate workers more and properly explain the changes and why they should up/reskill and what benefits it brings them

Closing speech

Nicolas Schmit, *European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights*

- skills need to continue to be developed and encouraged and we should start as early as possible (stressing the ability to learn in the first place)
- there is a lack of skills culture at many levels, also at level of many companies - not because they do not know the value of skills, but rather because they do now know how to provide skills and how to pay for it (and how to make time for it)
- NS prefers the concept of "productivity" (before "competitiveness") - finding balance and cooperation between labour and technology - skills are the answer for this, finding the right workers and invest in their skilling can help re-localize businesses to Europe



- skills are also a social issue - first law introducing lifelong learning was introduced in France and it came from the idea that society should be open – social justice should be combined with competitiveness and productivity (they do not stand against each other)
- there were some suggestions to have a Commissioner for skills, but having a Commissioner is not the answer, rather we need to break the silos, we need to support the horizontal holistic approach where everybody takes part and everybody has their share of responsibility for the skills policies and agenda
- Pact for skills works very well and we must develop it, enrich it, maybe restructure it a bit, but in general it is a very good initiative which should be continued
- EYS was a great start for the debate on changing attitudes to skills and now we need to continue with this topic and build upon it

