

Review of the Balance of Competences – call for evidence on the Government’s Review of the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

- Does EU action, as opposed to national government action, in the areas of education and vocational training generally benefit or disadvantage the UK? Can you point us to any published evidence or analysis in support of your view?

The UK clearly benefits from the intervention of EU action with regard to education and vocational training provision targeted at addressing the needs of disengaged and disaffected young people. The issues of Early School Leaving (ELS)¹, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)² and youth unemployment³ have not only attracted a high EU policy profile, but this has been matched by significant funding from the EU to tackle the problem. Research by organisations such as Eurofound, which has explored the scale and nature of youth disengagement/disaffection in different EU states and appraised policy interventions⁴, offers valuable evidence about the scale of the problem and, more importantly, evidence about positive interventions from which the UK could learn. The benefits emanating from policy exchange and policy borrowing should not be under-estimated, in an area of policy concern to most member states.

EU funding which is available through the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) can also provide valuable additional revenue to UK government departments, at a time when departmental funding is limited. A recent Inquiry by the House of Lords recommends that the Government should adopt the Youth Guarantee: [htm version of Youth unemployment in the EU: a scarred generation? report](#)

The YEI is to be introduced in a number of areas with high levels of youth unemployment in England in 2014.

- Are there any specific EU activities in the areas of education and training that you consider particularly beneficial or particularly disadvantageous to the UK?

See above – both the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative are beneficial. In addition, the European Social Fund (ESF) has, over a significant period of time, provided funding to support regional and local interventions with regard to education and training provision, in particular for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

- What international bodies or arrangements other than the EU are important to education and training in the UK? How does your experience of dealing with them compare with the EU’s activity in this sphere?

The International labour Office (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

¹ EU (2011) *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*. European Parliament’s Committee on Education and Culture. June.

² European Commission (2012) *Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society: Policy review of research results*. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation.

³ Eurofound, (2012), *Effectiveness of policy measures to increase the employment participation of young people*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴ Eurofound, 2012, *NEETs- Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Development OECD both provide robust evidence, research and policy recommendations, which are very important to education and training planning and development in the UK.

Youth questions

- Do you think the EU should do more, or less, in relation to Youth, and why?

The EU should do more in terms of quantifying the scale of youth unemployment/disengagement across member states by ensuring that data sources are accurate, verified and audited. The use of the terms Early School Leaving, NEET and youth unemployment give rise to a tremendous variation in the way in which member states define and measure the number of young people 'out of the system'. More radically, it may be both opportune and productive to question whether 'NEET', as currently defined and applied, is appropriate. NEET was a term coined originally in the UK to define 16 and 17 year olds who were outside the unemployment count, but is now commonly applied to those over 18 who are eligible to claim unemployed status. Is it now applied too casually, with the result that it masks rising and unacceptable levels of inactivity among young people? If so, do we need to re-appraise the phenomena and issues we are seeking to address, and then re-think our definitions and, crucially, our policy responses.

An appraisal of how these terms are defined by different member states and more importantly, how data is collected would enable us to estimate the extent to which young people are 'missing' and 'unknown' from official statistics and hence excluded from policy interventions which are designed to reduce youth unemployment, i.e. the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative and associated EU target-setting.

- Do you think the EU focuses on the right aims and priorities in the Youth field?

Generally yes, although there should be more intervention to support young people in the NEET inactive category. Young women are over-represented in this group, largely due to their 'caring' responsibilities. This effectively excludes them from active labour policies and interventions such as the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, which are made available to the registered unemployed. NEET inactive status therefore heightens young people's propensity to be subject to long-term social and economic exclusion. Greater intervention is needed to support this group of young people to ensure that they are not locked into a long-term trajectory of inactivity.

There also seems to be an over-reliance on expanding apprenticeships and traineeships as a solution to addressing youth unemployment/disengagement. There is a need for a wider appraisal of employers' demands for youth labour and how these skill needs can be best supported and developed. Moreover, more emphasis should be placed on developing the skills of guidance workers, to ensure that they have the competences, understanding and confidence to respond to the needs of both young people and employers in their local labour markets.

- What international bodies or arrangements are important to your sector beyond the EU?

The International Labour Office (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) both provide robust evidence, research and policy recommendations.

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