



Brussels, 30.5.2017  
COM(2017) 249 final

2017/0100 (NLE)

Proposal for a  
**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**  
**on tracking graduates**

(Text with EEA relevance)

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

### 1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

- **Reasons for and objectives of the proposal**

The objective of the proposed Council Recommendation is to improve the **availability of qualitative and quantitative information** about what graduates from tertiary education and vocational education and training (VET) in Europe do after they complete their education and training. Such information can be used by services that help new students make informed choices about what to study, by teaching staff and institutional management as input for the design of courses and by government authorities to inform decisions about how to steer higher education and VET systems. The proposal aims to stimulate further development and exploitation of different forms of graduate tracking mechanisms at education system level in individual Member States and to encourage greater cooperation between national actors involved in tracking to share good practice and, ultimately, increase the comparability of tracking data collected.

The **employability of graduates** is of concern in many EU Member States. In some parts of the EU, a significant share of tertiary graduates are unemployed or working in jobs for which they are overqualified. For **recent graduates from VET** programmes, the picture is more complex. In some countries, such as Denmark, Estonia and Germany, recent VET graduates have high employment rates that even exceed those for tertiary graduates. However, in many other countries, including France, Spain and Italy, the equivalent employment rates for VET graduates are notably lower and lag well behind tertiary graduates<sup>1</sup>.

**Good quality information** about what graduates go on to do after leaving education and training, and on how they assess the knowledge, skills and competences they gained in school, college or university, is essential to understanding both the **causes** of graduate employability problems and the success factors in particular regions, economic sectors or for graduates from particular higher education and VET disciplines. This information can then be used to **identify solutions**.

This proposal for a Council Recommendation and the proposed EU-level initiatives that accompany it will respond to three main problems in Europe:

- **A lack of fine-grained information.** Basic information on graduate employment and social outcomes is available, including at EU level, from existing data collection exercises, such as the [European Labour Force Survey](#). Moreover, some Member States have developed graduate surveys or set up additional systems to analyse data from education, tax and social security databases and register systems (administrative data) to track graduates' subsequent careers and earnings. However, in many parts of the EU, systems for collecting, analysing and using data on the graduate outcomes from tertiary education and VET are not well developed. The result is that solid evidence is often not available.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the 2016 Education and Training Monitor: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en)

- **Missed synergies.** Although many EU Member States are developing systems for tracking at the moment, or have plans to do so, there is currently limited exchange of knowledge about good practice and mutual learning about what works.
- **A lack of comparable data.** Existing comparable data are limited in scope and data collected nationally are **not comparable** between countries, making it **hard to draw lessons** from differences in trends and observed outcomes across countries and regions.

To address these issues, the proposed Council Recommendation and related EU-level initiatives have the following specific objectives:

- To encourage the start or further development and improvement of **graduate tracking systems for tertiary education and VET at national level in Europe**. In order to build a fuller picture of the outcomes of tertiary education and VET, Member States are encouraged to include within their tracking systems people who leave education and training without graduating.
- To encourage and facilitate **greater cooperation and sharing of good practice** between national actors involved in graduate tracking on implementing graduate surveys and tracking systems using administrative data, and exploiting their results through networking, mutual learning and counselling activities at EU level.
- To improve the **availability of comparable information** on graduate employment and social outcomes. This objective will be pursued through the cooperation activities highlighted above, in which improving comparability will be one of the aspects taken into account in further developing national tracking systems. In addition, this year the Commission will launch a pilot phase of a **European graduate survey** to test the feasibility of collecting information on tertiary graduate outcomes, building on the results of the [Eurograduate Feasibility Study](#), and continue efforts to harmonise social survey questions.
- **Consistency with existing policy provisions in the policy area**

In the Initiative '[Investing in Europe's Youth](#)', adopted on 7 December 2016, the Commission stresses the importance of high quality education and training in supporting young people's personal development and their transition to high quality employment. In line with the 2017 Commission work programme, as part of the work to follow-up to the Youth Initiative and the [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) adopted in June 2016, the Commission has committed to '*work with Member States to improve the availability of data on graduate employment and social outcomes ('graduate tracking') spanning also across vocational education and training (VET) sector*'. This commitment is in response to the recognition, at both national and EU levels, of the importance of improving knowledge about graduate outcomes, and thus the evidence base for policy-making and practice in education and training. Such information can inform the design of actions to improve the quality and relevance of students' education and thus contribute to better management of current and future skills needs or skills mismatches.

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) proposes as an area for further cooperation 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 by tracking the careers of graduates. In the VET area, Member States committed to ensuring continuous information and feedback loops in the [Riga Conclusions](#) of 2015, which presented deliverables in the area of VET for the period 2015-20.

The issues of addressing skills mismatches, assessing the quality of education and training and improving feedback on graduate outcomes are also pertinent to the:

- [Resolution on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016](#), which highlights the importance of addressing skills mismatches and skills gaps;
- [Council Conclusions on entrepreneurship in education](#) from 2014, in which Member States agreed to make use of tracking information, wherever possible, when assessing the quality and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education and training;
- [Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Higher Education](#) of 2013, in which Member States agreed to facilitate the provision of information on educational and labour market-related opportunities and outcomes; and
- [Council Conclusions on the employability of graduates from education and training](#) of 2012, in which Member States agreed to monitor the share of employed graduates, 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 examples of good practice aimed at complementing quantitative monitoring and enhancing the foundation for evidence-based policy-making.

In addition, the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#) and the [European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training \(EQAVET\)](#) highlight the value of objective, good quality information on what graduates do on completion of their education and training.

- **Consistency with other Union policies**

By providing information that can be used by policy-makers to monitor and measure graduate outcomes, inform analysis of the quality and relevance of the education that graduates received, take action to resolve any skills mismatches or skills gaps and design curricula to improve employability, graduate tracking will contribute to the realisation of the Commission's priority on [boosting jobs and growth](#).

It also supports the [Europe 2020](#) headline target that at least 40% of people aged 30–34 will have completed tertiary education, as the tracking initiative will contribute to the strengthening of career guidance for prospective students and development of higher education that can meet evolving educational, employment and societal needs.

In both higher education and VET, the proposal is consistent with the [Employment Guidelines](#), which prioritise an enhanced labour and skills supply by addressing structural weaknesses in education and training systems and by tackling youth and long-term unemployment. Indeed, the proposal will contribute to the successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee, as more information on unemployed graduates will also help youth guarantee service providers to better identify young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) within this group and target their intervention.

## **2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY**

### **• Legal basis**

The initiative is in conformity with Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Article 165 states that the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of their education systems. Article 166 states that the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training.

The initiative does not propose any extension of EU regulatory power or binding commitments on Member States. Member States will decide, according to their national circumstances, how they implement the Council Recommendation.

### **• Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)**

While many Member States have developed some form of graduate tracking, there is currently limited exchange of good practice and comparable data between countries, which impedes the analysis of education outcomes and challenges across the EU.

The added value of action at EU level lies in the ability of the EU to:

- facilitate the exchange and sharing of expertise and knowledge between organisations in different countries to improve graduate tracking at national level; and
- initiate an approach that will provide new comparable data on graduate outcomes across EU Member States and increase the comparability of data from existing data collection exercises, where feasible and desirable.

### **• Proportionality**

The proposal creates a coordinated approach to graduate tracking, which will provide support to Member States and the Commission in sharing good practice and information, and in developing policies at both national and EU levels. As the commitments Member States will make are of a voluntary nature and each Member State decides the approach to take in developing its own graduate tracking systems, the measure is considered proportionate.

### **• Choice of the instrument**

A Council Recommendation is an appropriate instrument within the field of education and training, where the EU has a supporting competence and is an instrument that has been frequently used for European action in the areas of education and training. As a legal instrument, it signals the commitment of Member States to the measures within the text and provides a stronger political basis for cooperation in this area, while fully respecting Member-State competence in the field of education and training.

### 3. RESULTS OF EX-POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- **Ex-post evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

Not applicable.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

The decision to propose an EU initiative on graduate tracking was informed by a wide-ranging public consultation on the review of the EU modernisation agenda for higher education, completed in February 2016. In particular, this highlighted concerns about the employment outcomes of graduates and widespread support from Member State authorities and stakeholders for further EU work to improve the availability of evidence of policy making and practice, in particular concerning transparency around outputs and outcomes. The full results of the consultation can be found in [the Staff Working Document \(Annex II\)](#) accompanying the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

Key responses included:

- 71% of students or recent graduates and 61% of higher education employees disagreed with the statement that 'there is a good match between the supply of higher education graduates and the knowledge and skills the economy needs';
- 55% of respondents disagreed with the statement that 'people designing higher education courses are sufficiently aware of likely skills needs in the labour market';
- 47% of respondents disagreed with the statement that 'higher education systems are functioning well'; and
- Only 29% of students or recent graduates agreed with the statement that 'students are supported well to make informed choices about what to study'.

Since completion of the public consultation, the specific proposals for an EU initiative on graduate tracking were discussed at the meeting of Directors General for Higher Education in Bratislava in October 2016, the November 2016 meeting of the [ET2020 Working Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education](#) and the 2016 European Education and Youth Forum, where broad support was given to a coordinated approach in this area.

A recent CEDEFOP European public opinion survey on vocational education and training indicates similar challenges in a number of EU Member States with regard to young people who complete VET, with almost a third reporting having experienced difficulties at some stage in finding a job. Another CEDEFOP survey, European Skills and Jobs, based on responses of 49,000 adult employees (aged 24-65), indicated that 41% of them believed they had few opportunities to find a job matching their skills and qualifications.

Graduate tracking has been discussed on several occasions with VET stakeholders and suggestions emerging from the debate fed into the preparation of the present proposal. In particular, the EQAVET annual network meeting in June 2016, the EQAVET peer learning activity on relevant indicators in September 2016, and the EQAVET forum in 2016, where graduate tracking was a major issue, provided input from the point of view of the VET quality assurance community.

- **Collection and use of expertise**

The proposal is based on an assessment of the potential benefits, risks and impact of a European initiative to further develop graduate tracking mechanisms at national and EU level. Promoting graduate employability and graduate tracking have been recurrent themes in the policy and practice exchange supported by Education and Training 2020 and the Bologna Process, with recent peer-learning activities on promoting graduate employability (February 2015) and graduate tracking (September 2015).

The final report of the [EUROGRADUATE feasibility study](#), finalised in 2016, carried out on behalf of the Commission, confirmed that graduate tracking initiatives at system level are widespread in Europe, although approaches and levels of activity vary considerably between countries. Initiatives based on regular or recent graduate surveys, analysis of administrative data or a combination of these were identified in 25 of the 31 countries surveyed. However, only 11 countries were found to run regular graduate surveys (usually annually or every two years) and 6 have tracking studies that integrate survey and administrative data. The survey also confirmed demand among stakeholders for a sustainable, regular European graduate study.

Evidence was also gathered from the outputs of [HEGESCO](#) and [REFLEX](#) studies (2010), (supported respectively by FP6 and the Lifelong Learning Programme), which undertook large-scale trans-national surveys of tertiary graduate outcomes, as well as the [Erasmus Impact Study](#) (2015), a report on [Labour Market Outcomes of VET](#) (CEDEFOP 2013) and the [European Skills and Jobs Survey](#) (CEDEFOP 2015).

The 2016 [EQAVET peer learning activity on indicator 5](#) (placement rate in VET programmes), also based on national case studies, concluded that tracking VET graduates provided national authorities and VET providers with crucial information to adapt VET supply to labour market needs and to assess the effectiveness of the VET system. The 2016 EQAVET Forum specifically discussed VET graduate tracking and suggested features for the design and implementation of appropriate systems.

- **Impact assessment**

Given the complementary approach of the activities to Member State initiatives, the voluntary nature of the proposed activities and the scope of the impacts expected, an impact assessment was not carried out. Rather, development of the proposal was informed by previous studies, consultation of Member States, in particular those with well-developed graduate tracking systems, and the public consultation on the modernisation agenda for higher education.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

Not applicable.

- **Fundamental rights**

Member States will commit to ensuring that they will develop graduate tracking initiatives that respect Article 8 of the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), which states that everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her; that such data must be processed fairly for specific purposes and on the basis of the consent of the person concerned or some other legitimate basis laid down by law; and that everyone has the right of access to data which has been collected concerning him or her, and the right to have it rectified.

Through the provision of improved information on graduate outcomes, the proposed Council Recommendation will also contribute to the realisation of Article 14, on the right to access education and vocational education and training, and Article 15, on the right to access employment.

The measures shall be carried out in accordance with EU law on the protection of personal data, in particular [Directive 95/46/EC](#), to be replaced on 25 May 2018 with [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation).

#### **4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS**

The establishment of graduate tracking systems has resource implications at national level and will require sustainable and adequate funding. As shown in the Eurograduate study, some form of graduate tracking is underway in 25 of the 31 countries surveyed, showing a recognition of the importance of information on graduate outcomes. The use of the existing EU funding, such as Erasmus+ or European Structural and Investment Funds, to support the development of national tracking systems will be encouraged, where appropriate and in line with their legal basis, as well as their respective financial capacity.

A budget of €800,000 over two years has been set aside in the Erasmus+ 2017 annual work programme for the pilot graduate tracking survey. The proposed network of experts will be funded through existing arrangements for ET2020 Working Groups. No additional budget or staff resources will be required from the EU budget.

#### **5. OTHER ELEMENTS**

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

Member States will commit to reporting annually to the Commission on their implementation and evaluation of the measures within the Council Recommendation, beginning within two years of its adoption, while the Commission will report to the Council on the overall implementation of the Council Recommendation within five years of its adoption.

In addition, progress, including any challenges, will be monitored through meetings of the Network of Experts, which will provide a forum for mutual learning and exchange of good practice.

- **Explanatory documents (for directives)**

Not applicable.

- **Detailed explanation of the specific provisions of the proposal**

#### **Member State Provisions**

##### **Paragraphs 1-2**



The proposal recommends that Member States improve the availability and quality of information about the activities of graduates (individuals who have successfully completed a given level of education and training), as well as, where appropriate, people who leave higher education and vocational education and training without graduating, by establishing, by 2020, graduate tracking systems that include:

- The collection of relevant administrative data from education, tax and social security databases;
- The development of longitudinal graduate surveys; and
- The possibility to link, on an anonymised basis, data from different sources.

Most existing graduate tracking initiatives collect information about and from graduates through either dedicated surveys or through assembling and cross-referencing various types of administrative data from educational, tax and social security databases. More general data collection exercises, such as Labour Force Surveys, also collect data on the employment outcomes of graduates from different levels of education, but the information generated is more general than that collected through dedicated graduate tracking initiatives. Moreover, as is stated in recital 5, transitions to the labour market are largely driven by the economic context, level of qualification and field of study. They are influenced also by socio-demographic factors, such as sex, country of birth, citizenship, ethnic origin and socio-economic background of the family. It is important, therefore, that graduate tracking systems gather this information also and present it in a meaningful way, for example by breaking down the data according to sex.

By recommending the linking of data from different sources, combining quantitative and qualitative data, it will be possible to build a fuller picture of graduate outcomes and the impact of their previous study choices on their subsequent choices. As outlined in the introductory text before paragraph 1, this will be done in accordance with national legislation, including national and European data protection regulations, available resources and national circumstances.

### **Paragraphs 3-4**

The importance of ensuring a high, representative and continued response to longitudinal graduate surveys is clear. However, in consultations, some Member States have raised concerns about difficulties in tracking graduates who have migrated, either for the purpose of education or on completion of their education. Member States will be urged, therefore, to make efforts ensure that the learning outcomes of these graduates are included in data collected, and that they cooperate with other Member States as appropriate.

An objective of the Council Recommendation is to develop comparable data on graduate outcomes. While recognising the right of each Member State to develop graduate tracking systems according to their own needs, the objective behind establishing the network of experts is to provide a forum for experts, to be nominated by Member States, to work together at European level to improve cooperation and mutual learning, explore options for developing mutually compatible and comparable data, and to consider the optimal frequency of longitudinal surveys.

The network of experts will be organised and funded in accordance with the arrangements for ET2020 Working Groups, without prejudice to any structures that may be developed to replace the ET2020 process. It is envisaged that webinars may supplement the face-to-face meetings where appropriate.

## **Paragraph 5**

The dissemination and use of graduate tracking data will be of importance to both Member States and the Commission. The proposed text outlines the uses to which the data should be put: strengthening career guidance, designing and updating curricula, improving skills matching, planning for evolving employment, educational and social needs, and improving policy development at national and European levels.

## **Paragraph 6**

Ensuring adequate and sustainable funding for graduate tracking initiatives will be crucial to their success. For this reason, the proposed Council Recommendation makes reference to both national and European sources of funding. Given that the Eurograduate study shows that some form of graduate tracking is underway in 25 of the 31 countries surveyed, it is considered that Member States already recognise the value of graduate tracking systems.

## **Paragraph 7**

Member States will be asked to agree to report to the Commission annually on the implementation and evaluation of the Council Recommendation, beginning within two years of its adoption. It is not envisaged that this reporting will be onerous: rather, Member States will be asked to report on the extent to which graduate tracking initiatives are being developed, along with a brief evaluation of outcomes or any challenges they may face. Regular reporting will enable the network of experts to tailor its work to specific needs.

## **Commission provisions**

### **Paragraph 8**

In higher education, the Commission will develop the pilot phase of a European graduate survey, which will improve the availability of comparable information on graduate outcomes and build on the results of the [EUROGRADUATE Feasibility Study](#). This study concluded that there was support among policy makers and stakeholders for comparable data on graduate outcomes across European systems, and that a European graduate survey could be a means to support the development of survey-based graduate tracking in countries where such studies are not currently undertaken or where reforms are underway.

In light of the potential added value of such a survey, but also the associated challenges, the Commission intends to follow a staged approach: a pilot phase, to develop and test data collection tools in a limited number of European countries, followed by a decision on whether to proceed to a full European graduate survey. The survey is scheduled to begin in September 2017 and report within two years.

### **Paragraph 9**

It is recognised that graduate tracking systems in vocational education and training are, in many cases, less developed than those that track higher education graduates. For this reason, the Commission will focus on capacity building support to put in place graduate tracking systems, based on good practices identified through mapping across Member States, and facilitating cooperation with regard to the use of graduate tracking data.

### **Paragraph 10 - 13**

The final four paragraphs state the Commission's intention to establish and support the network of experts, ensure that data and related analyses are made available, including through the use of online tools, support the use of European sources of funding, where appropriate and in line with their legal basis, and to report to the Council on the implementation of the Council Recommendation within five years of its adoption.

Proposal for a

## **COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

### **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 crisis<sup>2</sup> 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 2015<sup>3</sup>, to promote productivity and employability through an appropriate supply of relevant knowledge, skills and competences.
- (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 in both the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)<sup>4</sup> and the European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)<sup>5</sup>.
- (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, information is often not sufficient for students to

---

<sup>2</sup> COM/2015/0690 final

<sup>3</sup> 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)

<sup>4</sup> ISBN 952-5539-04-0

<sup>5</sup> 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)

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 such as sex, country of birth, citizenship, ethnic origin and socio-economic background of the family<sup>6</sup>. 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.
- (8) The results of the public consultation<sup>7</sup> 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)<sup>8</sup> 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 2016<sup>9</sup>, Member States highlighted the importance of addressing skills mismatches and skills gaps as a matter of priority.

---

<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>7</sup> COM(2016) 381 final

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25

<sup>9</sup> Draft Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016, 5685/1/16 REV 1

- (12) This built on previous work. Member States agreed, in the Council Conclusions on entrepreneurship in education<sup>10</sup> 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 Education<sup>11</sup>, 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 training<sup>12</sup> 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 Europe<sup>13</sup>, 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.

#### RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:

*In accordance with national and European legislation, in particular Directive 95/46/EC concerning the protection of personal data<sup>14</sup>, 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 graduates<sup>15</sup> and, where appropriate, people leaving higher education and vocational education and training without graduating, including through the establishment by 2020 of graduate tracking systems that include:
  - (a) the collection of relevant administrative data from education, tax and social security databases;
  - (b) the development of longitudinal graduate surveys at education system level, in recognition of the importance of qualitative data on people's transition to the

---

<sup>10</sup> OJ C 17, 20.1.2015, p2-7

<sup>11</sup> OJ C 168, 14.6.2013, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> OJ C 169/04, p11

<sup>13</sup> SWD/2016/0195 final

<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this Council Recommendation, 'graduate' refers to a person completing any level of higher education or vocational education and training. It is recognised, however, that some Member States have initiatives to track school leavers also.

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.

### **Content of data to be collected**

2. Collect data that includes:

(a) the following quantitative data

- (i) socio-biographical and socio-economic information
- (ii) study intensity
- (iii) study method
- (iv) qualification(s)
- (v) credits received
- (vi) field of study
- (vii) transition to employment or further education and training
- (viii) earnings
- (ix) type of contract
- (x) employment status
- (xi) occupation, professional status and/or activity
- (xii) geographical and/or sectoral mobility

(b) the following qualitative data

- (i) relevance of study to employment
- (ii) participation in volunteering or civic engagement activities
- (iii) career progression and satisfaction
- (iv) perceptions of the quality and relevance of their education and training experience

### **Longitudinal graduate surveys**

- 3. Encourage a high, representative and continued response rate to longitudinal graduate surveys, including 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, 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, which will encourage cooperation

and mutual learning, explore options for developing mutually compatible and comparable data and consider the optimal frequency of longitudinal surveys.

### **Dissemination of data and exploitation of results**

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

### **Funding**

6. 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 their existing resources, legal basis and priorities defined for the period 2014-2020, without any prejudice to negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

### **Reporting and Evaluation**

7. Within two years from the adoption of this Recommendation, and annually thereafter, report to the Commission on the implementation and evaluation of this Recommendation.

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT THE COMMISSION:

8. Develops the pilot phase of a European graduate survey in tertiary education, which aims to improve the availability of comparable information on graduate employment and social outcomes and which will build on the results of the Eurograduate Feasibility Study<sup>16</sup>.
9. Provides capacity building support in vocational education and training, as needed, for the establishment of graduate tracking systems, based on good practices identified through a comprehensive mapping across Member States, and facilitates cooperation among authorities, providers of vocational education and training and guidance services with regards to the use of graduate tracking data.
10. Promotes mutual learning and strengthens cooperation by establishing and supporting the network of experts.
11. Ensures that data collected and related analyses are made available for use by Member States and stakeholders, including through existing online EU tools.

---

<sup>16</sup> The Eurograduate Feasibility Study covers only higher education.



12. Supports 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 and priorities defined for the period 2014-2020, without any prejudice to negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.
13. Reports to the Council on the implementation of this Recommendation within five years of its adoption.

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION:

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council*

*The President*

## **Com 249 (2017)**

### **Information Note**

#### **1. Proposal**

*Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Tracking Graduates.*

#### **2. Date of Commission document**

*30/05/2017*

#### **3. Number of Commission document**

*COM (2017)249*

#### **4. Number of Council document:**

*The document number has not yet been issued by Council Secretariat.*

#### **5. Dealt with in Brussels by**

*The Education Council and Education Committee*

#### **6. Department with primary responsibility**

*Department of Education and Skills*

#### **7. Other Departments involved**

*Names of any other Departments with an interest in the proposal  
DSP/REVENUE if proposal is adopted and social security and tax information is to be collected*

#### **8. Background to, Short summary and aim of the proposal**

*Give details of any earlier proposals or particular consultation process relevant to the proposal.*

##### **8.1 Background.**

The employability of graduates is of concern in many EU Member States. Good quality information about what graduates go on to do after leaving education and training, and on how they assess the knowledge, skills and competences they gained in school, college or university, is considered by the Commission to be essential to understanding both the causes of graduate employability problems and the success factors in particular regions, economic sectors or for graduates from particular higher education and VET disciplines.

The decision to propose an EU initiative on graduate tracking was informed by a wide-ranging public consultation on the review of the EU modernisation agenda for higher education, completed in February 2016. In particular, this highlighted concerns about the employment outcomes of graduates and widespread support from Member State authorities and stakeholders for further EU work to improve the availability of evidence of policy making and practice, in particular concerning transparency around outputs and outcomes.

Since completion of public consultation, the specific proposals for an EU initiative on graduate tracking were discussed at the meeting of Directors General for Higher Education in Bratislava in October 2016, the November 2016 meeting of the ET2020 Working Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education and the 2016 European Education and Youth Forum, where broad support was given to a coordinated approach in this area.

Graduate tracking has been discussed on several occasions with VET stakeholders and suggestions emerging from the debate fed into the preparation of the present proposal. In particular, the EQAVET annual network meeting in June 2016, the EQAVET peer learning activity on relevant indicators in September 2016, and the EQAVET forum in 2016

## **8.2 Objectives and aims of the proposed Council Recommendation on Tracking Graduates.**

The objective of the proposed Council Recommendation is to improve the availability of qualitative and quantitative information about what graduates from tertiary education and vocational education and training (VET) in Europe do after they complete their education and training. Such information can be used by services that help new students make informed choices about what to study, by teaching staff and institutional management as input for the design of courses and by government authorities to inform decisions about how to steer higher education and VET systems. The information can also be used by policy-makers to monitor and measure graduate outcomes, inform analysis of the quality and relevance of the education that graduates received, take action to resolve any skills mismatches or skills gaps and design curricula to improve employability, graduate tracking will contribute to the realisation of the Commission's priority on boosting jobs and growth.

This proposal for a Council Recommendation and the proposed EU-level initiatives that accompany it aim to respond to the following issues:

- To address a lack of fine-grained information, the proposal aims to encourage the start or further development and improvement of graduate tracking systems for tertiary education and VET at national level in Europe. In order to build a fuller picture of the outcomes of tertiary education and VET, Member States are encouraged to include within their tracking systems people who leave education and training without graduating.
- To address missed synergies, the proposal aims to encourage and facilitate greater cooperation and sharing of good practice between national actors involved in graduate tracking on implementing graduate surveys and tracking systems using administrative data, and exploiting their results through networking, mutual learning and counselling activities at EU level.
- To address a lack of comparable data, the proposal aims to improve the availability of comparable information on graduate employment and social outcomes. This objective will be pursued through the cooperation activities highlighted above, in which improving comparability will be one of the aspects taken into account in further developing national tracking systems.

The Proposal also supports the Europe 2020 headline target that at least 40% of people aged 30–34 will have completed tertiary education, as the tracking initiative will contribute to the strengthening of career guidance for prospective students and development of higher education that can meet evolving educational, employment and societal needs.

In both higher education and VET, the proposal is consistent with the Employment Guidelines, which prioritise an enhanced labour and skills supply by addressing structural weaknesses in education and training systems and by tackling youth and long-term unemployment and will contribute to the successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee, as more information on unemployed graduates will also help youth guarantee service providers to better identify young

people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) within this group and target their intervention. A recent CEDEFOP European public opinion survey on vocational education and training indicates similar challenges in a number of EU Member States with regard to young people who complete VET, with almost a third reporting having experienced difficulties at some stage in finding a job. Another CEDEFOP survey, European Skills and Jobs, based on responses of 49,000 adult employees (aged 24-65), indicated that 41% of them believed they had few opportunities to find a job matching their skills and qualifications.

In addition, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) highlight the value of objective, good quality information on what graduates do on completion of their education and training.

The Council Recommendation proposal on graduate tracking is aimed at ensuring all Member States have tracking systems in place by 2020.

### **8.3 The following are the details of the actions which the proposal recommends that Member States adopt:**

Improve the availability and quality of data about the activities of graduates and, where appropriate, people leaving higher education and vocational education and training without graduating, including through the establishment by 2020 of graduate tracking systems that include:

- (a) the collection of relevant administrative data from education, tax and social security databases;
- (b) the development of longitudinal graduate surveys at education system 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.

#### **Content of data to be collected**

Collect data that includes the following quantitative data:

- (i) socio-biographical and socio-economic information
- (ii) study intensity
- (iii) study method
- (iv) qualification(s)
- (v) credits received
- (vi) field of study
- (vii) transition to employment or further education and training
- (viii) earnings
- (ix) type of contract
- (x) employment status
- (xi) occupation, professional status and/or activity
- (xii) geographical and/or sectoral mobility

Collect data that includes the following qualitative data:

- (i) relevance of study to employment
  - (ii) participation in volunteering or civic engagement activities
  - (iii) career progression and satisfaction
  - (iv) perceptions of the quality and relevance of their education and training experience
- (d) Encourage a high, representative and continued response rate to longitudinal graduate surveys, including the tracking of graduates who have migrated, whether for the purposes of education and training or on completion of their education and training.
- (e) Participate in a network of experts, to be organised in line with existing governance structures within the Education and Training 2020 framework to encourage cooperation and mutual learning and explore options for developing mutually compatible and comparable data and consider the optimal frequency of longitudinal surveys.
- (f) Ensure the timely, regular and broad dissemination of data and exploitation of the results.
- (g) 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 their existing resources.
- (h) Within two years from the adoption of this Recommendation, and annually thereafter, Member States will report to the Commission on the implementation and evaluation of this Recommendation.

#### **8.4 Next Steps**

The proposal will be considered by the next meeting of the Education Committee in Brussels on 4<sup>th</sup> July and is projected to go before Council on 20 November 2017.

A pilot phase of the EU Graduate Survey, funded by the European Commission is planned to test the feasibility of a standardised survey. It will start in September 2017 and will run for 2 years. A network of national experts will be established once the recommendation has been adopted, to facilitate discussions on implementation. The network of experts will be organised and funded in accordance with the arrangements for ET2020 Working Groups. Progress, including any challenges, will be monitored through meetings of the Network of Experts, which will provide a forum for mutual learning and exchange of good practice.

#### **9. Legal basis of the proposal**

*Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).*

#### **10. Voting Method**

*QMV*

#### **11. Role of the EP**

*N/A*

#### **12. Category of proposal**

*Some significance*

### **13. Implications for Ireland & Ireland's Initial View'**

*Initial assessment of the implications, if any, for Ireland. Indicate if Ireland supports the measure or indicate areas of concern.*

The initiative does not propose any extension of EU regulatory power or binding commitments on Member States. Member States will decide, according to their national circumstances, how they implement the Council Recommendation. However, implementing the additional measures proposed to existing graduate tracking systems is likely to have resource implications at national level. Ireland is relatively advanced in graduate tracking in comparison with some EU Member States. Details of existing and proposed graduate tracking for further and higher education are outlined below. Given the work underway in Ireland, we do not anticipate Ireland participating in the EU pilot. However, Irish Officials will continue to participate in the network of experts.

#### **13.1 Existing and Proposed Graduate Tracking - Higher Education**

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has had a graduate survey since the 1980s which tracks graduates of universities and colleges of education 9 months after graduation. The HEA is currently in the process of revising how Irish graduate outcomes are measured through a new national annual graduate outcomes survey which will track graduates of all publically funded HEIs and which will provide the following:

- Data on graduate qualifications and employment both within Ireland and overseas,
- Relevance of employment to area of study,
- Data on graduate further study,
- Data on graduate unemployment and unavailability for work.

The HEA anticipate that the new annual survey (9 months after graduation) will be in place by 2018 and is being run on a pilot basis in 2017 in a number of higher education institutions.

The new annual survey is a single point-in-time survey; and although the of results of this survey continue to benefit policy makers, students, guidance counsellors, teachers and all with an interest in education; it does not capture the longer-term outcomes from higher education to graduates. The HEA and CSO will produce a report of the findings in Q4 2017, setting the longitudinal data in context of both the economic situation at the time and factors influencing the development of higher education. This work is ongoing with the HEA and CSO.

The HEA and CSO are currently working on a project to link the HEA's student records system (SRS) and other data held within the CSO, including Revenue and Social Welfare, and the project will investigate the cohort destinations after 1, 3 and 5 years for P35, income tax, further higher education and social welfare.

#### **13.2 Existing and Proposed Graduate Tracking - Further Education**

The Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS conducts regular follow up surveys on graduates from the further education and training system. This survey includes an analysis of learners' perception on the quality of the course and its relevance in terms of gaining employment. There are currently no plans within this research for a longitudinal survey to be conducted.

The recently established Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) learner database, administered by SOLAS, will gather information enabling Solas to report on the learner in relation to the course studied, course completion status and the profile of the learner in terms

of age, socio-economic status, and employment status on commencement of the course. Solas anticipate that it will also be at least 2018 before any data analysis on learner activity will be available. For the purposes of PLSS data collection, it is planned to establish links with other datasets relating to social welfare status (DSP), higher education (HEA), the certification body (QQI) and Revenue in order to track the progression of learners on completion of their course. However, there have been difficulties in progressing data sharing agreements with each of the above, primarily related to concerns due to the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) next year.

**14. Impact on the public**

*N/A*

**15. Have any consultations with Stakeholders taken place or are there any plans to do so?**

*Consultation has taken place with European Stakeholders. There has been no Irish consultation.*

**16. Are there any subsidiarity issues for Ireland?**

*N/A*

**17. Anticipated negotiating period**

*The Proposal is projected to go before Council on 20 November 2017. Negotiations are expected to be concluded in advance of this date.*

**18. Proposed implementation date**

*Within two years of the adoption of this Recommendation.*

**19. Consequences for national legislation**

*N/A*

**20. Method of Transposition into Irish law**

*N/A*

**21. Anticipated Transposition date**

*N/A*

**22. Consequences for the EU budget in Euros annually**

*A budget of €800,000 over two years has been set aside in the Erasmus+ 2017 annual work programme for the pilot graduate tracking survey. The proposed network of experts will be funded through existing arrangements for ET2020 Working Groups. No additional budget or staff resources will be provided from the EU budget.*

**23. Contact name, telephone number and e-mail address of official in Department with primary responsibility**

*Annmarie Quinn. [Annmarie\\_quinn@education.gov.ie](mailto:Annmarie_quinn@education.gov.ie) Tel: 01 8896721*

*Date 27 June 2017*