



BRUSSELS, EMBARGOED UNTIL 19 NOVEMBER AT 17:00

PRESS RELEASE

Joint call for urgent education reforms to resolve the skills gap

The CEO of SONAE today called for urgent change to address Europe's skills gap. Paulo Azevedo, a Member of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), opened the Jumping the Skills Gap Symposium by challenging participants from across Europe, "Be pro-active. Share ideas and best practices, and take them back with you and implement them."

He called upon the Member States to move much faster on education reforms to address the skills gap. He noted that a productive and well-educated workforce is a crucial element in Europe's struggle for competitiveness and economic growth in a changing world that requires an ever increasing level of skills.

The Symposium brought together around 200 industry representatives, policy makers, innovators in education and training, and thought-leaders to discuss concrete examples of innovative solutions to jump the skills gap in Europe. The focus was on increasing the quantity of students and quality of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education, boosting vocational training with a high component of work-based training, and entrepreneurship education and support.

Koos Richelle, Director General of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion spoke about the European Commission's efforts to ease youth unemployment by aligning education and training with the job skills required in today's market.

"Even if the bar is higher, choosing a STEM career does pay off in the long run – but few are aware of this. We need signal strongly to young students choosing a career, to their teacher and parents where the opportunities are. Our renewed political emphasis on job creation and on the demand side of the labour market aims to provide a compass to avoid future skills mismatches", stated Koos Richelle.

Organised by ERT with support from their partners Junior Achievement-Young Enterprise Europe, CSR Europe, European Schoolnet, and BUSINESSEUROPE, the Symposium provided a unique opportunity for policy makers to talk directly with industry about changing attitudes about education and career pathways, education reforms and the need to create partnerships between industry and education.

The Dutch Technology Pact was highlighted as a best practice for other EU Member States to follow. Speaking on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Pieter Waasdorp, Director of the Entrepreneurship Department and Deputy Envoy for SMEs, spoke of the many advantages of bringing together businesses and the different ministries for an integrated approach to prepare and align for economic growth and the education and skills needs of the future workforce.

The lack of basic STEM skills required for many of the jobs available in industry today hinders many of Europe's youth from finding employment. Young people and their teachers lack knowledge of the career opportunities available for people with STEM backgrounds. One of the highlights from inGenious, a research project funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme, is the importance of National STEM Platforms such as Beta Techniek in the Netherlands. STEM Platform professionals from the Netherlands and Denmark presented how establishing a national platform creates the dynamic for sustainable industry – education cooperation at the local level.



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Marc Durando, Executive Director of European Schoolnet noted, “By bringing industry professionals together with teachers, a new dynamic is created by blending real world experience with classroom curriculum. Students can see how STEM relates to the products, services and infrastructure that are part of their daily lives. And together with their teachers, students learn about societal and business challenges, and career opportunities that require a STEM background. Europe’s economic growth and innovation capacity depend on increasing STEM graduates from both vocational and higher education.”

The Symposium highlighted numerous case studies of education and industry partnerships often in spite of barriers that still exist in many Member States that make cooperation a challenge, especially for establishing work-based vocational training. There were also examples of how education via ICT is rapidly developing, and there was debate about how it is expected to impact the traditional role of the teacher and the classroom.

Speaking at the event, Maxime Cerutti, Social Affairs Director at **BUSINESSEUROPE** said, “Vocational education systems, notably dual-learning apprenticeships, are well placed to provide young people with the skills that companies require.”

Industry and business associations called for not only improving the hard skills, but pointed out the need for young people to develop the so-called soft skills that are needed to make the transition to the world of work such as team work, problem solving, how to communicate, “English as a job skill,” and entrepreneurial skills as part of their formal school education.

Future economic growth relies on young people having the skills necessary to succeed in the world of work. “Whether they work for a large company or set up their own business, we have a responsibility to make sure they are equipped to fulfil their potential and contribute their talent and creativity in the workplace. If we want to see more entrepreneurship down the road, we need to be catalysts inside the system. Our focus is to support schools, engage the business community in the education process and scale up in order to see real economic impact. It’s truly rejuvenating to see the devoted efforts of business and policy stakeholders to invest in young entrepreneurs and show the way out of the crisis for Europe itself,” said **Caroline Jenner, CEO of JA-YE Europe**.

Stefan Crets, Executive Director of CSR Europe commented, “CSR Europe remains committed to Europe’s 2020 ambitions towards a job-rich recovery and a dynamic culture of entrepreneurship.

Specifically, our collaborative Skills for Jobs project focuses on the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in education to equip the next generation with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to start a business or be successfully employed. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership to address both the entrepreneurial and STEM skills gap our member companies are currently facing across Europe.”

One of the conclusions reached was that there are already many good practices existing, and Member States need to move much faster to adopt them and make systemic reforms. However, judging from the energy of the discussions, many at the Symposium today understand that Europe and its youth cannot continue to wait, and they will continue their efforts to implement practical solutions whether in STEM, vocational training, or educating and supporting a new generation of entrepreneurs.



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About the organiser and partners:

The **European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT)** is a forum of around 50 European industrial leaders aiming at promoting the competitiveness and growth of Europe's economy. ERT Members are Chairmen and Chief Executives of major multinational companies of European parentage covering a wide range of industrial and technological sectors. ERT derives its strength from the commitment and personal involvement of its Members. Companies of ERT Members are widely situated across Europe, with a combined turnover exceeding € 1,300 billion, sustaining around 6.8 million jobs in the region and investing € 52 billion in research and development.

CSR Europe is Europe's leading business network for Corporate Social Responsibility. Through its network of around 68 corporate members and 37 National CSR organisations, it connects over 5,000 companies to share best practice on CSR, innovate new projects between business and stakeholders, and shape the business and political agenda on sustainability and competitiveness. CSR Europe addresses societal challenges through the Enterprise 2020 Initiative, which fosters collaboration, innovative practical action and the business contribution to the European Union's Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. For more information visit www.csreurope.org

JA-YE Europe (www.ja-ye.org) is Europe's largest provider of entrepreneurship education programmes, reaching 3.1 million students in 38 countries in 2012. Funded by businesses, institutions, foundations and individuals, JA-YE brings the public and private sectors together to provide young people in primary and secondary schools and early university with experiences that promote the skills, understanding and perspective that they will need to succeed in a global economy. The JA-YE Company Programme is recognised by the European Commission Enterprise Directorate General as a 'Best Practice in Entrepreneurship Education'. JA-YE Europe is the European Regional Operating Center for JA Worldwide®.

European Schoolnet is the network of 30 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to our key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners. www.europeanschoolnet.org. Follow us on Twitter @eu_schoolnet and on Facebook european.schoolnet.