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PERSPECTIVES FOR EDUCATION POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF
EMPLOYMENT POLICY WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE PROBLEMS
OF THE TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE
FROM EDUCATION TO WORKING LIFE

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4. The forthcoming meeting between Ministers of Education will provide an opportune moment to compare and take stock of the developing policies in Member States. It is appropriate to re-examine the priorities set in 1976 and consider whether there are new or additional ones which should condition the future work of the Education Committee in this field. It is also timely to consider whether new forms of collaboration between the education and employment sectors need to be developed.

II. BACKGROUND

1. A new relationship between the education and employment sectors

Since 1976 several developments whether at local, national and Community level have demonstrated the emergence of a new relationship between the education and employment sectors.⁽¹⁾ There is, for instance, growing evidence throughout the Community that the education sector has an explicit responsibility, irrespective of the economic situation, to begin the preparation of young people for working life within the context of "general" education and before the end of compulsory schooling. At the same time, the employment sector has, for example, become deeply involved in attempting to provide on a long-term basis for the educational and training needs of the least skilled school-leavers.⁽²⁾ This development has frequently meant that a new range of training and temporary work experience opportunities now exist in parallel to the post-compulsory education sector. The complexities and anomalies created by this situation remain a challenge to inter-ministerial planning in many countries.

(1) Aspects of this relationship were discussed at a first joint meeting in Elsinor in September 1978 for senior officials of employment and education ministries, organised by the Danish government.

(2) Cf. Commission Recommendation on vocational preparation for unemployed young people and those threatened with unemployment. (OJ No. L 180 of 20.7.1977)

Cf. also the new area of intervention by the European Social Fund in favour of vocational training programmes for young unemployed people. (OJ L 199 of 30.7.1975)

2. Trends in the employment situation

Since 1976, however, in general the employment situation affecting young people has not improved. Unemployment, albeit of relatively short duration, affects the age group of 14-19 years particularly severely. As the prospect of a long-term deficit of employment during the 1980's has become more widely recognised, the policies focusing all resources on raising the level of vocational skills of new entrants to the labour market must be questioned. However well qualified certain sections of the labour force, their demand for employment must be viewed in relation to the global supply and distribution of jobs. Strategies involving direct job creation and various "work sharing" provisions are, therefore, being developed with a view to benefitting the whole working population, not only young people.⁽¹⁾ Education and training schemes will need to be adapted to these new realities.

3. Recent technological developments

The progressive introduction of new technologies, which will exacerbate employment problems in the 1980's, has also highlighted the need to review the type of skills and competences required by school-leavers and adult workers alike, the aim being not so much to guarantee them employment but to equip them with sufficient self-confidence and adaptability to find their way in a changing world.⁽²⁾

4. The role of continuing education and training

Continuing education and training takes on a new significance in this context. Apart from the need to provide educational and training opportunities for young unskilled workers, an increase in educational or training leave opportunities could become one of the crucial factors enabling all sections of the working population to manage their careers, to adapt to uncertainties and new developments in the labour market throughout their working lives and to play their role as citizens in a changing society.

The inter-relationship between the education and employment sectors thus goes beyond the context of the transition of young people from education to working life. To what extent have policies and measures been developed since 1976 which take account of these new realities?

(1) Cf. Council Resolution of 18.12.1979 on the adaptation of working time (OJ No. C2 of 4.1.1980)
Cf. New European Social Fund aid for job creation and recruitment subsidies (OJ No. L 361 of 23.12.1978)

(2) Cf. European Society faced with the new Information Technology (COM(79) 650)
Cf. Employment and the new micro-electronic technology (COM (80) 16)

III. A SELECTION OF QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN TWO KEY POLICY AREAS

1. Guidance and Preparation for working life : this has emerged as a major theme of nearly all the pilot projects on the transition from education to working life. With the increasing importance given to preparing young people for "working life" during the period of full-time schooling, greater demands and expectations are being placed on the in-school provisions for vocational guidance, personal counselling, training in "social skills", and career education. However, these are all areas which, from the teaching point of view, have not hitherto been attributed significant professional status. New developments in these areas are taking place against a background, in most countries, of falling school rolls and strong pressures to reduce or rationalise public expenditure in the educational field.

- i) to what extent have education authorities taken steps to assess and to cater for the changing attitudes of young people towards working life?
- ii) How can educational authorities working in collaboration with manpower authorities present adequate guidance to young people which takes account of both the traditional emphasis on entry (for boys at least) into the primary labour market, and the increasingly divergent alternatives for individual self-fulfilment? (e.g. temporary work, part-time employment, self-employment)
- iii) How do the responsible authorities plan to equip the existing body of teachers and counsellors to undertake the increasingly formidable task of preparing young people to find their place in a labour market where selectivity, prejudice and regional inequalities have been heightened by the unemployment crisis?
- iv) What possibilities are open to educational authorities to achieve a re-allocation of resources and a sharing of responsibilities within the teaching force with a view to upgrading the role of guidance, counselling, etc.?

2. The link between education/training and work/work experience

This theme, which is relevant both to school-leavers and adults, is becoming central to the development of manpower policy at national and Community level. Both educational and manpower authorities emphasise the need to provide young people with a basic vocational qualification, not under the illusion that this will directly reduce youth unemployment, but with a view to enabling young people at least to find an initial foothold in the labour market and thereafter enter into a phase of adult responsibility and self-development particularly through continuing education provisions.

The trend to prolong education and training and to postpone the opportunity for the choice of career has coincided with a contrary trend on the part of many young people, maturing earlier, to express forcibly their disaffection with compulsory schooling (whether full or part-time) on the one hand, and with available salaried employment on the other.

At present, the young people who are most marginal to the primary labour market are often those who are least protected from their own inexperience and benefit least (and not always voluntarily) from the provisions for initial and continuing education and training.

- (i) What are the evolving views of educationists regarding the age at which young people should have the right to leave school, to enter full-time paid employment, to be financially independent of their families and to take responsibility for their future?
- (ii) How far is compulsory part-time education and training (particularly in the form of compulsory "day-release" from employment) seen by educational authorities to be a practical and suitable alternative to full-time education and training prior to employment.
- (iii) To what extent should provisions for educational and training leave from employment (paid or unpaid leave) be focussed, as a priority, on the 16-19 age group?
- (iv) In view of the problems of transition from higher education to working life and the phenomenon of graduate unemployment, how far should third level education and training be organised in future on the basis of "alternance" i.e. alternating periods of study and employment?