

# The EUROPEAN PACT & YOUTH

## First Leaders Joint Proposal On:

**Making VET/Apprenticeships an  
Equal Choice in Europe**



# About this document

## European Pact for Youth

This document comprises the ideas originating from the diverse group of Pact Sherpas and acts as the base for the short document provided to the Pact Leaders. The short document contains key messages, which are sufficiently directional and strategic, without pre-empting solutions.

## What do we mean by Leaders Joint Proposals?

“To **contribute to the EU and national policies** on skills for competitiveness and employability, we commit, as business leaders to work with the supportive organisations of the Pact, to elaborate joint action proposals (...) leading to more significant and **long-standing impact** for the benefits of young people and companies”.

Through these proposals, we want to provide a strategic vision and input on how Europe can act as a game changer (1) to make fair and equitable **business-education partnerships the new norm**, (2) to offer **VET/ apprenticeships as an equal choice** for youth, and (3) to **embed entrepreneurship skills in formal and nonformal education across Europe**.

Each proposal will articulate concrete solutions that: (I) respect **subsidiarity** with Member States and public bodies in collaboration with other actors working on the ground, (II) target high **ambition**, (III) can be **felt by the people**, and (IV) are **easy to engage in**.

The proposals will be accompanied by National Action Plans (NAPs). These plans indicate regional and/or national priorities to work on that can act complementary to help achieve the Leaders' Joint Policy proposals. In addition, the Leaders will examine how they can practically support the solutions that they present in the first joint proposal.

The joint proposals will be presented together with the other Pact results at the **1st European Enterprise-Education Summit in late 2017** and to the **EU leaders supporting the Pact**. They will also be addressed to the **European Heads of State and Governments** (see annex).

**Disclaimer: the Joint Proposal's ideas and content do not reflect the opinions of each individual organisation, only the overall consensus of the European Pact for Youth partners. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information in this proposal.**

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# Transition to jobs: the current situation and response in Europe

Evolutions like the 'internet of things', the demographic change, big data, the circular economy and Industry 4.0 require learners and business to prepare for new types of jobs, many of which still are unknown today.

Meanwhile, over 7 Million 15-24 year olds in Europe are neither in employment, education or training (NEETs). One active young person in four currently looks for a job. This figure reaches one in two in some countries. Overall, this situation has an annual cost topping a 150 billion Euro mark. There is also a medium to long term impact of unemployment on our economy and society. Currently, young people are the group at highest risk of poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, there are large numbers of young refugees and migrants arriving in Europe who bring with them valuable skills and great talent.

Evidence suggests that countries with strong VET (Vocational Education and Training) and apprenticeship systems have lower levels of youth unemployment. However, the situation varies greatly among Member States with great divergence in attractiveness and quality of VET/apprenticeship programmes.

Initiatives on education and skills for jobs at European level support mainly national or regional initiatives. There is a **wealth of activities** being supported or coordinated through European programmes and structures such as **Erasmus +, the Grand Coalition of Digital Jobs, the European Hub for Entrepreneurship Skills, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships**. These structures should be seen as complementary activities, partnering together, leveraging each other's strengths in order to achieve the same goal in eradicating youth unemployment and skills mismatch.

The Pact for Youth intends to inspire and guide initiatives on education and skills towards a significant and long standing impact on youth unemployment, enhanced human capital and better social integration in Europe. It gives particular deference to VET and apprenticeships and the mechanisms necessary to accomplish the mission.

Therefore, in light of this, our two questions are: how can we build upon the lessons learned and success of the existing but dispersed initiatives and how can we move towards a European approach with vision, scale and instruments that can speak to and engage more directly with young people, their parents, teachers and enterprises?

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# Our proposal: Making VET/apprenticeships an equal choice for youth in Europe

The seriousness of the situation demands a strong vision, rapid action and a consensus at the highest levels of the European institutions. Therefore, as Leaders of the European Pact for Youth, we propose that Europe's leaders urgently draw on existing initiatives and new investments, partner together, and leverage one another's strengths to make VET/apprenticeships an equal choice for youth in Europe.

What Europe has proven capable of doing 30 years ago for its future university graduates, we believe it can and must do again today for its vocational learners.

VET and apprenticeship is a lever for action in favour of qualification and access to jobs for young people, as well as for better skills and attitudes required by enterprises, while mobility lies at the heart of the European Union's calling.

We believe it is time to develop one level playing field on VET and apprenticeships of high quality in Europe. By 2030, learners, teachers and enterprises should have an opportunity to engage with excellent VET and apprenticeship centres in their respective region or city, offering comparable and equivalent qualifications as those in other Member States.

An opportunity to engage with excellent VET and apprenticeship that is not reduced to the acquisition of purely vocational skills but that offers the same opportunities for personal development and citizenship, going hand in hand with the professional development. In conjunction with and supporting national reforms, our proposal should help to drastically enhance the attractiveness of VET among youth, parents, teachers and businesses, and should ensure that quality is a guarantee through pushing for a European wide Quality Framework for apprenticeships.

## Our proposal should further contribute to:

- Make VET/ Apprenticeship opportunities and information available at local level. The mainstreaming of work-based learning in VET curricula; much of the success of our proposal will rest on its capacity to develop knowledge, skills, and personal development of young people through the volume of off-the-job training; near-peer and peer mentoring, the systematic use of older and retired workers as mentors and the management of movement and change through a network of publicised opportunities in Europe
- The quality assurance in dual learning
- The advancement of future-oriented skill qualifications (sciences, technology, mathematics, innovation and entrepreneurship)
- The mobility of apprentices, from short to long term mobility opportunities fixed according to the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and the suppliers
- The mutual recognition of qualifications
- The portability of social rights

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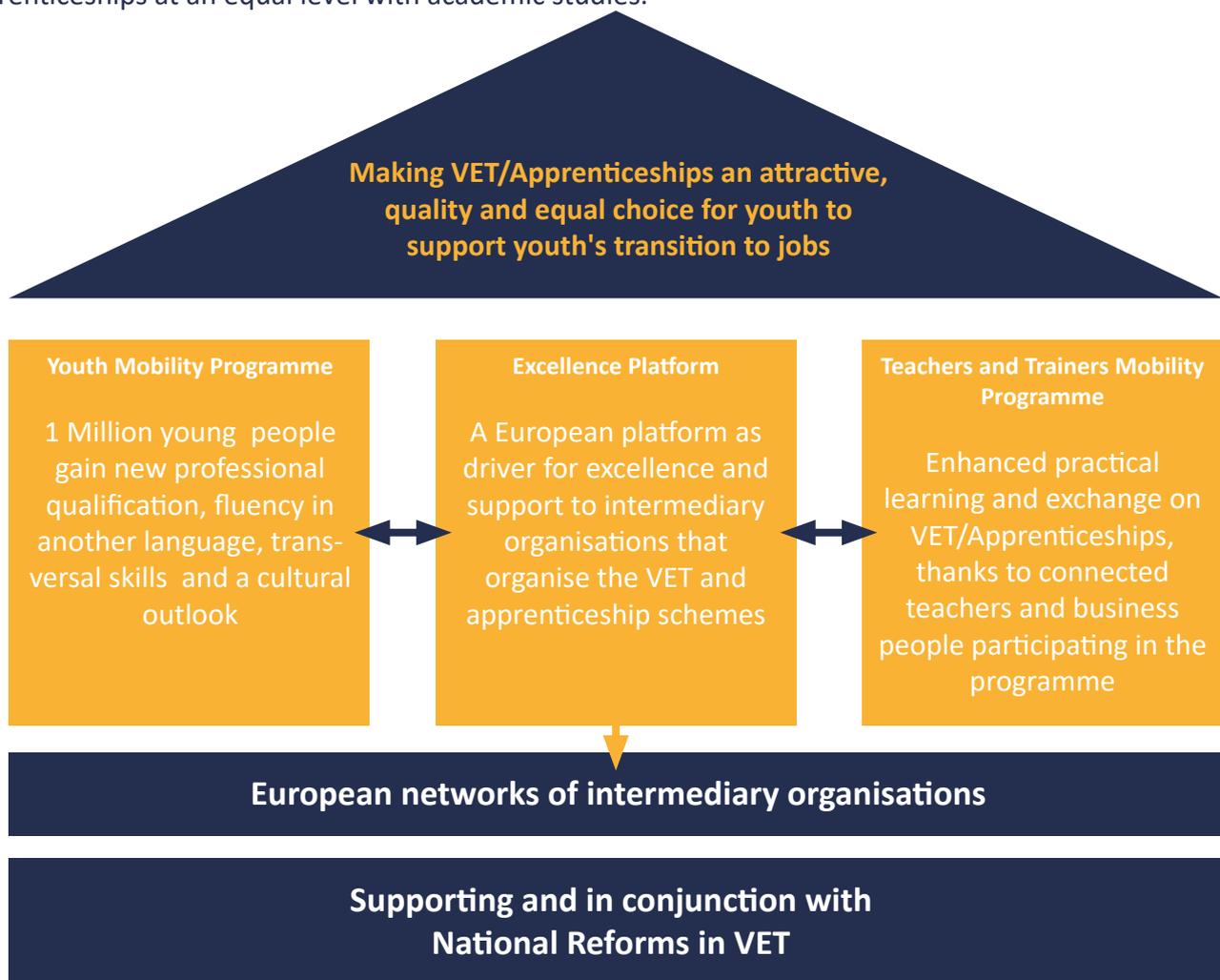


# Our proposal: Erasmus Pro as a strong unifying quality brand

Future structural policies at European, national and regional level should mutually enhance and support **(1)** the role of intermediary agencies in enhancing the quality and attractiveness of VET and apprenticeships through one European platform, **(2)** opportunities for learners to gain total or part of their professional qualification in another European country **(3)** the direct exchange and collaboration between VET teachers and representatives from business to strive for excellence in VET across Europe.

To that end, our proposal for Europe is to unify three mutually supportive ambitious packages into one comprehensive Erasmus Pro. In one central axis, we have a European Platform of Excellence on VET and Apprenticeships, there is also two European mobility programmes: one for learners and one for business trainers and VET teachers as illustrated below.

Erasmus Pro also offers a brand that is easy to recognise and understand, whilst the current brand names and logos connected with European programmes like Erasmus+ and its sub-programmes, are today not recognisable by the average European citizen, learner, teacher/trainer or business person. Thereby, they do not sense that Europe is an ally that offers a vision and supports practical solutions for developing more and new professional qualifications that can directly support youth in their transition to jobs and social integration. Erasmus Pro wants to countermeasure this and as such value the importance of VET and apprenticeships at an equal level with academic studies.



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# A European Platform of Excellence on VET and Apprenticeships

Smooth collaboration between the learner, school teachers, workplace mentors from business and social partners, is the key driver for success for any VET/apprenticeship programme. It is therefore crucial that full support is provided to local agencies whose role is to bridge these two communities and facilitate their collaboration.

Indeed, it is the level of awareness and capacities of intermediary organisations, such as chambers of commerce, employers' federations, education networks, sector associations, employment services, Academic-Business platforms and youth organisations etc., that will be pivotal for the collaboration between vocational schools and companies to deliver on the design of vocational profiles, administering VET, and its funding, finding training places and, most of all, ensuring a high level of quality that puts the learner at the centre. The same way the mobility of young university students has been possible thanks to the contacts which universities organise amongst themselves, an important role for the platform is to also help VET schools to organise contacts with other VET schools.

The Platform could contribute to a wider playing field for all European VET institutions to have a good command of the latest EU tools for VET (ECVET, EQAVET). As such, they can better implement validation and recognition of non-formal and formal education. A European Platform of Excellence for intermediary agencies, networks, Business-Academic platforms and their related stakeholders, including youth organisations could be the driver to enhance their expertise, to benchmark their performance and to ensure a total quality approach on the role they play.

This Platform - whose shape and structure remain to be defined - would serve as a connection point in bringing together the different intermediary organisations and networks, thus enabling them to connect with each other for enhanced communication, emulation, peer review and cooperation. Furthermore, this Platform would serve as a one-stop-shop for all EU level matters, providing the agencies and networks with the adequate information on EU initiatives and provide access to funding that can be further passed on to local actors. The Platform should make use of virtual technologies, being a place where people are connected online, but could also be shaped into regional VET fairs.

We believe such a Platform should be built around the experience and know-how of platforms like CEDEFOP and should support the ongoing work of associations that want to be active in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships or those that are developing projects supported by regional, national and European authorities (e.g. Youth Guarantee or Erasmus).

One immediate action would be to have an agency like CEDEFOP to expand its annual activity plans to include training sessions, learning networks and expert-services to the agencies that are intermediate between education providers and enterprises. Another action should be to build on and learn from members of VET4EU2, such as EfVET, which in the coming years will ensure **1)** systemic application of learning outcome principles not only in VET providing, but in organizing work placements and apprenticeships, and **2)** learners benefit opportunities for multi-choice of career pathways and schemes.

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# Teachers and Trainers Mobility Programme

Our ambition is clear: in order to stimulate quality through exchange, support is needed to establish a new international grant scheme for teachers and their business partners:

- To undertake benchmark and study visits that will allow them to enhance and improve their local practice, or
- To act as mentors going on secondment to help peers to develop new VET and apprenticeship systems in regions or cities where such systems are of poor quality, too small in scale or unknown

The exchange of teachers and business partners would enhance the quality of apprenticeships through mutual exchange of expertise and best practices in domains such as **(1)** the organisation of apprenticeship examination, **(2)** setting up of certification-mechanisms for training places in companies, **(3)** review of vocational profiles, and **(4)** the qualification of teachers in schools and trainers in companies.

The same way Erasmus is being built on the exchange between universities, VET apprenticeships (and their mobility) requires effective company involvement. As such, business needs should be reflected in order to build long-term sustainable schemes and good investment of public funds. How such a trainer mobility programme will work out practically still needs to be further defined. It should focus on and address company engagement, taking into account funding schemes, administrative requirements, lack of structures facilitating mobility, language barriers, etc.

This programme should last at least 10 years, with a strong involvement of business networks, representatives of VET-providers and the members of the European Committee of the Regions and Eurocities. Their engagement is key to promote and help coordinate VET and mobility in VET of young people and apprentices in a broad process of democratic and participatory governance aimed at addressing the most relevant socio-economic and environmental issues, involving micro, small and medium enterprises, start-ups, local communities and social partners.

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# Youth Mobility Programme

Our joint proposal sets a target of 1 million young Europeans, to have the opportunity to take part in tailored quality mobility schemes by 2020, from short to long term periods, defined according to the needs and capacities both of learners and suppliers. Such mobility would allow the learner to gain **fluency in a foreign language**, new **professional qualifications**, transversal skills such as **adaptability, curiosity, learning to learn, interpersonal and civic skills**, as well as a **European cultural outlook**: all of these assets should be documented and mutually recognised by the different Member States in order to highlight their respective value and to help the learners in their transition to a job.

This approach is directly inspired by the Erasmus Pro proposal of the **Jacques Delors Institute (JDI)** and by the work of **Jean Arthuis** who, along with a group of Members of the European Parliament, play leading roles in the mobility of apprentices with the support of the European Commission. Our common ambition is to position learning and training mobility as a building block towards other structural reforms, just like Erasmus did 30 years ago for the Bologna process. For practical mechanisms and financial implications, further elaboration is needed, based on JDI core elements as well as current findings, based on ground level experience. Any future intra-EU mobility scheme for apprentices should help overcome some of the current hurdles, such as **1)** differences in legal frameworks between Member States, **2)** administrative requirements and the lack of structures that facilitate mobility, as well as **3)** not underestimating the language barriers and other practicalities.

In conjunction with and supporting national policy reforms on VET, Erasmus Pro will contribute to the development of one European playing field on VET and Apprenticeships across all Member States. For Erasmus to become the new European success story, it is necessary to determine a suitable approach and set up the required mechanisms to reach our objectives. The current resources that are allocated are not proportional to the level needed on the ground. Consequently, appropriate financial mechanisms should be explored with the view of revising current instruments and setting up new ones. This could notably take the form of a new and wider EU programme on VET in order to allocate the necessary funding and attention to the issue and create a strong brand for better and targeted communication towards youth, parents, educational institutions and companies.

In addition, other financial instruments should be considered, especially in the form of co-investment in VET and mobility by companies and public authorities. The current Juncker Investment Plan could play a major role in this by exploring possible financial mechanisms in making the “Youth Mobility” and the “Trainers Mobility” Programmes an attractive investment for implementation by companies, schools and intermediate agencies.

## Additional recommendations for policy reforms and incentives

Here some other recommendations to be further worked out:

1. We need to emphasise explicitly other important and complementary actions helping youth in their transition to jobs.
2. How to enhance the role and capacities of youth organisations (to boost youth to youth mobilisation) which have broader and more direct impact when informing, mobilising and supporting young people;
3. Enhance companies’ and banks’ efforts to integrate business-education partnerships in their strategy, performance and transparency practice (link to EU Directive on Non-Financial Information that will be revised at the end of 2018)
4. Schools and high schools to systematically implement the European Skills Passport. Support should be provided to increase common recognition amongst Member States of acquired skills which learners obtain through work-based learning, especially if there is mobility of a learner.

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# ANNEX: What do we mean by a Leaders Joint Proposal?

In the Engagement Guide, the mandate assigned to the Leaders stipulates that they will **provide strategic vision and input to help develop joint proposals on how Europe can:**

1. **Make Business-Education Partnerships the mainstream** to enhance youth competences and career skills
2. **Offer more and quality apprenticeships** to support youth in their transition to jobs
3. **Embed entrepreneurial skills in formal and non-formal education**

The joint proposals will be presented together with the other Pact results at the **first European Enterprise-Education Summit on 23-24 November 2017** and to the **EU leaders supporting the Pact**. They will also be addressed to the European **Heads of State and Governments**.

Each joint proposal will articulate concrete solutions that:

1. Respect the principle of **subsidiarity** and possible ways to leverage it
2. Target **high ambition**, setting out the required **practical and financial mechanisms**, in order to ensure **long standing impact**
3. **Tackle the blockages and obstacles** across different Member States and between different actors (business, youth, educational institutions, ...)
4. Can be **felt by the people**. Teachers, learners, parents and the wider public should sense that new, quality opportunities are arising
5. Are **easy to engage** for the actors (e.g. companies, schools, learners/apprentices)

## Putting our words into action

Capitalising on the experiences and other results accumulated during the Pact at national, European and international level, and fully aware of the continuous and collaborative efforts needed, the Leaders will examine how they can practically support the solutions that they present in the first joint proposal.

# Building Blocks of the Joint Policy Proposals

**BUILDING UPON OUR CURRENT EFFORTS AND COLLABORATION TO BOOST BUSINESS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS AND TO REDUCE THE SKILLS GAPS**

**CONSIDERING FURTHER ACTIONS AND COMMITMENTS UNDER THE EUROPEAN PACT FOR YOUTH**

**COMMITTED TO MAKING BETTER USE OF EXISTING EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL TOOLS AND MECHANISMS**



We commit, as business leaders to work with the supportive organisations of the Pact, to elaborate joint action proposal leading to more significant and long standing impact for the benefits of young people and companies.

## Three Joint Policy Proposals:

1. To make fair and equitable business-education partnerships the new normal
2. To offer VET/apprenticeships as an equal equal choice for youth
3. To embed entrepreneurship skills in formal and non-formal education all across Europe

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