



## JOINT PRESIDENCY TRIO AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

*on a suitable governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area*

### **HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

6 JULY 2021

#### **1) Context**

The **Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)**<sup>1</sup> invited the Commission “to work with the Member States until the end of 2021, in order to agree on a suitable governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area, reflecting also on the issues that need to be taken further to higher political discussion, without creating additional burdens for the Member States, while ensuring their ownership of the process”.

#### **a) Education and Training 2020**

Drawing on experience from the ET 2020 cooperation, **Member States and stakeholders** emphasised during **targeted consultations from 2018 until 2020** the need to better define the roles of different bodies of governance and ensure a stronger alignment between steering at the political level (Council, Education Committee), informal meetings of high-level officials (High Level Group, DG meetings) and implementation at the technical level (working groups, peer learning activities, etc.).

**Strengthened political guidance** by the EYCS (Education) Council on the implementation of the strategic cooperation framework was underlined as especially important. A **stronger mandate and political ownership of the High Level Group (HLG)** was also proposed, given the Group’s limited steering capabilities shown in practice and limited participation of high-level officials in the meetings over the past years.<sup>2</sup> These findings were supported also through an external assessment of ET2020.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG)

<sup>2</sup> Commission Staff working document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 {COM (2020) 625 final}

<sup>3</sup> [Assessment of tools and deliverables under the framework for European cooperation in education and training \(ET2020\)](#), Final report (ICF and Technopolis, February 2019)

**b) Non-paper on the post-2020 EU strategic framework for cooperation in education and training December 2019**

The **Non-paper** on the post-2020 EU strategic framework for cooperation in education and training endorsed by 15 Member States in December 2019<sup>4</sup> calls for **increasing the coherence and communication** between various bodies (Directors-General formations, the HLG, working groups etc.) and for linking these to the main overall strategic themes. The non-paper further advocates that these bodies should have a stronger focus on supporting the debates and decision-making in the EYCS (Education) Council.

The Non-paper put forward the possibility of establishing a **high-level rapporteur** to ensure a link between working structures and the Council. Such a rapporteur could oversee progress made in all working structures, possibly supported by rapporteurs in the separate working groups. He or she could report about the developments at working level and suggest issues for political debate. A rapporteur could be appointed preferably for a longer timeframe in line with the 18 months Trio Presidency Council Working Programme in order to ensure some continuity. However, previous discussions regarding the **appointment procedure** and the **mandate** of such a rapporteur were inconclusive and also not raised in later discussions.

**2) Governance solutions to coordinate the work and steer the development of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (2021-2030)**

The Council, in its **Resolution on a strategic framework** for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), agreed that “until 2030, the achievement and further development of the European Education Area will be the overarching political objective of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, permeating all strategic priorities and priority areas, as set out in the Resolution, bearing in mind that the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training will be the **main tool to support and implement the European Education Area**, contributing to its successful achievement and ambitious further development, through its initiatives and a common vision, in a spirit of co-creation”.

The Council further agreed that the strategic framework, during the **first cycle**, until 2025 should maintain all the tried and tested mutual learning arrangements of the ET 2020, such as the working groups, Directors-General formations and peer learning instruments, and maintain the involvement of other relevant governance bodies. It further agreed that Member States and the Commission will have to adapt those arrangements to the new strategic priorities and will work together to set up **governance solutions to facilitate efficient communication of information from the technical to the political level, and coordinate the work to be done under the strategic framework**, without creating unnecessary structures or additional burdens for Member States.

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<sup>4</sup> Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain.

The Council also agreed that **cross-sectoral cooperation should be enhanced** between relevant EU initiatives in education and training and those in related policy areas and sectors, particularly employment, social policy, research, innovation, youth and culture. Special attention should also be paid to policy and funding **synergies between education and training, research and innovation, namely in the context of the European Research Area and the European Education Area**, while ensuring consistency with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

### **3) High Level Group meeting - 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021**

During the HLG meeting, organized on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, Member States engaged in discussions in relation to the strategic framework and the future of its governance mechanism as well as the future governance structure.

On the one hand, Member States agreed on the need for a better coordination of the work done under the strategic framework, but were unsure about the need to create a new body or structure for this purpose. They also highlighted that the **definition and proposed mandate for such a structure should be made clear**, especially in relation to all other existing groups within the strategic framework. Therefore, in terms of next steps, Member States agreed that **discussions around this issue should continue in an intensive way**, firstly at an informal level, and eventually going back to the Education Committee in order to finally agree on the governance structure and adopt it, thus respecting the deadline established in the **Council Resolution on a strategic framework** for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030).

Member States also held a discussion around the future of the HLG, its overall mission and role, but also regarding the part it can potentially play within the future governance structure. Within this discussion, Member States highlighted the importance of **maintaining the traditional role of the HLG and of raising the political relevance of its discussions**, ensuring that this can be a forum where Member States can continue to freely debate on strategic and forward-looking topics, contributing to a long-term perspective in policy making for education and training.

Nonetheless, some Member States also agreed that the **coordination role that the HLG had during the ET 2020, although necessary, should be assumed by a different structure**, thus striking the right balance between the political and technical level.

### **4) Objectives and main tasks of possible models of a governance mechanism**

#### **Objectives:**

- To enhance ownership and prepare high-level political steer,
- To ensure a comprehensive and integrated organisation and stock-taking of the many streams of activities (Directors-General meetings, working groups, expert groups, peer learning and counselling etc.),
- To bridge the transition from the technical to the political level and back,

- To advise on issues to be taken further to higher political discussion.
- To contribute to enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation.

### **Main tasks:**

- Propose topics for discussion at HLG** and contribute to HLG meetings' agenda setting.
- Report to the Council and the Commission**, including through reporting to the HLG and to the Education Committee (in between HLG meetings).
- Propose reporting for the Council on progress under the strategic framework towards achieving the EEA** (e.g. one Council meeting per Presidency could have a dedicated AOB point on this topic).
- Take stock of progress** towards achieving the EEA by 2025 under the strategic framework, including through regular updates on the outcomes of Directors-General meetings and on the work of the working groups, expert groups, outcomes of peer learning seminars and other mutual learning activities.
- Provide advice on broad orientations for possible future policies** and for interaction between existing policies at international, EU, national and regional levels contributing to the achievement, and further development, of the EEA.
- Propose policy topics** that could contribute to the preparation of **policy debates in the Council**, as regards the EYCS as well as joint meetings with other Council configurations.
- Enhance **synergies** between education and training and **other policy areas** such as employment, social policy, research and innovation, including through **joint meetings** at similar levels.
- Contribute to a possible review of the working groups'** mandates and to the preparation of the subsequent mandates.
- Steer the work on evaluating and considering new and revised governance** for the post-2025 period, and proposing solutions for posterior analysis and adoption by the Council.
- Channel stakeholders' perspectives into the strategic steering process:** Representatives of relevant European stakeholder organisations could be invited to some meetings or parts of meetings of the suitable governance structure.
- Prepare an overview of the above-mentioned tasks in a form of **rolling agenda** for a period of 18 months.

### **Implementation of tasks - main challenges:**

- Appointment of a **high-level rapporteur** to report to the Council and the Commission working closely with the rapporteurs of the working and expert groups;
- Organisation of **joint meetings** between relevant bodies of the European Research Area and the governance structure of the strategic framework, while ensuring consistency with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- Involvement of representatives of relevant **European stakeholder organisations**, including their participation in meetings or parts of meetings of the governance

structure when needed or relevant. Stakeholders' perspectives could be channelled also through regular updates of the governance structure on the work of the working groups, expert groups, outcomes of peer learning seminars and other mutual learning activities in which stakeholder organisations also take part. Each working group could select a 'rapporteur' to report to the suitable governance structure.

## **5) Possible models of a governance mechanism**

As a part of the **co-creation process** between the Member States and the Commission, the Presidency trio DE, PT and SI, as well as the European Commission, jointly propose models of a governance mechanism to coordinate the work and steer the development of the Strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area. The **proposed possible models take into consideration different views as expressed by Member States** during previous discussions in the Education Committee, at last HLG meetings and during informal workshops organised by the current Presidency trio, under German and Portuguese Presidencies.

The **proposed models** for discussion are as follows:

- I. **Establishing a Steering Board** with limited membership
- II. **Establishing a Steering Board** with full Member States representation
- III. **Reinforced High Level Group** with a supporting/steering mechanism

### **Option I: Establishing a Steering Board with a limited membership**

- The Steering Board would be **established alongside the strengthened HLG**.
- Composition:
  - The Steering Board would be **composed of** senior-level representatives of the current and upcoming Presidency Trios and the Commission.
- Chairing:
  - The Steering Board would be **co-chaired** by representatives of the Member State holding the current Council Presidency and the Commission.
- Organisation of work and co-financing:
  - The Steering Board would **meet at least twice** per Council Presidency in Brussels and/or in the Presidency country or via teleconferencing.
  - It would be an **agile body, interacting with** the many streams of activities under the strategic framework, also with stakeholders when needed, and in synergy with different bodies in other relevant policy areas.
  - It would help **valorise results of work carried out at the technical level**.
  - Through its composition it would be the natural **link between the voluntary cooperation arrangements and the political decision-making**
  - The Commission would **co-finance** the meetings of the Steering Board, and would also **provide organisational, administrative and analytical support** to the Board.

### **Option II: Establishing a Steering Board with full Member States representation**

- The Steering Board would be **established alongside the HLG**.
- Composition:
  - All EU Member States would **nominate** up to two senior representatives as members as well as the Commission.
- Chairing:
  - **Co-chairing** by the Presidency Trio and the Commission; or by representatives of the Member States holding the current and future Council Presidencies and the Commission.
- Organisation of work and **co-financing**:
  - The Steering Board would meet once per Presidency in Brussels.
  - The Commission would **co-finance** the meetings of the Steering Board, and would also provide organisational, administrative and analytical support to the Board.

### **Option III: Reinforced High Level Group with a supporting/steering mechanism**

- The reinforced HLG would be **supported by a group** composed of senior-level representatives of the current and also possibly the upcoming Presidency Trios and the Commission and chaired by representative(s) of the Member State holding the current Council Presidency.
- The group supporting the HLG would meet at least twice per Council Presidency in Brussels and/or in the Presidency country or via teleconferencing.

### **Possible questions for discussions:**

- *What are the pros and cons of each model in your opinion? Which model would you prefer and why?*
- *What should be the main elements, including tasks, of the overall governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, and possibly described in a Council document?*