



MLADINSKI  
SVET  
SLOVENIJE  
NATIONAL  
YOUTH  
COUNCIL  
OF SLOVENIA

**MSS-109-10**

***Policy Paper***

***YOUTH EDUCATION***

## **Introduction**

### **On youth policies**

In the past few years, youth policy in Slovenia has entered the socio-political agenda, and has become increasingly important and taken into account. Since 2010 it is also defined in the Act on the Public Interest in the Youth Sector (ZJIMS) as: “ /.../ a harmonised set of measures of various sectoral public policies with the purpose of promoting and facilitating the integration of youth in the economic, cultural and political life of the community and appropriate support mechanisms for developing youth work and operation of youth organisations, which is carried out in cooperation with autonomous and democratic representatives of youth organisations and professional and other organisations /.../«.<sup>1</sup>

The National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS), the umbrella organisation of national youth organisations and the key partner in the social dialogue in the field of youth, strives for the development of youth policies and, consequently, for the improvement of the situation of young people. With this in mind, MSS adopts policy documents tackling different sectoral policies, which call upon relevant stakeholders to implement the proposed actions. Such documents – the present one, tackling youth employment, being one of them – are a basis for MSS to, *inter alia*, enter into discussions with policy makers, to react to current affairs, to inform young people and the wider public and undertake other measures.

A definition of youth says that one is young until one has reached the desired points of growing up (has moved away from one’s parents, has created a family, has become employed, has finished schooling, etc.), and has thus become autonomous and independent. Youth policies intend to properly regulate these key transitions in the lives of individuals. Through policy papers, MSS wants to form these processes according to the views of young people.

### **POLICY PAPER „YOUTH EDUCATION“**

Within the scope of youth policies, education is one of the key areas, due to its role in the process towards youth autonomy. The aim of the present policy paper is to define the problems of youth education, to point out certain inconsistencies – especially related to the aspect of linking education with the labour market – and to propose measures for improvement. As such, the document addresses education in youth organisations and in youth work, as well as a broader aspect of education

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<sup>1</sup> Act on the Public Interest in the Youth Sector, Ur.l. RS št. 42/2010. English version available at: [http://www.ursm.gov.si/fileadmin/ursm.gov.si/pageuploads/pdf/ZJIMS/ZJIMS\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.ursm.gov.si/fileadmin/ursm.gov.si/pageuploads/pdf/ZJIMS/ZJIMS_ENG.pdf) (19.8. 2010)

(horizontal and vertical), and includes all forms/pillars of education: formal and non-formal education, and informal learning.

In order to encourage life long learning to enable a smooth transition of young people from education to employment and to strengthen their flexibility in the labour market, this document especially aims to achieve:

- improved quality of all forms of education,
- connectivity between the three educational pillars, and
- recognition of non-formal education.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Formal education** is a planned process of learning or gaining knowledge, which follows pre-determined goals, takes place in formal education and training institutions, and leads to generally recognised diplomas and qualifications.

**Non-formal education** is also a planned process of learning or gaining knowledge, but it takes place outside formal systems of education and training; it does not necessarily lead to formally recognised outcomes. It emphasises participants' activity and self-initiative. When compared to formal education methods, those of non-formal education are more diverse, whilst the relationship between the teachers and students is interactive and non-hierarchical. Non-formal education is more flexible, as it adapts to the needs of participants and the society in general. Non-formal learning can take place in the framework of organisations and civil society groups, or at the workplace.

**Informal learning** comprises knowledge and skills one acquires as so-called side effects of life and activity. Informal learning takes place in the family, social networks, daily life, through the media, etc. It is largely based on experience (e.g. learning from mistakes). Contrary to formal and non-formal education it is not planned.

**Life long career guidance** in the context of life long learning denotes a number of activities that help citizens identify their skills, competences and interests at all ages and in all phases of life, in order to take decisions about their education, training and choice of profession. It also enables them to steer their own life path through learning, work and other environments, in which they acquire competences and skills and/or in which they use them.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Niklanović, Saša. 2007. *Pregled politike karijerne orientacije v EU: resolucija o karierni orientaciji*. Ljubljana: Zavod Republike Slovenije za zaposlovanje.

## **The significance of youth education**

### **1. Education brings employability, personal development and realisation of life goals to young people.**

Young people primarily enter the education system in order to gain knowledge and skills, based on which they will be able to become employed and ensure for themselves a life in decent social and economic conditions. Education is thus a condition for youth employment; at the same time, in the spirit of life long learning (acquisition of various competences) it enables flexibility to often unpredictable conditions in the labour market. This way, education plays a key role for youth autonomy, fosters one's personal development and enables one to realise her/his life goals, their learning and research potentials, creativity and innovativeness. In the forthcoming pages we mostly focus on the aspect of employability, but we nevertheless fully recognise the importance of other impacts that education has on the individual.

### **2. Quality and efficient youth education enables the development of the society's economic and social welfare.**

Efficient youth education of high quality aims at gaining a high level of knowledge, which brings about a well-educated work force. This in turn has an important impact on the development of the economy, because it improves its competitiveness and efficiency, by bringing innovation and other important aspects of development, such as the social and the environmental ones. As a consequence, welfare and quality of life also improve. Education, thus, is an important investment that can prevent many negative consequences the society suffers from, due to the unpredictability of the economy.

The European Union has also set itself the aim of creating a knowledge-based society, in order to improve the competitiveness of the economy and thus to ensure a higher quality of life.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Holistic youth education is only possible, if formal and non-formal education are interconnected.**

The societal development is based on life long learning, enabling the adaptation to the high dynamics in the economic and social spheres, and on the strengthening of

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission: *Communication from the Commission of 5 February 2003 - The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge*, COM(2003)58 final.

the eight key competences<sup>4</sup> as a set of knowledge and skills. On their basis people realise their life goals, act independently and enrich the society as active and responsible citizens. These competences are<sup>5</sup>:

- a. Communication in the mother tongue;
- b. Communication in foreign languages;
- c. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- d. Digital competence;
- e. Learning to learn;
- f. Social and civic competences;
- g. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
- h. Cultural awareness and expression.

Youth education in the knowledge-based society should thus aim at encouraging life long learning and at acquiring key competences, which is something the education system must properly adapt to. Formal education can in this sense offer only a part of the needed knowledge and skills in a limited time frame (mainly the first four competences from the list above), while non-formal education due to its nature and learning methods offers quality approaches to acquiring the other key competences throughout the life cycle. Holistic education thus primarily requires precisely the inter-connectedness of both these pillars. Their complementarity can ensure that young people successfully become autonomous, are more employable, develop both professionally and personally, and have a better quality of life.

#### **4. Non-formal education in youth work importantly contributes to the process of life long learning.**

Non-formal education and informal learning are among the key characteristics of youth work. Youth organisations offer an environment conducive to learning mainly due to the methods and learning environment, which do not put young people merely in the role of students, but often allow them to co-develop the learning process, and to serve as resources of knowledge for their peers, with whom they learn, upgrade and discover new knowledge together. This way young people develop a positive attitude to learning and take responsibility for their own learning process and acquired knowledge. They take a positive approach to learning and realise that knowledge can be gained in different learning situations, in different ways, that different forms of (formal, non-formal and informal) learning are complementary and interlinked. This way, young people learn to develop their transferable competences<sup>6</sup> through their whole life, not only in youth.

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<sup>4</sup> This is **one of the competency models**, which is already subject to much criticism; different national realities and organisations adapt these models to their environment and needs.

<sup>5</sup> *Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)*, Official Journal of the EU, L394/10.

<sup>6</sup> Transferable competences are those, whose use is not linked to only one area, but can be used in different situations — e.g. public speaking.

## Key issues in the area of youth education in Slovenia

### FORMAL EDUCATION

**One can sense a serious lack of career guidance**, which would be accessible to all young people, **throughout the entire scope of education (primary, secondary and tertiary)**. For young people to become independent and responsible individuals, it is essential that, within formal education processes, they discover their interests and skills, and gain competences to take decisions regarding education, training, choice of profession and career development. The choice of educational paths when transiting from primary to secondary, or from secondary to tertiary education, namely strongly affects their further educational path and later employment opportunities. It is a fact, however, that young people do not have sufficient and adequate information about all educational and employment possibilities and opportunities, which would enable them to take decisions. Moreover, formal education currently does not encourage the exploration of one's different skills and interests and does not raise awareness on the importance of decisions taken by young people at transition points in their education path.

Quality career guidance within the education process is an important support mechanism for a smooth transition of young people through the education system and to the labour market; despite efforts, it remains highly underdeveloped in Slovenia. Young people are not given proper support and encouragement that would in the long term improve the quality of the decisions they take in the area of education.

**Slovenia demonstrates a weak inter-connectedness of education and employment.** The lack of structural coherence between youth education and work force demand is the most problematic aspect of all. At the secondary level an ever higher rate of young people choose general and technical grammar schools, as a starting point for tertiary education. On the other hand, vocational secondary schools are in an inferior position and attract a decreasing number of students. In addition, a large part of students in tertiary education choose humanities while the interest for natural sciences is significantly lower.<sup>7</sup> All this, together with a lack of career guidance in the education system, leads to incoherence between the offer and demand in the labour market, lowers young people's employability and slows down their way to independence. Low employment prospects and thus low quality of life at the end of one's studies lead to the prolongation of time spent studying and low motivation to complete studies. The situation is mostly related to the inexistence of a national education and employment strategy, and to a disinclination of formal education institutions to adapt the availability of study programmes to the dynamics in the labour market.

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<sup>7</sup> Rakar, Tatjana. 2009. Izobraževanje in izobraženost mladih. V *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo*, ur. Urban Boljka in Tatjana Rakar. Ljubljana: MŠŠ – URSM in IVZ.

Additionally, weak links between the education system and the labour market are evident in the fact that young people are poorly equipped with competences required for work or for the implementation of the gained knowledge in practice. This is a consequence of the lack of practical experience during education. Despite the existence of practical training within certain education programmes, it is by far not accessible to all young people in education, which renders young people's transition from education to work even more difficult.

**Education suffers from a lack of quality**, particularly at tertiary level, which is linked to the public investment in different education levels: financial investment in the primary and secondary levels is sufficient, but at the tertiary level it lags behind the European average; this means that there are far too few professors per student.<sup>8</sup> The weak link between theory and practice, mentioned above, also lowers the quality of education. Also, a weak overview of education programmes, learning processes and work of professors, is in place. Certain forms of evaluation exist but their results do not lead to major change and improvements in the quality of education.

The quality of education programmes is often questionable also in secondary schools. One can notice a lack of learning of key competences for responsible independent life, such as the basics of economics, active citizenship, public participation and entrepreneurship (the skills needed to put ideas into practice – creativity, innovativeness, risk taking, planning and management of projects).

All levels of education reveal another problematic aspect: the use of discriminatory discourse.<sup>9</sup> Teachers, educators and professors do not sufficiently realise the importance of the language they use in teaching, which is the most problematic at primary and secondary levels, where schools play the key role in upbringing. It may be subconscious, but the use of a certain discourse can have important effects on young people. Discriminatory discourse leads young people to develop stereotypical thinking, prejudice and intolerance, which have a long-term negative impact on the development of the society.

**Slovenia is not implementing the Bologna reform well.** With the introduction of the Bologna reform in 1999, countries signatories of the Bologna declaration, including Slovenia, had set themselves a common goal: whilst fully recognising and

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<sup>8</sup> Rakar, Tatjana. 2009. Izobraževanje in izobraženost mladih. V *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo*, ur. Urban Boljka in Tatjana Rakar. Ljubljana: MŠŠ – URSM in IVZ.

<sup>9</sup> Discriminatory discourse in the context of this document denotes speech that expresses discriminatory prejudice on the ground of personal circumstances, such as gender, race, religion, ethnic background, sexual orientation and physical or mental disability. On the one hand, discrimination is oriented against people who are traditionally neglected or put in a less favourable/threatening position due to personal circumstances. On the other hand, it goes against those groups of people who are given the "victim status" as a social status or social identity by the state, due to their personal circumstances. (Source: Referat na mednarodni konferenci Besede so dejanja, govor jih poganja – diskriminatorni in sovražni govor, Ljubljana, 27. september 2006, v organizaciji Urada varuha človekovih pravic Republike Slovenije).

respecting the differences between national education systems and autonomy of universities, they would together build an open and competitive European higher education space by 2010, which would enable European students and graduates free movement and employability, and would at the same time be attractive to non-European students. The goal should be achieved through different measures, such as the establishment of comparable and transparent higher education structures and levels, mutual recognition of relevant and comparable higher education qualifications, establishment of mutually recognised credits systems and quality assurance systems, encouragement of students' and university professors' mobility, as well as the development of a European dimension in education and better competitiveness of the European higher education in the world.<sup>10</sup>

In Slovenia the system was reformed only formally, whilst the curricula were not adapted to the change. Moreover, due to inadequate regulation of this area in the Higher Education Act<sup>11</sup> the chance to gain employment after completing the first cycle of the Bologna system is inexistent, because the level of education achieved when graduating according to the old system corresponds to the second cycle of the Bologna system. This way the introduction of a two-tier system becomes superfluous and, contrary to the expected effects of the Bologna reform, brings about the prolongation of studies.

The next sign of poor implementation is the issue of accrediting study programmes; due to a too high number of the latter, it does not work according to plans. Many programmes still have not passed the process of accreditation. Furthermore, the duality of tertiary education poses problems: university and vocational college programmes exist; however, after completing the first cycle of either of them, one can continue studying in the second cycle which does not introduce major difference between the two forms. The lack of a national structure of qualifications is another sign of weak implementation of the Bologna reform. Such a structure would, on the one hand, ensure comparability of educational programmes at the national level; on the other hand it would link the national qualification system with the EU system. Slovenia is among the last of EU countries that has not yet developed this national structure. Last but not least, the Bologna system entails the problem of achieving high mobility. Due to the financing system being insufficiently developed mobility levels in tertiary education are still very low (the level is at three percent at the moment, while the Bologna reform aims at ten percent).<sup>12</sup> Many students cannot afford to study abroad because there are no adequate/sufficient financial incentives for mobility. In addition, higher education is inadequately financed, as it is still adapted to the four-year studies and does not suffice to ensure quality implementation of five-year programmes within the Bologna system.

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<sup>10</sup> Univerza v Ljubljani. 2010. *Cilji bolonjskega procesa*. Dostopno na [http://www.uni-lj.si/bolonjski\\_proces/cilji\\_bolonjskega\\_procesa.aspx](http://www.uni-lj.si/bolonjski_proces/cilji_bolonjskega_procesa.aspx) (31. 8. 2010).

<sup>11</sup> *Zakon o visokem šolstvu (uradno prečiščeno besedilo) (ZViS-UPB3)*, Ur.l. RS št. 119/2006. Slovenian version available at: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=2006119&stevilka=5079> (19. 8. 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Komljenovič, Janja in Eva Marjetič. 2010. *Držna Slovenija: na poti v družbo znanja. Publikacija 2/3 – Statistični podatki o visokem šolstvu*. Ljubljana, Ministrstvo za visoko šolstvo znanost in tehnologijo.

**Early school leaving is visibly present in Slovenia within secondary vocational training and especially within the tertiary level of education.**<sup>13</sup>

The level of inclusion in the formal education system in Slovenia is very high (around 70 percent) and is above the European average.<sup>14</sup> Formal education is free of charge and thus in principle equally accessible to all young people; this however often does not hold for young people in a weaker economic position due to all other costs related to education (residing in the place of studies or commuting there from home, food, study materials, etc.). Accessibility of formal education is even more problematic for those young people who had left school at any level. The latter can also be seen as the consequence of education processes not being adapted to the real needs of young people, to poor inclusion of youth in the development of these processes, and in some cases to the above-mentioned indirect costs of education.

Young people can hardly afford to leave formal education and to re-enter later. Free-of-charge education has an age limit for each level. Moreover, no efficient system of fostering return to school is in place. Some reintegration programmes exist, but they are not particularly efficient, especially not in tertiary education.

**Mechanisms of scholarships for secondary and tertiary level students exist in Slovenia but their current state does not correspond to the needs that they are expected to fulfil.**

The aim of scholarships in secondary and tertiary education is to motivate young people to be consciously included in the education system, to attain high levels of knowledge, to improve youth employability and, for tertiary education, to finish studies in appropriate time. This way the scholarship system is directed towards achieving social and economic development of the country, and also plays an important role for the independence of young people – having their own financial means allows young people to learn skills related to economics, responsibility and independence. With regard to the latter, the scholarship system aims also at ensuring financial means, which is the only opportunity to enter education for young people with fewer opportunities.

First, the access to scholarships is limited to a small number of high school and university students. In this sense, all three types of scholarships available are problematic: state, Zois and company. State scholarships aim at fostering the education of youth from financially weaker family environments; however, the eligibility criteria are very strict and are not in accordance with the economic situation in the country; this situation does not give access to scholarships to many young people, although they would be entitled to them. Zois scholarships support particularly talented high school and university students, but are too few and are distributed according to inappropriate criteria, because they are mostly based on high average marks and less so on real talent. The approach to determine talent is

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<sup>13</sup> Rakar, Tatjana. 2009. Izobraževanje in izobraženost mladih. V *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo*, ur. Urban Boljka in Tatjana Rakar. Ljubljana: MŠŠ – URSM in IVZ.

<sup>14</sup> Rakar, Tatjana. 2009. Izobraževanje in izobraženost mladih. V *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo*, ur. Urban Boljka in Tatjana Rakar. Ljubljana: MŠŠ – URSM in IVZ.

also problematic, as it is to a certain extent too dependent on education institutions. Company scholarships offered by employers with state financial support are far too few, despite their high potential and wider benefits for both education and employment of young people.

All three types of scholarships furthermore suffer from weak control over allocation and over the fulfilment of criteria, lack of information about scholarship opportunities among young people, lack of fostering scholarship-giving and lack of widening the access to more young people. The inappropriate scholarship system in Slovenia – relative to its aims – is visible mostly in low employability of young people, the length of tertiary education, which in Slovenia is disproportionately high when compared to the rest of Europe,<sup>15</sup> and in the high rate of early school leaving in secondary vocational training and in tertiary education.<sup>16</sup>

## **BETWEEN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

**Formal and non-formal education are insufficiently interlinked, despite their complementarity.** Non-formal education gives important added value to formal education, because it offers a broad range of content and forms of knowledge, which contribute to young people's personal development, responsible attitudes to the society and to active citizenship, and are particularly relevant for the development of working skills and attitudes. All this is difficult if not impossible to acquire through formal education. It does not mean, however, that formal education should take on this role; non-formal education providers are better equipped for it, due to their long-lasting experience in running their types of learning processes and transfer of knowledge and skills. One can conclude, in any case, that stronger inter-connectedness of non-formal and formal education would lead to a holistic approach to education.

In spite of that, formal education institutions are not prone to cooperating with non-formal education providers, although these could offer an excellent environment for young people to gain practical experience and to learn competences relevant for life, such as entrepreneurship, active citizenship, initiative, creativity and economy. Moreover, curricula are not structured in a way to give certain space to non-formal education. This lack deprives formal education institutions from an important educational aspect; at the same time, non-formal education providers are at loss as well, because they face non-recognition, low esteem and low value of their activities in the eyes of the society, the state and the economy. Such disconnection between the two pillars causes major loss, the consequences of which are borne mostly by young people.

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<sup>15</sup> Rakar, Tatjana. 2009. Izobraževanje in izobraženost mladih. V *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo*, ur. Urban Boljka in Tatjana Rakar. Ljubljana: MŠŠ – URSM in IVZ.

<sup>16</sup> Rakar, Tatjana. 2009. Izobraževanje in izobraženost mladih. V *Med otroštvom in odraslostjo*, ur. Urban Boljka in Tatjana Rakar. Ljubljana: MŠŠ – URSM in IVZ.

**The state, formal education institutions and employers do not formally recognise non-formal education and training**, although it is a key component of the lives of most young people, who also go through formal education. In education young people gain knowledge and work experience through youth work, volunteering or student work, and in their free time take part in activities, education and trainings through youth and other non-governmental organisations, other providers and businesses. Non-formal education gives young people (mostly in youth organisations) various types of knowledge. It thus plays an important complementary role to the formal education system. Non-recognition renders it impossible to complement formal education processes with an important learning component, and it hinders the employability of young people, which goes against the goals of education – to prepare young people to enter the labour market.

The main problem of non-recognition of non-formal education provided by youth organisations is the lack of knowledge of youth work, work of youth organisations and the process of non-formal education and gaining of work experience, which take place in youth organisations and through which every young person active in youth organisations, consciously passes. The manner of registering and demonstrating non-formally acquired knowledge is problematic as well, and leads to an aversion to its recognition, as opposed to formally acquired knowledge. With the Bologna system, universities developed rules for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge in faculties. However, for different reasons the practice does not lead to the recognition of non-formally gained knowledge within formal studies, or it is linked to high costs. Also, the faculty rules define possibilities for progressing to the next academic level but only for certain forms of youth activity (in student organisations), while youth work elsewhere remains unrecognised.

## **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND INFORMAL LEARNING**

**The concept of non-formal education is less known and consequentially less valued in the Slovenian society.** It does not give participants, especially young people active in youth organisations, formal certificates or a higher level of education. It has to be said that formal certificates are particularly valued in the Slovenian society. We cannot claim that every type of involvement in youth work enables young people to develop the competences sought for and valued by the employers; however, we can certainly say that youth organisations are the environment where young people can develop such competences to a level that makes them flexible and transferable to all aspects of a young person's action.

**Non-recognition of non-formal education by the state, formal education institutions and employers also causes a shortage of financing of non-formal education.** Organisations providing non-formal education, especially youth organisations, thus largely depend on funding from calls for tenders. These rarely fund organisations' regular work, but mostly focus on individual projects. In this way the running of non-formal education often depends on the state's and the EU's

priorities, which requires adaptations of non-formal education contents, limits organisations' autonomy, and thus lowers the quality of non-formal education.

**Informal learning is mostly completely overlooked and does not receive systemic support.** If one assumes that youth organisations are the environment for planned as well as unplanned learning, then informal learning merits a special mention. Youth organisations can be the field where experimentation takes place – and in this way learning on one's attempts and errors, without the consequences that would follow mistakes in other areas (such as the economy or public service). In practice this means that every young person or group of young people have the right to "make mistakes" and to learn something from that. Informal learning can be understood as "the positive side effect" of young people's engagement in youth work. It is not necessarily defined or described in aims, it takes place spontaneously. Most often different people, based on their individual experience or personality, learn different things. The learning outcomes are thus individual and many times are not even recognised.

## NON-FORMAL EDUCATION WITHIN THE YOUTH SECTOR

**The quality of non-formal education and training in the youth sector is not ensured according to unified standards; therefore, different providers vary in terms of content as well as method and long-term impact.** All this affects the major reservations of relevant stakeholders; these reservations accompany the attempts to equally recognise non-formally and formally acquired knowledge and work experience. The main argument against introducing a system of recognition of non-formal education is namely precisely the relative quality of knowledge and competences acquired in a non-formal way.

## EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

**The involvement of young people in decision making about the functioning of their education institutions, contents and paths is not developed** to the point that would sensitise them about the importance of such engagement. Despite the existence of school student and student unions this is particularly characteristic for formal education. To attain the optimal effects of education, young people must develop responsibility towards learning processes and especially the desire to learn. The concept of life long learning must crucially be internalised while young people develop their personality; it is being gradually introduced into formal education institutions, but its importance has not yet pervaded the societal culture and is only partially encouraged. On the contrary, within non-formal education the participation of young people in the forming of learning processes is practiced much more, but is still not omnipresent. However, young people's wish for life long learning in formal and non-formal education can primarily be developed through their participation in the planning of education processes.

## Recommendations

The situation of young people in the field of education as identified in this policy paper must urgently be improved. The National Youth Council of Slovenia strives for the implementation of a range of measures through the state, formal education institutions and employers – all these are the key agents of change in the area.

1. We call for **active implementation of life long career guidance and individual planning in elementary, secondary and higher education**, which will enable young people to become acquainted with all possibilities and opportunities in education and employment, get to know the labour market dynamics, explore their own wishes, interests and skills, develop a positive attitude and motivation for life long learning.

Young people must be guaranteed constant access to career guidance at all levels and fields of education, and regardless of their region or education institution. Such career guidance must have adequate space in the curriculum, its importance must be clear to teachers, tutors and professors, and they must include it in regular teaching processes. Special attention must be paid to the quality of career guidance personnel within education institutions, and regular coordination and training for teachers, tutors and professors must take place. The latter is particularly important because of the large number of young people in the education system, which renders their access to individual guidance more difficult.

Career guidance must enter the education system in cooperation with school counselling services, Information and vocational guidance centres (CIPS), the Public Employment Service (ZRSZ), different career centres and other providers of career counselling/planning. Youth organisations should also be taken into account, because they can enable young people to gain important competences related to aspects of career guidance: inclination towards life long learning, active citizenship, decision making, social responsibility and critical thinking are among them. The processes of career guidance should also be intensively linked with the labour market, both through cooperation with experts and employers and through enabling all young people at all levels of education to gain practical experience. This way young people must be led towards better awareness about their education, relative to the opportunities to find jobs later in life, which would shorten the period of transition between formal education and the labour market.

2. We call upon state authorities to **develop a national strategy on education, which will be of high quality, long-term oriented and adapted to the dynamics of both the Slovenian and the European markets, and to ensure symmetry between education and employment**. It should be set up together with education institutions, employers and education and employment experts. On this basis high quality career guidance at all education levels must be devised, and must be

accessible to all young people. At the same time we call upon formal education institutions to better adapt their programmes to the needs of the labour market and to better link with the state, employers and European guidelines in planning educational processes as well as in managing the number of study places in individual programmes. With these measures young people finishing studies must become more employable, more motivated to finish studies in due time, and must be helped on their path of development and towards autonomy.

We likewise propose to set up different special support measures for education in deficient professions.

3. We invite formal education institutions to **introduce practical training in all educational programmes and curricula for all young people** in education. We strive for formal education institutions to cooperate with employers and non-formal organisations, particularly youth organisations, which provide adequate learning spaces for gaining important practical experience. Cooperation between the education system and employers should also begin through concrete assignments: home assignments, bachelor or master theses, school/study projects, which can relate to concrete businesses and organisations and their tasks or activities.
4. We call upon state authorities to **set standards of quality in education and to supervise their realisation.**
  - a. One of mechanisms to achieve this goal is the increase of public financial means for tertiary education, which would ensure a sufficient number of providers relative to the number of students.
  - b. In this sense we call upon formal education institutions to strive to ensure proper training for all providers of studies. The selection of professors, young researchers and assistants should be transparent and followed by a clear and regular revision of their competences.
  - c. We also invite formal education institutions to introduce better control over educational processes and regular and efficient evaluation of teaching processes and outcomes; in this regard we advocate for better inclusion of students in the processes of evaluation and improvement. The latter should be primarily ensured for all young people in tertiary education and for student councils at higher levels of decision making.
5. We call for the **inclusion of basic competence learning for responsible independent life into regular curricula of secondary and higher education.** To effectively learn competences such as the basics of economics, active citizenship, participation and entrepreneurship we propose that education institutions cooperate with youth organisations, whose nature and experience in this area can ensure the most adequate environment where such competences can be acquired.

6. **Mandatory training for teachers, tutors and professors in the field of non-discrimination in teaching, must be established.** This way, education providers will strengthen their awareness about the role of upbringing and its consequences for the personal development of young people.
7. We call for the **implementation of the Bologna reform** in the framework of its guidelines, and especially with the aim of ensuring quality in tertiary education.
  - a. In line with the official reform, the subjects and contents of individual educational programmes must be revised.
  - b. An appropriate system of accreditation and evaluation of educational programmes should be set up.
  - c. The purpose of duality in tertiary education should be reconsidered and appropriate measures to adapt both systems must be introduced.
  - d. A national qualifications framework should be set up, based on which the comparability of educational programmes and levels of education in the country can be regulated, and the national qualifications system can be linked with the EU one. In this sense, the Higher Education Act should be revised accordingly. This can improve the employability of youth who finished the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of the Bologna system and thus contribute to the realisation of the goals of the Bologna reform.
  - e. The financial support for mobility in tertiary education should be regulated in a way to ensure access to studies abroad to all young people.
  - f. The financing of higher education should adapt to the 5-year cycle of studies and to its quality.
8. All young people need to **have access, means and adequate support to take part in formal education.**
  - a. Firstly, we call for sufficient financial support to cover indirect costs of education for young people from weak economic and social backgrounds, which should develop together with an improved policy of scholarships.
  - b. Secondly, adequate preventive measures to decrease the rate of early school leaving must be introduced, such as educational processes, adapted to the needs of young people, inclusion of youth in the development of such processes and their encouragement to consciously approach education through proper career guidance.
  - c. Furthermore, we call for a strengthening of measures supporting reintegration in the education system; this will enable school drop-outs to get needed information, self-confidence and motivation to complete their studies.
  - d. Finally, we call for the restructuring of the formal education system in a way that will enable smoother reintegration, especially into tertiary education, of early school leavers. Young people need to have the

opportunity to co-develop their educational path with regard to their own needs and interests. In this way, life long learning will be encouraged, which has positive implications for the society.

9. We call upon state authorities to **fundamentally revise the scholarship system and to enlarge the number as well as optimise the way state and Zois scholarships are given**, which will ensure a fair allocation of scholarships for young people in secondary and tertiary education. With regards to state and Zois scholarships we advocate for the adaptation of eligibility criteria which will serve their purpose; with state scholarships this means lowering the threshold, currently at the average monthly income per family member; for Zois scholarships it means raising the importance of the talent indicator relative to grades. At the same time the control over the distribution of both types of scholarships and over the fulfilment of criteria, must be in place.
10. We invite employers to **significantly increase the number of company scholarships**, which would have many positive consequences, such as better motivation to stay in education, better employability, lower pressure on the labour market, caused by the disparities between the offer and demand, and the long-term development of the society and the economy – by employing young people they supported with scholarships, employers would win efficient, development-oriented work force, and young people would become more autonomous. In this sense we propose to introduce limited-period company scholarships (e.g. one year), which relieves both employers and young people, but retains the positive effects of company scholarships. Last but not least, we call upon state authorities to support and promote company scholarships among employers as well as among young people.
11. To achieve holistic education we propose to **actively connect formal education institutions with non-formal education providers**. Youth organisations can cooperate with formal education institutions in complementing the educational process with contents such as development of critical thinking, team work, active citizenship, social responsibility, participation in public life and gaining of entrepreneurial competences; they can also help with enabling practical experience in youth organisations in different areas young people study or train for. This will at the same time give greater visibility to youth work and better reputation and value to non-formally acquired knowledge and work experience. Finally, both educational approaches should be linked through the adaptation of curricula, which should give enough space to non-formal education, e.g. with putting a ceiling on homework, obligatory tasks and other assignments.
12. We call upon state authorities, formal education institutions, employers and other stakeholders to **establish a system of recognition of non-formal education and training**, which should develop in cooperation with youth and other non-governmental organisations and which should enable to certify non-formally acquired knowledge and skills through different certificates.

Compared to formal knowledge, non-formal knowledge needs to be recognised as equally important. Recognition of non-formally obtained knowledge and skills would contribute to the holistic education of young people, significantly increase their employability and in consequence positively influence their development, independence and autonomy.

It is crucially important for young people to have a proper record of the non-formal knowledge and skills, gained through youth work, volunteering and student work. Several efficient tools already exist (Europass tools – Europass CV, Europass language passport, Europass mobility, Europass diploma supplement, Europass certificate supplement, Youthpass, Nefiks, e-Nefiks<sup>17</sup>); these must necessarily be recognised by state authorities, formal education institutions, employers and other stakeholders. Another option is to use the above-mentioned tools to develop a system of recording non-formal knowledge and skills, which will enable a clear demonstration of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills. Rules must be put in place about what can be recorded and which knowledge and competences are valid for job-seeking and will be taken into account.

13. Recognition by experts, politicians and thus the wider public of the youth field as a space for quality non-formal education, and with financing such activities, should lead to **increased reputation and importance of non-formal education.**

This could also be achieved by:

- a. financing and motivating its support and promotion through media;
- b. financing and systematically tackling the awareness-raising (through parts of the elementary and secondary school curricula) among young people and their parents about life long career orientation, which includes both formal and non-formal education;
- c. systematically supporting the inclusion of individuals in all forms of non-formal education – through benefits at school or work, when the individual undertakes non-formal education (scholarships, discounts, time off, better prospects for employment, rewards...);
- d. promoting the concept of life long learning, which fosters all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal, and encouraging the society (especially employers and experts) to internalise it as a value.

14. We invite formal education institutions to **set up systemic frameworks for the recognition of knowledge gained in youth work.** In this sense the control over the recognition of youth work in faculties must be ensured together with systemic support to faculties to recognise such knowledge, including through increased financial support for those who do so. In addition, the rules on passing between years of study should include not only work in

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<sup>17</sup> Nefiks is an index of informal education, in which knowledge and achievements are recorded, developed by a Slovenian youth organization Društvo mladinski ceh.

student organisations but also other forms of youth work, as a mitigating circumstance.

15. We call upon state authorities and formal education institutions to **introduce the status of youth worker** (like the athlete status) in secondary schools and universities. A youth worker eligible for this status must hold the highest positions in youth organisations, and the organisation must have a public interest status.
16. We call upon state authorities to generally **increase financial support for the functioning of organisations which provide non-formal education**, particularly youth organisations; only this way they will be able to function successfully and with high quality, achieve visibility in the society and among formal education institutions and employers. With increased financial support these organisations will be able to realise their potential of providing a wide range of contents and knowledge, equipping young people with important competences for different areas of expertise and for responsible and successful independent life.
17. Informal learning is important and useful for youth work; youth organisations and other actors should support it to a larger extent; unfortunately calls for tenders and other sources of funding focus on planning and implementation of objectives, while spontaneous and unplanned learning is disregarded. Thus youth work loses an important learning dimension that would encourage young people to test new ideas and creativity. Fund providers should **consider the aspect of testing and trying, i.e. informal learning in youth work, and adequately finance it**, as it represents an important and unique learning space for young people.
18. We call for **improved conditions for youth participation in education-related decision making processes.**
  - a. Formal education institutions should strengthen the role of school student and student councils within their structures and decision making processes. The latter must give young people opportunities to co-decide about the way the education system functions, which should also include curriculum planning. At the same time we call upon school student and student councils to include more young people in their structures, work and decision making, and to better inform them about the opportunities for participation in forming the educational system.
  - b. We likewise call upon non-formal education providers to strictly ensure youth participation in developing their work, and in planning the structure and content of non-formal learning processes.

Only in this way will young people internalise the understanding that they are themselves providers of education processes, which will significantly increase the inclination for life long learning and for a responsible attitude to learning;

at the same time it will strengthen their autonomy and their motivation for further active participation in the society.

In order to improve the situation of young people in the field of education the National Youth Council of Slovenia also strives for the implementation of measures by youth organisations themselves, who provide youth work and thus also a large share of non-formal and informal learning for youth.

19. Youth organisations must actively aim at **ensuring high quality of non-formal learning, training and work experience** offered to young people. A unified system of quality standards for non-formally acquired knowledge and competences must be set up, as a basis for all actors in the youth sector. This will increase the reputation and value of youth work and consecutively render the recognition of non-formal education, training and work experience more favourable; in the future this can definitely improve the total quality of youth education as well as their position in the labour market.
20. To improve the quality of non-formal education in youth work, youth organisations must more strongly **encourage international mobility**. Many opportunities remain unexploited in this sense, which should be used to improve the quality and widen our range of knowledge and experience, to be used in order to give high added value to the non-formal education we provide.

## **Conclusion**

A holistic regulation of the youth education policy in Slovenia is a necessary step towards the improvement of the situation of young people before entering the labour market, towards raising awareness about the value of life long learning, and consequentially towards ensuring a sustainable development of the society.

Young people are often the most overlooked part of the civil society, which in the opinion of many does not need special measures. However, such reasoning does not hold, seen the importance of transitions that one goes through during one's youth. If we strive for a healthy, harmonious and interconnected society, giving a perspective for the future and enabling a happy and productive life, young people need to be properly provided for – and must take part in these efforts.

The National Youth Council of Slovenia works to foster cooperation between all stakeholders which can in any way contribute to the improvement of existing circumstances and conditions. We strive for the development of a long-term and coherent policy corresponding to the needs of young people, enabling their successful integration in the labour market and motivating them to life long learning. In this way, we can have an important influence on the quality of life in Slovenia and on the future of our society.