

# Boosting e-skills - decoding its potential

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According to projections by the European Commission, by 2020 there will be 900,000 open vacancies in the ICT sector in Europe due to a lack of skilled employees. The digitalisation of the economy reduces transaction costs and makes it possible for companies and customers to take full advantage of the European Single Market and the upcoming European Digital Single Market. Completing the Digital Single Market is expected to increase the EU's GDP by 4% by 2020, which is equivalent to about 500 billion euros. However, if the alarming skills gap is not addressed, we will not be in a position to take advantage of digitalisation as societies and economies. Young people suffer from really high levels of unemployment, which bears a really high economic and social cost. We need to do everything possible to bring down unemployment. Closing the e-skills gap is one of the big opportunities that has the potential to offer employment opportunities to hundreds of thousands if not millions of young people in the future. Developments in the field of ICT and networks, including cloud computing, big data, social media, the "Internet of Things" and the mobile internet, create demand for e-skilled employees and opportunities for those who will acquire e-skills. Therefore, addressing the skills gap with a wide spectrum of actions is of utmost social and economic importance because our long-term competitiveness relies on taking advantage of digitalisation and on acquiring the new required skills.

The current state of e-skills in Europe is worrying. We need to address challenges at all of the three e-skills levels defined by INSEAD Business School. There are challenges regarding the basic level including literacy, basic e-skills, maths and science. The same is unfortunately true regarding occupational level and occupational skills required for the job market acquired both in formal education and 'on the job'. Additionally, we also face challenges in the most advanced level defined as 'Global Knowledge Economy Talents'. The highest skills level deals with advanced skills such as leading teams utilising digital technologies and anticipating changes that are crucial for innovation using digital skills and technologies. Therefore, we have to consider boosting e-skills in a holistic fashion, and it is nearly impossible to consider the challenge ahead of us according to the traditional division between ministries in Member States or between DGs in the EU. Below we identify the key topics that require immediate action and proposals to address the identified challenges.

## 01 Public-Private Partnerships to offer e-skills trainings to citizens

It is paramount that we understand that there are a number of different levels of digital skills that are needed. There are e-skills that are needed for scaling up businesses, and to learn and master those skills one does not necessarily need formal education. There are skills that are needed to use digital services and to benefit from e-commerce. Private companies are best placed to offer these skills, and therefore, a lot more emphasis has to be put on the existing Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs. Companies have to actively and decisively participate in addressing the skills gap by providing trainings and it is also in their interest to do so.

### **The European People's Party:**

- Calls on the European Commission and the Member States to provide the right incentives for companies to offer trainings and internships – within the framework of the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs – that offer the “right skills portfolio” which develops competencies such as creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and citizenship;
- Encourages Member States to create their own National Grand Coalitions for Digital Jobs to further engage private-sector actors;
- Recognises and embraces the importance of the private sector’s participation in addressing the e-skills gap.

## 02 Grassroots movements – encourage children, youth and women to join ICT

Public bodies have to recognise that grassroots movements, which aim to get children, youngsters and especially women interested in e-skills and in joining the ICT-sector, have an important role to play. Women are underrepresented in the ICT-sector, and the current European Commission should build on the good work of the previous Commission to encourage women to join the sector. High youth unemployment rates are a grave social and economic problem. We have to prioritise providing unemployed young people with new skills, and the focus should be on e-skills, bearing in mind the projected employment opportunities in that sector.

### **The European People's Party:**

- Calls on the European Commission to dedicate funding within the Youth Employment Initiative to grassroots movements to expand their reach and to provide e-skills trainings – especially to disadvantaged youth and children, as allowed by the European Council’s decision of October 2013;
- Encourages Member States to offer practical help to grassroots movements, for example by allowing the use of school facilities after hours to hold trainings;
- Embraces the e-Skills for Jobs 2015-2016 campaign and calls on the relevant stakeholders to develop the campaign further, together with industry and education providers;
- Calls on Member States to encourage and give incentives for women to join the ICT-sector.

## 03

### Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) – recognition and standardisation

The youth guarantee should be used to address the skills mismatch, especially since MOOCs exist in a variety of different levels. The primary aim of the youth guarantee should be to offer skills that can lead to employment, and since the highest job growth is projected in sectors and jobs that require e-skills, these skills should be given top priority within the youth guarantee.

- Calls on the Member States to prepare, together with private-sector stakeholders, different levels of MOOCs to be used within the youth guarantee to provide participants with e-skills, by defining minimum standards and outcomes in order to be accepted and recognised by employers;
- Calls on the Member States to introduce MOOCs as an integral part of the youth guarantee;
- Calls on the Member States to foster cooperation and partnerships between European universities and technical colleges in order to develop common eLearning curricula in different languages, awarding successful students with ECTS credits that can be attached to study programmes, courses or modules.

## 04

### Primary and secondary education – digitalisation requires a different way of thinking

Digitalisation is comparable to the Industrial Revolution in how it will change society and the economy. We are only in the beginning of that process, but it is of key importance that e-skills are integrated into primary education in order to foster an understanding of the digital world and the logic through which it functions. E-skills are part of education policy but should also be considered as an integral part of long-term employment and competitiveness policies.

#### **The European People's Party:**

- Calls on national education ministers to make sure that coding and e-skills become as integral to students' timetables as reading, writing and mathematics, by integrating e-skills to subjects across national curricula;
- Calls on national education ministers to integrate e-entrepreneurship training to relevant secondary level courses;
- Encourages Member States to support teachers with the right training and resources they need to successfully deliver ICT curricula.

## 05

## Higher Education – the future ‘Global Knowledge Economy Talents’ and e-leaders

It is important to increase the number of students enrolled in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects in universities. We need to have the best talents in Europe to secure new innovations and cutting-edge technology companies. Only by having the best talent can we have the most competitive and innovative economy on a global scale.

**The European People’s Party:**

- Calls on the Member States to increase funding for universities to develop more awareness initiatives in order to attract more students to STEM subjects;
- Calls on the Member States, educational providers and industry to urgently adopt the recommendations of the European e-Competence Framework for ICT professionals to help standardise competences, role profiles and education;
- Calls on the Member States and education providers to integrate e-entrepreneurship and e-leadership training to relevant courses;
- Calls on the Member States and universities to develop undergraduate programmes designed and developed together with leading employers in order to provide the students with the skills, which are needed in the ICT-sector today and in the future. Employers could be encouraged to invest and participate in the activities of education and training institutions through professional or governance and advisory boards

## 06

## Digital skills for employability and inclusion

Due to the fast digitalisation of all industries and governments, it is expected that 90% of jobs require some sort of ICT skills. In a knowledge-based economy it is of the utmost importance to provide the citizens the right set of skills and digital education to fill in the gap between the supply and demand of labour, but also in order to strengthen social cohesion and active citizenship. Now is the time to train and educate the digitally skilled workers, digitally aware consumers, and digitally savvy citizens of tomorrow, not forgetting elderly people who should be helped in going online in order to tackle wider social issues and close equality gaps.

**The European People’s Party:**

- Calls on the Member States to foster formal validation and recognition of digital competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings (lifelong learning) of those who did not receive a formal education;
- In order to support citizens to live and work in an increasing digital society, we should foster the adoption of the recommendations of the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DIGICOMP) by governments, education providers and industry to help citizens, jobseekers, employers, employment services as well as education and training institutions;

- Encourages employers to use the European Social Fund to invest in human capital, either by providing learning vouchers to their low-skilled workers, or by providing adequate support to allow them to cost-effectively recruit new candidates with low skills if they invest in their training;
- Recognises that special attention should be placed on encouraging elderly citizens to use digital services. This will require greater support for those initiatives and organisations that already make a difference and for creating the environment for better, stronger and more coordinated work among people, businesses, charities and the public sector.

**“Technology is a tool, not a learning outcome.”**

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