

SMEs need better skilled staff

#SMEs4Europe Campaign: Transformations in labour markets require more recognition of vocational training

Brussels, 4th April 2019 – Crafts and SMEs in Europe are eagerly looking for skilled staff. Due to the digital and green transformations, they are already facing a serious skills gap and mismatch in the labour market. Vocational Education and Training (VET) and on-the-job learning are the best responses to the current and future labour market skills needs. SMEUnited calls on the policy-makers to reform education and training systems to acquire strong basic skills for all, and invest in quality VET and work-based learning including apprenticeship. Access to continuous training and a bolstered Erasmus programme to foster cross-border mobility of VET learners are also highly necessary.

*“This week, SMEUnited continues its campaign for the European Elections with a focus on labour markets and skills,” announced **SMEUnited President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller**. “Labour markets are rapidly changing and our SMEs are confronted with a lack of qualified workforce and face a real skills mismatch, in particular regarding digital skills”.*

“Targeted policy actions at European level are strongly needed, and the European Union must also keep pushing the Member States to modernise their education and training systems,” she continued. The goal must be to make these systems fit for labour market needs. In particular, basic skills (writing, reading, calculating) and solid key competences (including digital knowledge and entrepreneurship) must be ensured for all. Based on this, alternating training systems and apprenticeship should ensure that people acquire a good mix of technical, digital and soft skills. “Furthermore,” said Ms Rabmer-Koller, “these rapid changes imply that access to continuous training for entrepreneurs and staff has to become a reality. In order to maintain their employability, workers need to be ready for up-skilling or re-skilling. Employability should be a shared responsibility.”

Quality and attractiveness of VET can only be boosted through excellence and innovation at all levels. *“We need vocational training at tertiary level to fit with existing labour market trends.” she underlined. Moreover, the image of apprenticeship in Europe must be improved to make the hands-on aspect of the experience attractive. With respect to this, she added that “businesses should be truly recognised as genuine learning places and SMEs in particular as a unique learning environment.”*

EDITORS' NOTES: SMEUnited is the association of Crafts and SMEs in Europe with around 70 member organisations from over 30 European countries. SMEUnited represents national cross-sectoral Craft and SME federations, European SME branch organisations and associate members. Combined, we represent more than 12 million enterprises with around 55 million employees across Europe. SMEUnited is also a recognised employers' organisation and European Social Partner. SMEUnited was formally known as UEAPME.

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To ensure that the training offer on the job can be properly delivered, she insisted that *“a stronger partnership between SMEs and VET providers must be developed”*. *“Our SMEs will only be able to complete the transition to the digital and green economy with greater public investments and affordable training costs on their side”*, she concluded.

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