

Reform of the European Citizens' Initiative: further improvement needed to deliver ECI's full potential for participatory democracy

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) welcomes the European Commission's reform proposal to improve the European Citizens Initiative (ECI), which it sees as "a step in the right direction" to make it more accessible and user-friendly. The EU's Assembly of local and regional representatives however regrets that the proposal falls short of achieving the ECI potential as a transnational tool of participative democracy at European level. In an [opinion](#) led by Luc Van den Brande (BE/EPP), Member of the Management Board of the Flanders-Europe Liaison Agency and Special Adviser to the European Commission on outreach towards citizens, the CoR is concerned that the proposal fails to solve the current conflict of interest whereby the European Commission is both judge and party in the procedure. The Assembly also calls for the European Parliament to play a greater role in political scrutiny and follow up. Since 2012, the ECI empowers one million EU citizens from at least seven EU member states to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to propose new legislation. However, during its six years of existence, only four ECIs managed to successfully secure the required number of signatures, with two of them ([Stop Glyphosate](#) " and " [Right2Water](#)) finally leading to formal EU legislative proposals. Following mounting criticism against the instrument for being too restrictive and burdensome, the Commission came out with a proposal last September to remove excessive legal and technical requirements whilst taking advantage of new identification and collection technology.

The CoR reiterates its strong support for the ECI as a tool than can help respond to the perceived democratic deficit of the EU and bridge the gap with the citizens. The need to restore citizens' trust in Europe is what triggered the CoR's EU-wide consultation process called " [Reflecting on Europe](#) ", mainly in the form of citizens' dialogues at local level, to collect their ideas, ambitions and concerns about Europe's future.

In an [opinion](#) adopted on 23 March, the CoR welcomes major revisions proposed to improve the usability of the ECI, including a central online collection system, a collaborative platform to better advise organisers, the possibility of partial registration of an initiative, and lowering the minimum age for supporting an ECI to 16 years. According to the CoR there is however much more to be done to enable the ECI to truly give a voice to citizens in EU-policy making.

"The Commission has undoubtedly introduced administrative, technical, logistical and communicative improvements to the ECI in its reform proposal. But the EU executive missed a great opportunity to transform it into an effective participatory tool that would truly allow citizens to influence the

EU policy agenda. There is still an impression of an over-cautious stance on the part of the Commission, which is especially evident in the more political aspects of the citizens' initiative “; said rapporteur Van den Brande.

Commission's conflict of interest

The CoR points out that the proposed revision does nothing to resolve the Commission's conflict of interest, namely that it is at the same time the support structure and primary “addressee” for ECIs, and the authority that decides over registration and admissibility. The CoR is therefore repeating its call made in its [2015 opinion](#) for the creation of a “wise-persons council” or “European Citizens Advocacy”.

“ One of the key sticking points with the new regulation is the Commission's conflict of interest and monopoly over all stages of the procedure. Failure to resolve this situation is damaging the effectiveness and legitimacy of the ECI. We therefore suggest that the registration decision is entrusted to an independent committee of lawyers, academics and representatives of civil society ”, explained Van den Brande.

Role of European Parliament

The CoR expresses concern regarding the lack of political scrutiny and follow up to successful ECIs, calling for a greater role for the European Parliament. In particular, the Parliament should take full responsibility for organising public hearings where ECI organisers are invited to present their initiative – as opposed to the Commission's proposal whereby both Commission and Parliament should organise these hearings.

Signatures' collection period

The CoR stresses that collecting 1 million signatures represents quite an undertaking and requires a great deal of publicising and awareness-raising. In order to allow more time to achieve the final target for signatures, the CoR calls for an extension in the collecting period from 12 to 18 months, which would be less of a deterrent for potential initiative organisers.

Follow-up to unsuccessful initiatives

The CoR calls on the Commission to develop appropriate forms of response to those ECIs which receive significant support but do not meet all the formal criteria or do not reach the full 1 million signatures. This would ensure that the political message of such ECI and the mobilisation they have created are not completely ignored.

Note to the editors:

Luc Van den Brande is a former President of the European Committee of Regions and former Minister-President of Flanders (1992-1999). As Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission for “the outreach towards the citizens”, he published a [report](#) last October which sets out a framework for a more citizen-focused Europe.

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[Commission proposes €4.6 million from Globalisation Adjustment Fund for former Caterpillar workers in Belgium](#)

This money should serve to help nearly 2,300 former workers of Caterpillar Solar Gosselies and of several Caterpillar suppliers find new jobs.

EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne **Thyssen** commented: *"Thanks to the €4.6 million from the Globalisation Adjustment Fund, we'll be able to help former workers find new jobs or better job opportunities. From the very announcement of the closure of Caterpillar Gosselies in 2016, we have acted without delay to help the Belgian and Walloon authorities minimise as much as possible the devastating consequences for many of the redundant workers, by giving guidance on how to mobilise all European instruments available, including the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. We must show solidarity in times of hardship, to make sure no one is left behind. "*

The measures co-financed by the Globalisation Adjustment Fund would benefit 2,287 former workers and up to 300 young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). They will receive active career guidance, help with their job-search, vocational training and support for setting up their own business.

The total estimated cost of the package is €7.7 million, of which the EGF would provide €4.6 million. The remaining 40% would come from the regional budget of Wallonia. The proposal now goes to the European Parliament and the EU's Council of Ministers for approval.

Background

Belgium applied for Globalisation Adjustment Fund support on 18 December 2017, after redundancies following the closure of Caterpillar's plant in Gosselies, announced in September 2016. These job losses were the result of major structural changes in world trade patterns, in particular the delocalisation of a substantial part of the enterprise's production capacity to non-EU countries, which triggered the closure of the Gosselies facility.

The Commission has lent its support to the Belgian authorities from the beginning of the process. Immediately after Caterpillar had announced to close the factory, the Commission helped setting up a joint Task Force involving also social partners, upon the initiative of President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. The Task Force worked closely together with the Belgian authorities to discuss the way forward and prepare the next steps, including the mobilisation of the Globalisation Adjustment Fund to support the training and reorientation of the affected workers.

Caterpillar is the world leader in the production of machines and accessories necessary for the construction and operation of mines. Caterpillar has been strongly affected by declining demand for this type of products in Europe, which has led to the delocalisation of substantial production capacity to third countries, especially in Asia and Latin America.

The dismissals at Caterpillar primarily affect the area of Charleroi, in Wallonia, a former coal-mining and steelmaking area where employment is strongly dependant on traditional heavy industries.

The former Caterpillar workers and young people from the Hainaut region not in employment, education or training, which are eligible to participate in Globalisation Adjustment Fund -supported measures, would be able to benefit from counselling, career guidance and individual job search assistance. They could also follow training courses focusing on the development priorities of Charleroi (<http://www.catch-charleroi.be>). Persons interested in starting their own businesses could benefit from a system of support for entrepreneurs. This includes a close collaboration with the regional authorities dedicated to support self-employment along with start-up grants.

Belgium uses the Fund also to provide personalised services for NEETs to help them find a job. This possibility is provided for in the Globalisation Adjustment Fund regulation for regions which (like Wallonia) are eligible under the [Youth Employment Initiative](#).

On the Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)

More open trade with the rest of the world leads to overall benefits for growth and employment, but it can also cost jobs, particularly in vulnerable sectors and among lower-skilled workers. The EGF was set up to help these groups adjust to the consequences of globalisation. Since starting operations in 2007, the EGF has received 157 applications. Some €630 million has been requested to help more than 148,000 workers and 3,369 young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

The [Fund continues during the 2014-2020 period](#) as an expression of EU solidarity, with further improvements to its functioning. Its scope includes workers made redundant because of the economic crisis, as well as fixed-term workers, the self-employed, and, by way of derogation until the end of 2017, young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) residing in regions eligible under the [Youth Employment Initiative](#) (YEI) up to a number equal to the redundant workers supported.

On the proposal for the European Labour Authority

Earlier this month, the European Commission proposed the establishment of a “[European Labour Authority](#)” to ensure that EU rules on labour mobility are enforced in a fair, simple and effective way. As one of its tasks, the Authority could in the future facilitate cooperation between relevant stakeholders in the event of cross-border labour market disruptions, for instance in the case of large-scale restructuring of companies. The Authority could bring together the relevant organisations, such as public employment authorities and social partners, in order to find the most appropriate solution for the workforces involved and provide guidance on relevant EU legislation and available EU financial support.

Further information

[EGF website](#)

Video:

[The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#)

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Statement ahead of World Tuberculosis Day by Commissioners Andriukaitis, Moedas, Thyssen and Mimica

On the eve of World Tuberculosis Day, we underline our commitment to ending the tuberculosis epidemic by 2030. We call on governments all over the world to redouble their efforts and make this happen.

Globally, tuberculosis remains the single most deadly infectious disease. In 2016, there were over 10 million new tuberculosis cases and 1.7 million deaths worldwide. The European Union fully supports the international effort to address this, including the commitment made in Riga in March 2015 to fully eradicate tuberculosis by 2050; the 2017 “Berlin declaration”; and the 2017 “Moscow declaration to end Tuberculosis”. Building on the work of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, in summer through a policy paper the Commission will address ways to eliminate tuberculosis, as well as HIV/AIDS, and significantly reduce viral hepatitis, in line with the objectives set out in the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). In September this year, the EU will be represented at the United Nations General Assembly which will convene for the first time, specifically to discuss tuberculosis. This is a crucial opportunity for health ministers to stand together and reaffirm

our commitment to eradicating tuberculosis forever. The EU is also financially supporting the international effort. For the period 2017-2019, we provided €475 million to the [Global Fund against Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#), to support the most vulnerable people, including those living with tuberculosis and HIV, and those who do not have sufficient access to quality services. Thanks to our support, more than 53 million lives were saved between 2000 and 2016.

We are also working to address antimicrobial resistance, which is inextricably linked to tuberculosis. In 2016, 600 000 of new cases of tuberculosis were also multi drug-resistant (MDR-TB), underlining the extent of the global antimicrobial resistance (AMR) [\[1\]](#) crisis. Unless we take decisive action now, by 2050, antimicrobial resistance could cause 10 million deaths per year, up to a quarter of which could be caused multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis [\[2\]](#). It is precisely to eliminate the possibility of this unthinkable future, that the Commission adopted an [EU Action Plan against antimicrobial resistance](#) last June, which includes infection prevention and control measures within vulnerable groups, to tackle resistant tuberculosis strains. To make matters worse, there is also still no effective vaccine for tuberculosis. Treatment is complicated, and where available, it can be very toxic. This is why we are investing in research to find better diagnostic tools, more effective treatments and safe and effective vaccines. The EU is currently investing over €100 million in the development of new vaccines and new drug regimens.

But this is far from enough. Tuberculosis is also frequently associated with poverty and poor living conditions. This is why we must pay particular attention to addressing the social conditions that encourage the disease to spread. This is not just a question of financing. We strongly urge leaders in Europe to ensure access to preventative and good quality curative healthcare for everyone, in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and the values Europe stands for.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. The number of cases is actually decreasing in most parts of the world. The overall number of new cases within the EU continues to decline by 5-6% each year and globally by 1.5% per year. While small, these figures bode well for the future. They show that with political will, determination and sufficient funding, we can save lives. Together we can #EndTB.

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[#EUHealthResearch](#) [@Moedas](#)

For more information

<https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/tuberculosis>

[\[1\] Global Tuberculosis Report 2017, World Health Organization](#)

[\[2\] "Tackling a crisis for the health and wealth of nations", Review on AMR, December 2014](#)

[News story: PHE publishes consultation on Nutrient Profiling Model](#)

Public Health England (PHE) has today (23 March 2018) published a [consultation on an updated Nutrient Profiling Model \(NPM\)](#), the model that differentiates which food and drink products can be advertised during programming where children make up more than a quarter of the audience.

The NPM is a tool used by the Office of Communications (Ofcom) and Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) to give food and drink products a score. This score determines whether products can be advertised during children's television programming and non-broadcast media including print, cinema, online, and in social media. The score is based on the balance between 'negative' and 'beneficial' nutrients that make up a product. The more beneficial nutrients, such as fruit and vegetables, protein and fibre, and the fewer negative nutrients, such as sugars, saturated fat and salt, the more likely a product will be given approval to be advertised during children's programming.

As part of the government's childhood obesity plan, PHE was tasked with updating the current model to bring it in line with current UK dietary recommendations, especially around sugar and fibre.

Dr Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist at PHE said:

It is important the Nutrient Profiling Model reflects the most up to date dietary recommendations in order to help support healthier food choices. We welcome comments on the modifications to the model.

Given current UK dietary recommendations advise the population to consume less sugar and more fibre, we can expect some products which currently pass the model to fail the revised version.

In this consultation, PHE is asking for views on the technical basis of bringing the draft revised version in line with current UK dietary recommendations. It does not cover the application of the NPM or further restrictions to advertising during children's programming.

The consultation opens today and closes on 15 June 2018.

Speech: Amanda Spielman speech to Annual Apprenticeships Conference

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.

Introduction

This is a very important conference, at a critical time for the development of apprenticeship provision. It is gratifying to see apprenticeships on the news agenda regularly: whether as mentions in Prime Minister's speeches or the subject of thoughtful newspaper columns from journalists you wouldn't normally expect to care. Apprenticeships are, quite rightly, recognised as a vital component of our education and skills sector. Less gratifying, perhaps, is that too much of this recognition is about the system, not yet, working as it should.

That's why I am so pleased to be here today. I see it as essential that providers, policy makers and employers can have open and frank discussions about what works and what needs to be improved.

It is almost a year now since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy—one of the most significant changes to apprenticeship funding that we have ever seen. Alongside the slow but inexorable move from apprenticeship frameworks to apprenticeship standards, providers and employers are working to secure the training and support that businesses need to develop a well-trained and productive workforce.

And at Ofsted, we carry on supporting the reform programme. Indeed we're putting our money where our mouth is, with our own award-winning band of 29 business administration apprentices.

Challenges

We know that it has been a challenging year for providers. The levy has required a different relationship with employers. There have been challenges in applying for, and receiving, non-levy allocations. There have also been problems getting on the Register of apprenticeship training providers. And, in too many instances, in finding a replacement standard for a framework—particularly at levels two and three.

I suspect that the fall in apprenticeship starts is due to a combination of these factors. Nevertheless, any barriers that prevent employers taking on an apprentice, or standing in the way of good providers delivering high quality training, must concern us all.

The first quarter of 2017 to 2018 saw almost 50,000 fewer starts than the same quarter in 2016 to 2017. There is no denying, that the low number of starts continues to be a concern, which is why I was heartened to see Anne

Milton's recent confidence that numbers will pick up in the new academic year. We all have to hope that this is true.

It is not just about overall volumes though. We are also experiencing some unintended consequences from the emerging trend towards higher-level apprenticeships. Of course, I understand, indeed applaud, more apprenticeships at higher levels, especially when there is clear progression in an occupation, from level 2 through to degree level. However, around 40% of the standards approved or in-development are at higher and degree levels, while only 7% of apprentices work at these levels.

This shift may be good for the economy in the long run, but the reduced number of apprenticeships at levels two and three is another destabilising factor in the system. To put it more brutally, there is a risk that young people, fresh from school, get squeezed out of apprenticeship routes because employers prioritise higher level programmes. This makes it more difficult for young people looking for entry-level employment straight from GCSEs.

In this context, I am pleased to see that the Institute for Apprenticeships is upping the rate at which it develops and approves apprenticeship standards. Up till now, this process really has been too slow. I am also pleased that there is now more flexibility to include qualifications within apprenticeship standards. I see these positive developments as a sign that the institute is listening to the concerns expressed by employers and training providers. However, I would still like to see a greater focus on achieving a set of standards that really reflect the balance of training and development needs of the economy.

Ofsted's role

With all the change, and uncertainty in the system, I am sure you want reassurance about Ofsted's agility and ability to adapt inspection to fit the new reality.

We know the challenges you face. We are working hard with you to make sure that inspection takes account of the changing landscape. But, let me be absolutely clear, we will not be excusing poor performance. Regardless of the changes that we are all dealing with: apprentices deserve high quality training at, and away from, work.

Pilot inspection findings

We have already carried out a number of pilot inspections to make sure that we are looking at the right things in this new environment. And we found a need for inspectors to focus on the bottom line, not the money, but what knowledge, skills and behaviours apprentices actually develop and acquire.

Now I hope many of you will know that one of my big interests as Chief Inspector is looking at the substance of education. By this, I mean the entirety of what is actually learnt, whether at school, college or on an apprenticeship.

As I said at the launch of my first [Annual Report](#), our early research has shown that, all too often, the knowledge that we want young people to acquire is lost in the dash for grades and stickers.

These pilot inspections of apprenticeship providers have revealed that many of the concerns we have uncovered at a school level are also evident in apprenticeships.

We are seeing an over-emphasis on simply ticking the box to show that the next part of the qualification has been achieved. There is not enough focus on the actual skills, knowledge and behaviours learned.

Indeed, most providers in our pilots found it difficult to demonstrate what actual progress their apprentices were really making. As providers, you need to consider how you make sure that apprentices are making progress. This isn't for inspectors, not for Ofsted, but for apprentices' and employers' benefit. It is also to inform the training and development programme that apprentices need to be following to pass end-point assessments.

The findings from our pilot inspections are informing changes to the inspection handbook. We will carry on iterating and adapting these as the systems develop.

Inspections of apprenticeships

More broadly, we are now developing our new education inspection framework for September 2019. How we inspect and report on apprenticeships are important considerations in our thinking and planning for this new framework. What we learn on inspections now, and what we learn from our work with organisations like AELP, the British Chambers of Commerce and the CBI, will inform our development. And of course, we will consult on our proposals.

But the changes in the system aren't just about new frameworks and new ways of inspecting. I know that many of you have concerns about the number of untested providers entering the market and the effect this could have on quality. Well, rest assured, we are not standing idly by and waiting for new providers to fail. We are doing all that we can to make sure that no apprentice's future opportunity is ruined by poor provision. It is essential that poor quality provision is spotted and tackled quickly, so that it doesn't damage an individual's prospects or the overall apprenticeship brand.

We have already begun a series of early monitoring visits to assess the quality of these new providers. Some of you will have heard about our first monitoring visits, which hit the headlines, at least in the trade press, last week. There is no hiding the fact that what we found at Key6 Group was worrying. And I'm very pleased that there has been a prompt reaction by ESFA [Education and Skills Funding Agency].

But, it is important that we don't over-interpret this one result as a judgement on all new providers coming on stream with the levy. We are doing more monitoring visits of this type. And I very much hope that positive results will significantly outnumber the disappointments.

Besides these monitoring visits to new providers, we have increased our inspection focus on subcontractors, many of whom are providing apprenticeship training. We are doing this in two ways. Firstly, as part of our standard inspections, where providers have a significant proportion of subcontracted provision, we are increasing our focus on this part. This will mean that teams can evaluate and report, in more detail, on the quality of education and training in individual subcontractors.

In addition, we are making monitoring visits to a number of directly-funded providers to look specifically at subcontracted provision. This way, we can make sure that apprentices are getting the best possible training. We expect the first of these to be published in the next couple of weeks.

Our message here is simple. As the direct contract holder, you are responsible for your learners. If you subcontract, for whatever reason, you are still responsible for making sure your apprentice gets high quality training. If you are sitting back and collecting the money, without taking proper responsibility for quality, you are failing your apprentices. We are determined to expose this in the system.

And, just in case, any of you were being kind enough to worry about us, and whether Ofsted has the resources to deliver this increased volume of inspection, please don't worry: we are being equally robust in our approach to government for funding. Indeed the DfE has already acknowledged that it needs to fund us properly for this work.

Standards

With the experience of Learndirect still prominent in all of our minds, I have no doubt that you are all acutely aware of the risks when large sums of money flow into a system.

It is sobering, in that respect, to look at recent inspection outcomes. Between September 2017 and February 2018, we made a judgement on the apprenticeship provision at 55 providers. We found three-fifths of them to be good or outstanding, with 16 requiring improvement. Six were inadequate. This means that 4 in 10 providers did not offer high quality training for apprentices. There is no way of dressing this up – it is not good enough.

But looking at it another way, the good and outstanding providers were generally the larger ones, so 33,000 apprentices were in good or outstanding provision – almost 80% of the overall places. And this is a lot higher than the provision looked at in the previous year. Then, only 60% of apprentices were being trained in providers of the same quality, we have excluded Learndirect from those figures. To be clear, it is not a perfect year-on-year comparison because inspection priorities and scheduling decisions affect which providers are selected for inspection. However, I do believe the figures are cause for optimism about quality in the sector.

So, while we rightly shine a light on concerns in the system, and I do have to talk about where things are going wrong. I also believe it is important to celebrate where things are going well. We see outstanding apprenticeship

providers like National Grid and Craven College and Fareham College. There we see leaders and managers who work very closely with local employers to make sure that apprenticeships meet the needs of the local economy. They expect the best of their apprentices who show exemplary skills, getting the qualifications and competencies they need.

And whether it's TTE Training with 160 engineering apprentices on various pathways, Busy Bees Nurseries and its range of early years apprenticeships or CITB supporting 10,000 apprentices in the construction industry—these very different types of outstanding provider are similar in one thing: the determination to give their apprentices top-notch training and to set them on a path to a successful and fulfilling career.

Conclusion

So, to conclude, we cannot escape the fact that this is a testing time for apprenticeships, a period of significant change that has inevitably brought a level of uncertainty alongside great opportunity.

There is still a way to go before we can confidently declare the new approach a success, but it is possible to see it beginning to take shape.

My inspectors are seeing some excellent provision around the country, but not enough of it and we need to see more. The sector is adapting confidently to change, but we need to make sure that the pace doesn't slacken.

Ofsted's overarching goal, as set out in our corporate strategy, is to be a force for improvement in all the sectors we inspect and regulate. This is as relevant for apprenticeship provision as it is for schools or child protection. Through our work, we will provide the evidence of what is working and the early warning of where things are going wrong. For a system in the midst of change, this could not be more vital.

After all, success of this ambitious apprenticeship programme is essential, not only to the needs of our wider economy, but for the young people and adult learners so desperate for the right opportunity to prosper.

I know all of you in this room are working hard to ensure this success. I am delighted to be joining all the winners of the inaugural AAC apprenticeship awards at tonight's ceremony in recognition of that commitment.

Thank you.