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**Closing the gap between education and employment:
Final conference of Learn2Work**

The Learn2Work project recently held its final event in Brussels to present a new best practice for learning that is expected to bring closer the world of education to the industry's needs and at the same time promote job opportunities in the European Footwear industry among NEETs. The event, organised by the project partners the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) and Think Young, gathered a wide variety of stakeholders, in particular European regions, who were called on to support the recognition of this new learning path in Italy, Portugal and Spain, where it has been tested.

On 18 April 2018, the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) and Think Young, a think tank that supports young people's interests, presented an innovative training model, developed under the Erasmus+ project Learn2Work, to introduce youngsters to footwear manufacturing at the conference "Innovative Fashion: closing the gap between education and employment". The event was attended by representatives of a variety of stakeholders, including regions with an important footwear sector presence, EU institution officials, industry associations, trade unions, and education providers, who were all invited to work together to recognise and adopt the new learning model of manufacturing occupations.

The training methodology, inspired by the successful Danish "Production School model", focuses on on- the- job-training based on "learning by doing" and introduces a comprehensive set of social, personal, and professional skills, necessary for good performance and professional growth in the work place. It has been specially designed for NEET people - young people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training-, who are at risk of continued and future unemployment. Teaching, supported by peer-to-peer learning, is led by tutors who use innovative assessment tools that enhance students' motivation.

Following three pilot exercises carried out last year in educational centres in Italy, Portugal and Spain, -countries with high youth unemployment rates in Europe-, project partners confirmed the advantages of this new methodology: there was a high level of interest and motivation to learn among students, who also showed an increase in self-esteem, adaptability, and integration in the work environment. During the final event, one of the young students who completed the pilot in Italy described very satisfactorily her experience and acknowledged how proud she felt to be part of the footwear community as she was now doing an internship in a company producing luxury shoes for a renowned European brand.

Moreover, Cinzia del Rio, Rapporteur of March 2018's European Economic and Social Committee Opinion on the "Future of work – acquiring of appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the needs of future jobs", was invited to present the main points of the Opinion, which stresses the relevance of high-quality and effective training, combining soft and technical skills, and the importance of life-long learning and upskilling and reskilling strategies in order to both seize the job opportunities of the future



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and meet companies' needs. In this respect, she highlighted the need for a common strategy to anticipate skills at EU level and the relevance of social partners and local and regional authorities to jointly make it possible.

The CEC concluded by calling on public administrations at EU, national and regional level to facilitate the smoother transition from education to work in order to quickly adapt to rapid industry changes caused by digitalisation and new technologies. In this relation, VET systems in many EU countries should be rapidly modernised and strengthened, and education curricula should include more work-based learning from an early age. Last but not least, recognition and validation of non-formal education should be promoted in all countries in Europe, as it can faster anticipate and adapt skills delivery to the rapid industry's changing needs.

The project partners are now counting on Europe's regional authorities and education providers in Italy, Portugal and Spain to work together to recognise the Learn2Work model, as this will give young people a chance to develop a successful and rewarding career in a sector which heavily relies on and values highly skilled and dedicated workers.

For more information about the project, visit the Learn2Work website at <http://learn2work.eu/en/>

