

Declaration of the joint Vocational Education and Training providers on the contribution of Vocational Education and Training to the EU 2020 strategy

“Without the opportunity to learn through the hands, the world remains abstract, and distant, and the passions for learning will not be engaged”

(Doug Stowe, Wisdom of the hands (blog), october 16, 2006)



Part I: GENERAL STATEMENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

EfVET, EUproVET, EVTA and EVBB, the main European networks of education and training providers express their appreciation for the proposed Council Conclusions which in a distinct way place Vocational Education and Training (VET) at the centre of European attention.

We stand in support of the comprehensive and global European vision of integration which empowers VET, employment, innovation and development.

Achieving this vision will require strong cohesion between the policies on education and training, culture, social issues, employment and economy. It will also stress the necessary interdependence between the EU 2020 objectives – competitiveness, sustainability, social cohesion, fairness and widespread and knowledge-based innovation. Together they are specific features and necessary preconditions for the social, political and economic development of the European Union and the individual Member States.

The further development and enhancement of the Copenhagen process will strongly contribute to achieving the goals set for EU 2020, particularly through initiatives such as those aimed at establishing a common framework for the certification of qualifications and, above all, improving the quality and attractiveness of VET.

The continuation of the Copenhagen process demonstrates the need to increase the impact of the policy directions of the Council. While an appeal, to national and local governments, to maintain adequate levels of financial investment and organisational support for education and training is a step in the right direction during this economic crisis, equally important is the desire to promote and stimulate the involvement of public and private providers of VET.

We welcome the connection established between VET and the wider and richer development of key competencies, thus recognizing the contribution that VET can make to the improvement and ongoing development of skills, even in the framework of general education. This promotes the interaction of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in education and training

Curricula and training paths based on the development of practical skills and learning outcomes form the conditions to enhance the quality of VET, to which the Council's Conclusion makes repeated reference. For Initial Vocational Education and Training (I-VET) in particular, quality assurance is a pre-requisite in order to value VET pathways established in school systems or in other contexts, as being equal to those of general education, in terms of skills development, basic knowledge and access to higher education.

Under the heading of quality, we also wish to underline the references to the promotion of equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and combating the serious problem of early school leaving. Also the relationships with the labour market, the attractiveness of VET, training the trainers' programmes, the flexibility of training, innovation and entrepreneurship, must all receive the attention required to ensure improvement.

Recognition of these elements enhances the ability of VET to offer to all learners, including individuals who do not follow the traditional schooling systems, an I-VET pathway, then tertiary education and continue on with Continuing Vocational Education and Training (C-VET), just like general education, without compromising the quality of education and training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In every respect, all partners involved, consider that quality, efficiency, innovation, flexibility and creativeness in VET programmes are the key elements to promote Lifelong Learning, social cohesion and improve vocational and geographical mobility.

VET providers see themselves as the best ambassadors of the important role vocational training, active experiential learning, work based learning and individual skills development play in the development of European vocational standards.

As partners in the economy, we are committed to both innovative solutions and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The developments of entrepreneurial skills as well as the promotion of key qualifications for lifelong learning are the goals we pursue.

In this respect, VET providers place particular emphasis on the following points:

1. Develop a Lifelong Learning strategy that integrates knowledge, practical skills, experience and learning outcomes

An attractive, innovative and flexible VET requires a specific educational approach, aimed at promoting the development of comprehensive knowledge and skills. The ability to organise learning and offer individualised training pathways are the specific techniques of this training profession. The development of this approach and its dissemination throughout Europe, require a considerable R&D commitment in the field of VET, new investments in training the trainers and more profound European cooperation. In this respect the recognition of prior learning (RPL) should be prioritized to a greater extent than exists at present.

2. Implement existing instruments that promote cooperation between education providers, labour market agencies, local authorities and social partners

VET can act as intermediary between all actors in education, labour market, enterprise and civil society. VET offers both short term solutions to prevent and provide support in crisis situations by matching and developing competences in individuals with the needs of the labour market and long term solutions aimed at restructuring and developing sectors and/or territories and promoting active citizenship and social cohesion. In particular the voice of employers, business and professions should be acknowledged. This required approach by VET is not yet a uniformly established strategy at European level. Achieving it requires a shared framework, as well as close cooperation between strategic stakeholders.

3. Secure VET as a career path as well as one of the instruments for social cohesion

VET has the potential to emerge as a powerful tool offering both a career path from basic to tertiary level, and a way to employment, integration and social cohesion. A VET-system oriented to LLL and offering a wide range of training opportunities at all levels will ensure possibilities for quality employment. VET at multiple levels will also, to a much greater extent meet the challenges Europe faces on global competitiveness.

4. Link VET with complementary initiatives and services

VET must become a platform linked with complementary initiatives and services. These services are essential for the quality and effectiveness of the learning and professional outcomes, analysis of requirements, training and professional guidance, counselling, certification and validation of skills, support in finding employment. In this context, the certification of skills, recognition of professional qualifications based on formal and informal learning and the establishment of Europe-wide practices relating to these services require more support for this implementation.

5. View VET as a public interest service

The costs for VET are today covered not only by national and European funding but also by the direct investments made by companies and the sectoral training funds. The required involvement of the private sector must not, however, reduce VET solely to market interest or to a marginal

entitlement of citizens. VET service must be viewed as public interest service that allow citizens to exercise their right to education and training. The EU and its Member States must therefore work together to devise and support appropriate funding models for VET by mobilising all available resources.

6. Promote transnational mobility in VET

The promotion of transnational mobility should not only focus on the EU, but also to and from countries outside the EU for students, young workers/apprentices and staff within VET institutions as well as for workplace VET providers.

7. To be effective, agree an implementation timetable, systematic checks and measurable targets

All areas highlighted aim to support the effectiveness of the provisions contained in the Council's Conclusions in the Member States and to strengthen a common European framework to guide policy and legislation aimed at ensuring their implementation.

The Council's Conclusions however require a timetable of objectives, achievements and intermediate evaluation.

COMMITMENTS

In order to support and enhance the adoption of the suggested visions, objectives and actions we, EfVET, EUproVET, EVTA and EVBB, commit to:

- Cooperate with the European Commission and national governments in implementing the Council's Conclusions, particularly regarding the development of the Copenhagen process, the "New Skills for New Jobs" and "Youth on the Move" initiatives and the Europe-wide dissemination of the results of projects and European research in the field of VET.
- Cooperate with all European networks, including social partner networks, in order to support the implementation of the Council's Conclusions.
- Advise and support the Commission in practical and effective ways to achieve these goals.

Part II: OPERATIONAL STATEMENT

EfVET, EUproVET, EVTA and EVBB, acknowledge that new jobs and new skills will have to be created to support the growth of a greener, smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive economy, where the key input will be the integration of knowledge and skills. In connection with this, attractive, inclusive and high quality VET are necessary prerequisites for both the European competitiveness and social inclusion. Otherwise, Europe will risk a lengthy period of – relative to other continents – low economic growth and social exclusion of disadvantaged groups. We also acknowledge that collaboration between the EU and member states among the member states themselves is essential in insuring the future prosperity and cohesion of Europe.

In the joined declaration we have given recommendations to achieve these goals. We have also committed ourselves to give practical support for the implementation of the recommendations. Below these operational actions are given for each separated recommendation.

1. Develop a Lifelong Learning strategy that integrates knowledge, practical skills, experience and learning outcomes

Proposed actions:

- To strongly involve VET providers in the processes of improving the quality of teaching in VET and to provide the appropriate resources for this.
- To address the issue of early school leaving more effectively by promoting a learner centred approach that provides learners at all levels with appropriate challenges as well as

opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and competences through a optimal mix of ‘learning by doing’ and theory.

- To promote adult learning, as this is crucial for fostering social cohesion and ensuring employability and economic growth.
- To maintain additional investments for the lower qualified target groups and disabled people, as these are especially in need of support and guidance to get involved in training programs.
- To invest in the promotion of Life Long Learning through a variety of instruments like learning vouchers and tax advantages for companies that offer work based learning.
- To ensure that all receiving unemployment benefits have access to appropriate and affordable education and training programmes.
- To take specific measures to ensure the access to the labor market of groups at risk, like people with special needs due to mental or physical impairments, elderly people.
- To take measures to ensure the equal access to education and the labour market for citizens with a migrant background.

2. Implement existing instruments that promote cooperation between education providers, labour market agencies, local authorities and social partners.

Proposed actions:

- To further develop some of the measures adopted during the current economic crisis - shorter time work combined with training.
- To implement and align to national policies already developed tools, such as EQF and EQAVET, before developing new ones.
- To become more responsive to workplace needs.
- To encourage National education systems to shift their policy focus from controlling the resources allocated to education and the content of the education and training curriculum towards focussing on the attainment of better learning outcomes.
- To promote concrete measures related to the ‘New Skills for New Jobs’ initiative.

3. Secure VET as a career path as well as one of the instruments for social cohesion

Proposed actions:

- To recognise that, in the knowledge society, vocational skills and competences, including key competences are just as important as academic skills and competences.
- To improve the permeability from secondary education to VET and from VET to Higher Education.
- To promote activities that enhance the attractiveness of the VET sector at all levels of education, including potential HE students.
- To make it possible for VET to provide programs at EQF level 5 or higher, if appropriate.
- To promote the right balance of vocational skills and key competences, as they are defined by the European Commission.
- To promote national strategies to enhance VET opportunities for those European citizens encountering disadvantage in the labour market because of their low or inappropriate qualifications.

4. Link VET with complementary initiatives and services

Proposed actions:

- To give sufficient autonomy to VET providers to enable them to meet the particular needs of both their learners and the communities they serve - in the context of an overall quality-assured framework that aligns with both the national and European qualifications frameworks.
- To create education-work frameworks capable of supporting emerging life-cycles whereby work and education/training are integrated into career paths as an alternative to the traditional sequence of education-work-retirement.

- To prioritize the recognition of prior learning (RPL), so that adult learners can access education and training at the point on the qualifications ladder that matches their previous learning (knowledge, skills and competences) irrespective of where or how that learning was acquired.
- To improve guidance and counselling for young people at school, as well as for adults, whether employed or unemployed.
- To support 'New policies' in education, to unleash the innovative and creative potential of the VET sector, including the appropriate use of ICT and support for entrepreneurship.

5. View VET as a public interest service

Proposed actions:

- To promote educational financing for all age groups, as this is an important public good to ensure employability, economic growth and social cohesion.
- To ensure that the VET pathway achieves parity of esteem with other learning pathways and that this is reflected in the equitable and realistic distribution of public funding at European as well as at national level.
- To facilitate access to funding schemes, including the use of the European Structural Funds, without excessive bureaucratic burdens.
- To involve VET providers, in terms of equity, together with policy makers and social partners in the development of educational policy – both at the national and European level.
- To improve the information about VET learning pathways in general education and at all other appropriate places.

6. Promote transnational mobility in VET

Proposed actions:

- To open up the Lifelong Learning program, Leonardo da Vinci for joint courses rather than confining it to work placements.
- To integrate the European and global dimension, wherever possible, into VET programs
- To bring the EU ambitions regarding mobility into balance with the practical funding possibilities.
- To consider the provision of financial incentives for companies that offer work placement to foreign students or employees, including additional national funding.
- To implement a Leonardo-Mundus programme.
- To encourage virtual mobility, as these tools could be used as first steps in international mobility and as preparatory means – also for teachers
- To put more emphasis on oral and VET specific language training - as language remains one of the main barriers to mobility within Europe.
- To promote the international exchange of best practices and experiences, in order to learn from each other.
- To promote concrete measures related to the 'Youth on the Move' initiative.

7. To be effective, agree an implementation timetable, systematic checks and measurable targets.

- To investigate why the Lisbon 2010 strategy only partly achieved its targets and to apply the lessons learned from this investigation towards the implementation of the EU 2020 strategy.
- To strongly involve VET providers in the processes of planning and implementation of policy.



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