

TOWARDS ET2020: POSITIVE ACTION TO ENHANCE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING WITHIN A LIFELONG LEARNING AGENDA

Recommendations to the European Commission from the Four VET Associations – EfVET, EVTA, EVBB and EUproVET

Rationale

During the events to launch the Bruges Communiqué in December 2010, Stelios Mavromoustakos, Vice-President of EfVET presented the *Declaration of the joint Vocational Education and Training providers on the contribution of Vocational Education and Training to the EU 2020 strategy*. This document was compiled by four European VET Associations working in cooperation – EfVET, EUproVET, EVTA and EVBB.

In January 2011, members of the policy group from each of these four VET organisations, met with officials from DG EAC primarily to examine and discuss the short-term and longer-term objectives outlined in the Bruges Communiqué, but also to offer constructive assistance to the European Commission by giving access to thousands of practitioners and learners in these associations' member institutions throughout the European Union and beyond. These four associations would serve as a two-way conduit to stage consultation exercises and gather examples of tried and tested good practice and innovative initiatives and developments. They could tap into the expertise and experience of the whole range of VET specialists and then into appropriate national, regional and local agencies, employer and employee representative bodies as well as companies served by their member institutions.

It was further decided that EfVET, in organising its twentieth annual conference in Malta in October 2011, would use as its theme: ***The EU Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training setting out the future priorities of Vocational Education and Training to meet the policy objectives of the EU Strategy 2020***. There were several key note speeches covering this theme, but, as important was the programme of workshops, in which more than 200 VET stakeholders analysed, discussed and made recommendations on the Bruges Communiqué's strategic objectives and priorities for 2011-2020.

In June 2012, EUproVET organised its Annual Conference in London, and one of the workshops examined and discussed the key recommendations as formulated at the EfVET Conference and several amendments were proposed. These have been incorporated into this document.

The recommendations have also been circulated to EVTA and BVBB for discussion by their memberships and again all these amendments have been included.

This document now represents the views of the four leading VET associations on behalf of all their members throughout the European Union. The four Presidents of EfVET, EVTA, BVBB and EUproVET, as joint signatories, present this document to the European Commission, with the intention that the recommendations identified by

VET Stakeholders at all levels will be incorporated in the implementation of the objectives outlined in the Bruges Communiqué.

The five priority areas, as outlined in the Bruges Communiqué, have therefore been considered by all four VET organisations. The Key recommendations follow here and the full lists of recommendations appear as an Appendix.

1. Improving the quality and efficiency of VET and enhancing its attractiveness and relevance

- There is an urgent need to discuss whether the present VET systems are appropriate to meet the requirements of future training needs, some of which have not yet been identified.
- It should be made easier for VET teachers and trainers to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) placements in companies in order to update teaching and learning methodologies and the skills and competences of VET professionals
- A structure of peer evaluation of the quality of a VET institution's course provision should be universal and complement any existing or future national inspection regime. The application of the EQAVET criteria would ensure consistency of performance
- There remains too little collaboration and consultation between VET trainers and employers. VET professionals would thus become more aware of labour market needs and employers could advise on course revisions and developments. Companies should be encouraged to offer practical experience to all trainees by way of work placements

2. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality

- Complete the process of implementation of national lifelong learning strategies, paying particular attention to the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- In developing systems to validate Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), it is essential not to replicate any inflexible elements of the accreditation of formal learning qualifications. It is recommended that proven alternative validation processes, still recognising knowledge, skills and/or competences through learning outcomes be standardised across the European Union. (e.g. Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL))

- Ensure the early matching of national qualification systems to the EQF and support the use of an approach based on learning outcomes for standards and qualifications, assessment and validation procedures, credit transfer, (ECVET) curricula and quality assurance
- Work together gradually to eliminate barriers and to expand opportunities for learning mobility within Europe and worldwide for VET, including new objectives and financing instruments and taking into consideration the particular needs of disadvantaged persons

3. Fostering Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship

- It is necessary to broaden the definition of employability to include personal development in a combination of work, study, social and civil involvement, personal affairs and formal and non-formal economic activities
- A bottom-up approach and the involvement of all stakeholders is needed to support innovation and creativity. Institutions and governments have to give the opportunity to learners and educators to think in another way with innovative pedagogy, partnerships and participatory governance
- Encourage innovative partnerships by developing cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation and peer learning, using good practice and recognised networks and platforms for the organisation of these partnerships

4. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

- It is important to take preventive and remedial measures to maximise the contribution of VET in combatting early leaving from education and training.
- It is essential to consider specific measures aimed at raising the participation of low-skilled and other “at risk” VET groups, including developing flexible pathways in CVET, using appropriate guidance and support services
- Use ICT to maximise access to training and to promote active learning, as well as to develop new methods in both work and school-based VET, in order to facilitate the participation of “at risk” groups
- Use existing and new monitoring systems to support the participation of “at risk” groups in VET

5. Working in partnership at European, National and Local level

- There is a need to establish representative fora in each EU Member State so that stakeholders at all levels can influence EU VET policies and developments
- Greater involvement of VET stakeholders and greater visibility for the achievements of European cooperation in VET
- Coordinated governance of European and national instruments in the areas of transparency, recognition, quality assurance and mobility
- Intensifying cooperation between VET policy and other relevant policy areas

To reiterate, therefore, the four VET associations stand ready to cooperate with the European Commission in pursuing and implementing these recommendations and their representatives are willing to meet with DG EAC officials at the earliest opportunity to embark upon this work.

Signed:

President EfVET

APPENDIX

FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORKSHOPS

1. Improving the quality and efficiency of VET and enhancing its attractiveness and relevance

- There is an urgent need to discuss whether the present VET systems are appropriate to meet the requirements of future training needs, some of which have not yet been identified.
- Ways must be found to guide IVET and CVET trainees more effectively to select the correct training pathways and career choice.
- It should be made easier for VET teachers and trainers to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) placements in companies in order to update teaching and learning methodologies and the skills and competences of VET professionals
- Progression by various routes from IVET and CVET courses to appropriate Higher Education courses and qualifications should be made easier and more direct.

(The EUX initiative was started in Denmark in 2010 and this combines academic education and vocational training in gymnasiums allowing easier transition to higher level VET courses).

- A structure of peer evaluation of the quality of a VET institution's course provision should be universal and complement any existing or future national inspection regime. The application of the EQAVET criteria would ensure consistency of performance.
- EU VET policy documents will not be effective unless there is provision of adequate funding to support the implementation of policies.
- It is essential to mount promotional campaigns at European and Member State level to raise awareness in European citizens, particularly parents, of the importance, the benefits and the quality of VET, particularly as one of the elements required to bring the EU out of the current economic downturn.
- Skill competitions motivate students and trainees but these must be better publicised and marketed and successes disseminated more widely.
- There remains too little collaboration and consultation between VET trainers and employers. VET professional would thus become more aware of labour market needs and employers could advise on course revisions and developments. Companies should be encouraged to offer practical experience to all trainees by way of work placements.
- There is an urgent need to develop a Europe-wide system to collect up-to-date information on the success and effectiveness of VET.
- VET institutions should play a much greater role in the work of sector skills councils, both at European and Member State levels.
- In the proposed "Erasmus for All" programme 2014-2020, VET needs to be given more prominence and share of the funding. The balance still favours Higher Education too much.
- In essence, Centres for vocational innovation, regional enterprises, VET institutions and local authorities within each sector need to work together to train learners and teachers in "state of the art" technology to ensure that skills acquired, match regional and national labour market needs.
- There needs to be long-term systematic co-operation strategies between VET institutions and small and micro enterprises.
- There is a continual need to develop new qualifications for all sectors fully integrated in flexible open pathways and ensure all appropriate stakeholders are involved in these developments.
- Given the current decline in numbers of learners embarking on VET courses, all Member States must review existing structures, develop better guidance processes and encourage VET institutions to work in collaboration rather than competition. Obviously these issues can be addressed as National Qualification Frameworks are devised and then matched against the European Qualification Framework, leading on subsequently to ECVET developments.
- CVET should be more related to personal and professional development of learners.
- There must be established flexible pathways to enable teachers to gain professional competence
- It is crucial to include learners' perspectives and to promote participatory governance at organisational and institutional level and in all sectors.
- Basic skills in literacy and numeracy and science are seen by employers as very important, but we must go beyond the 'basics' to emphasise transversal competences

- We need to stimulate learners of all ages to be proactive, adaptable reflective and critical lifelong learners
- There is a need to create better learning environments by looking carefully at well-being and health in education and training

2. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality

In order to develop a strategic approach to the internationalisation of IVET and CVET and promoting international mobility:

At the European level:

- There should be better funding for mobility- students, trainees, teachers, schools and particularly companies (by means of lower taxes for example).
- Finalise the EQF to rationalise national qualification systems across the EU, as there still exist too many differences in approaches and mechanisms.
- In developing systems to validate Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), it is essential not to replicate any inflexible elements of the accreditation of formal learning qualifications. It is recommended that proven alternative validation processes, still recognising knowledge, skills and/or competences through learning outcomes be standardised across the European Union. (e.g. Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL); Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL); Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL&A); Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) and more recently Learning Outside Formal Teaching (LOFT)
- More transparency and flexibility for the recognition of qualifications, gained during the placement.
- Extra funding for international students (e.g. support for Africa should be education and training instead of direct donations).
- More attention should be paid to schools by the policy makers. They should visit the wide range of VET institutions, see “real life” and comprehend better the issues faced by these institutions.
- Alternative language education for VET purposes (not so academic)
- Transparent validation and recognition of skills
- Possibility for continuation of mobility projects (much more simplified application procedures for the continuation and sustainability of a project)
- Less bureaucracy at every stage (application, implementation, reports)

At the National Level:

- Each school should have an international coordinator (not all countries have this position in schools)
- International mobility should be a mandatory part of the curriculum
- Top management of organisations should be more aware of mobility issues and should themselves motivate teachers/learners to take part in these initiatives
- There should be more information about the benefits of international mobility, which should motivate students to choose international internships
- Tutors should be included in the process to a greater extent than they are currently.
- Mobility processes should be handled increasingly at National Government level
- Priority in funding mobility should be given to state schools, which in many countries are less active
- More support and guidance for those who write applications
- More significance should be given to developing language skills of VET students, as lack of language skills is a frequent obstacle for participation in mobility
- Greater involvement of companies and Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- Training tutors/mentors for work placements in companies
- Trade unions should be more involved in work-based learning
- Teachers should be given sufficient funding and motivation to accompany students on their placements abroad
- National governments should foster and stimulate closer links between education and business
- More support for continuous learning
- Vertical and horizontal mobility should be available
- Encourage cooperation between different providers of education
- Funding organizations who are willing to share experiences and successful results
- More information for institutions- encouragement through Ministries and associations of top management
- Encourage cooperation between different providers of education
- Possibility for continuation of mobility project (much more simplified application procedures for the continuation of a project)
- Less bureaucracy at every stage (application, implementation, reports)

At Organisation level:

- Institutions should have consultants who could support students and explain to them their possibilities for placements abroad
- Creating individual portfolios, which would include competences gained in international placements

- International mobility should be part of the educational process
- To create a need to be involved in mobility
- More flexible timing of the placement- the students should have a possibility to choose appropriate timing
- Closer links to business locally on advising on their training needs in the future.

3. Fostering Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship

A definition of Creativity was determined as:

- Adding something new and something different
- Finding different solutions
- Thinking out of the box
- Having trust in your own abilities
- Human nature is creative but somehow we often succeed in destroying creativity.
- There is too often resistance to change from the point of view of teachers and organisations,
- No or little willingness to take risks is widespread
- There is too much time between creation and implementation.
- The lack of flexibility of the educational system in most EU countries.
- Creativity should be a part of the strategy of the organisations and if possible, part of an interactive local or regional strategy with universities and companies
- It is necessary to broaden the definition of employability to include personal development in a combination of work, study, social and civil involvement, personal affairs and formal and non-formal economic activities
- A bottom-up approach and the involvement of all stakeholders is needed to support innovation and creativity. Institutions and governments have to give the opportunity to learners and educators to think in another way with innovative pedagogy, partnerships and participatory governance
- Encourage innovative partnerships by developing cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation and peer learning, using good practice and recognised networks and platforms for the organisation of these partnerships

4. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

It is important to take preventive and remedial measures to maximise the contribution of VET in combatting early leaving from education and training.

- Strengthen existing preventive approaches
- Build closer cooperation between general and vocational education sectors
- Remove barriers for “drop outs” to return to education and training
- VET should not be a closed environment but needs to equip learners with important skills and competences for their life in society – not just vocational skills but soft, personal and societal skills

- Include active citizenship in benchmarks
- At all levels remove financial barriers to access
- Expand an effective apprenticeship system in every country where, with the full support of enlightened employers, IVET learners are trained in a real workplace environment and acquire a range of transferable skills in a particular vocational area
- Reform the curriculum in compulsory schooling to offer a more vocationally-orientated programme, more suited to the needs of the majority of pre-16 learners
- Give more consideration to active citizenship as a qualitative indicator when measuring progress
- Attention should be paid to transitions between learning, work and life responsibilities

It is essential to consider specific measures aimed at raising the participation of low-skilled and other “at risk” VET groups, including developing flexible pathways in CVET, using appropriate guidance and support services

- Some countries have a parallel CVET system
- Initial guidance to learners to ensure the appropriate course is followed
- Educating parents in the value of VET qualifications and the amount of work required by the learners to achieve them. Seek parental help in preventing “drop out”
- Treat literacy and numeracy throughout the entire LLL cycle
- Promote inclusive education and personalised learning through timely support
- Promote the early identification of special needs
- Provide well-coordinated support services
- Integrate support services within mainstream schooling
- Ensure flexible pathways to further education and training
- Enable mature learners to access easily training in new skills required in the changing employment scene.
- Develop validation systems of informal, non-formal learning

Use ICT to maximise access to training and to promote active learning, as well as to develop new methods in both work and school-based VET, in order to facilitate the participation of “at risk” groups

- Develop on-line courses/modules/case studies at differentiated levels which can supplement/sometimes replace attendance on VET courses
- Expand “blended learning” in all areas
- Use the full range of technical tools offered by ICT
- Use of E-mails
- Facilitate ICT access to the elderly
- Facilitate ICT access to migrants
- Facilitate on-line job seeking
- Facilitate access to e-services

- Use of social media to communicate with learners but be fully aware of the potential risks
- Need to guide teachers and trainers in the effective use of social media.

Use existing monitoring systems to support the participation of “at risk” groups in VET

- Teachers need to become aware of all a learner’s problems outside school
- Need to monitor attendance and check reasons for absence (visit homes if necessary?)
- Follow up and overcome reasons for absence (domestic issues, financial worries, bullying, learning difficulties, medical problems etc. (Teacher or Counsellor to work with/assist the social worker?))
- Greater support for migrants/immigrants in adapting to a new country and culture
- Greater support for migrants to learn the language of the host country
- Need for greater understanding and acceptance of the similarities and differences of the migrants’ cultures
- Need to promote to the parents the opportunities for young migrants offered by VET qualifications and progression to higher level studies

5. Working in partnership at European, National and Local level

- Greater involvement of VET stakeholders and greater visibility for the achievements of European cooperation in VET
- Coordinated governance of European and national instruments in the areas of transparency, recognition, quality assurance and mobility
- Intensifying cooperation between VET policy and other relevant policy areas
- Improving the quality and comparability of data for EU policymaking in VET
- Making good use of EU support
- European tools for transparency to enhance communication and advice
- Publicise widely the collected data
- EU support possibilities to give feedback on European policy based on project outcomes
- Objectives and deliverables are formulated too widely. There is a need to devise more realistic narrower formulations
- The roles of National Agencies differ too widely
- Policy making too often a one-way top-down process
- There is a need to establish representative fora in each EU Member State so that stakeholders at all levels can influence EU VET policies and developments