



**The Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the EU Conference  
'Skills for a lifetime – towards a future proof VET'  
Amsterdam, 16 - 17 February 2016**

**'Stepping stones' towards a future proof VET**

*What are these 'Stepping stones' (and what not)?*

The conference 'Skills for a lifetime' addressed a wide variety of topics in six workshops. The topics cover key areas that were also discussed in the context of the **Riga Deliverables**<sup>1</sup>. Some of them might be included and given a new impetus in the forthcoming (wider) New Skills Agenda that is currently being developed by the European Commission.

The **aim of the conference** was to make good use of the experts who were among the participants and, through their contributions, inspire policymakers – in the relevant ministries as well as education and training institutions – and other stakeholders.

To kick-start the event, the conference team, i.e. the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and various national stakeholder organisations in VET, prepared some **suggestions** for debate. They were meant to guide conference organisers, speakers and moderators when preparing their contributions, statements and workshop set ups. These were not set in stone, nor did they aim to prescribe fixed solutions or give instructions to VET stakeholders. Ideas could be rejected, transformed, or expanded to reflect participants' multi-stakeholder perspectives.

**Now that the conference has taken place**, the results of the discussions have been translated into this final document, to be shared with a wide audience of VET stakeholders in Brussels and throughout Europe. These 'Stepping Stones' will be brought under the attention with a summary of the main conclusions by the Netherlands EU Presidency to EU Education ministers, in view of their meeting and discussion on Skills in the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf)

## ***Theme 1 - Excellence in VET: flexible solutions in a changing labour market***

### ***A: Links between innovation, VET and industry***

**Introduction:** *The key question that precedes the discussion in this workshop is: why should VET be included in – regional and sectoral – innovation partnerships with industry?*

*The answer is threefold:*

*Companies need skilled human capital to work with innovations, especially at VET level. New technologies may be ever so clever, without people who can apply them in daily work they won't be profitable.*

*Moreover, if VET expertise is included in the development process, researchers and applied scientists will profit from the practical experience and insights while designing new methodologies. For example, if the ambition is to design a useful and efficient healthcare robot, knowledge about the experiences and visions of nurses and technical staff is indispensable.*

*Finally, it is good to remember that most process innovations take place in SMEs, and are often initiated by VET-educated entrepreneurs and employees.*

The definition of a **partnership between VET, industry and innovation** should allow room for adjustments to accommodate different circumstances across Member States, but some common characteristics can be described. Some examples: all parties relevant for the development of innovative VET are included, they all profit from and contribute to a common goal. Long term visions can only be achieved by a structural and sustainable partnership that exceeds ad hoc short term goals. Finally, partnerships that are organised at regional and/or sectoral level, may find it easier to stay on top of relevant developments. As border regions may share more characteristics or challenges with their neighbours than with other parts in their own country, partnerships could extend beyond national frontiers.

How to initiate, organise and maintain a partnership? How to involve social partners (employer and employee organisations / trade unions) effectively in this? Some possible answers:

- The **focus should be on the regional and sector level**, that's where the plans should be made and worked out. Stakeholders at regional level need to have the competency to implement. National and EU level can facilitate with expertise, funding and coordination.
- **Schools** could take initiative, **being agents of change**, investing in networks with industry, preparing students for work placements or apprenticeships so that they have immediate added value for training companies. They are in a position to create ambitious work placements and should not settle for educating basic skills only.
- To facilitate **involvement of companies**, it is necessary to find smart solutions for SME's (by the use of networks), involve R&D, listen to critical friends and reduce bureaucracy (or do the paper work for them). Companies have to take responsibility for the quality of their future and present staff!
- Most importantly, schools, companies and other stakeholders that want to improve VET, have to **work together from the very beginning**, not make separate plans and involve others at a later time.

- The most promising partnership starts with a concrete **regional or sectoral challenge** that is felt by all stakeholders, for instance the need to identify new potential growth areas. Don't limit your thinking to your own interest, use an integrated approach in which every party will profit from the cooperation in his or her own way.
- The starting point may also be a '**common regional DNA**', like automotive companies in a region, or agriculture or chemicals. By themselves, companies will often be too small to compete internationally, but in a partnership their position will improve. Thus will the need for skilled staff in the region grow. "Cooperation is the new way of competing", agriculture partnerships claim.
- It is essential that VET and industry work together right **from the beginning**. Usually, each party minds his own business until they reach the stage that they need help from the other. The new model is: start together and plan and develop joint pathways.
- Structural cooperation can be organised in **triple helix platforms**<sup>2</sup> (regional, national and sectoral). Stakeholders bring their best capacities to the table, and focus on long term developments (for example: a strategy for regional economic development) as well as short term actions (training programmes to upskill staff and students). Such a strategy would imply policies to anticipate, develop and utilise skills, which requires close collaboration in wider partnerships. Depending on the national or regional situation, other stakeholders can play an active role. It is often useful to explicitly include the various roles and contributions in a vision statement.
- The **regional government** is an important stakeholder in regional partnerships. It is often an employer or client/policy implementer in the field of healthcare, education, inclusion, labour market activation and migration, and profits from high responsiveness of education programmes. Most clear is the example of social services to unemployed people by regional authorities: the sooner people enter into paid jobs, the more money is saved by the local or regional authority. Civil servants therefore need to be up to date with regional developments, and this can be facilitated by participating in triple helix networks. Results may be improved when they integrate the networks in their strategic plans. Regional governments can consider coordinating and facilitating such networks, support them financially and/or with capacity and expertise.
- **People involved in the partnerships** may need training in certain skills, to contribute effectively to the cooperation. Company instructors need didactic skills to coach and train students. VET teachers will have to get out of the classroom (more) to stay up-to-date with new technologies and developments in their trade. This training has to be financed, planned and organised. Quality and labour agreement rules/contracts may need changing to allow time and opportunity for extra training. Thus, regional cooperation may have an impact on national frameworks and rules.
- In the initial phase of setting up a partnership, **financial support** will be very welcome. Co-financing schemes will stimulate ownership and sustainability. In case of temporary external financial support, partners need to include a long term business model in their plans.
- A **national supportive organisation** (like the STEM Platform in the Netherlands, also trying to involve SME's) may be useful to boost new (regional) initiatives. It can help

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<sup>2</sup> Triple helix in this respect refers to education (all sectors), innovation/research and industry.

network partners to start and speed up the process. Ideally, such an organisation could have the following tasks: provide general information and personal expertise/coaching regarding the process, share experiences of other partnerships (nationally and internationally); give an overview of other relevant initiatives; execute supporting finance programmes (if available); provide information about other financial support (also at EU level); collect information about obstacles that require change in national policies and regulations and bring them to the attention of relevant policy makers; perform evaluations and benchmarks to compare and improve results.

#### **Suggestions for national stakeholders (government, social partners):**

- On the **role of governments** (regional, national and European), the following preliminary remarks were made:
  - a. **Agents of change are needed in schools**, people that understand the language of the industry; if they are not there yet, they need to be trained.
  - b. We need **people that bring people together**, not only funding.
  - c. VET institutions should not fear **quality assessments** by supervisory bodies such as inspectorates of education, but experience their observations as support in attempts to perform better.
- What could be considered is the promotion or creation of a **national institution/expert organisation** to support the development of triple helix platforms or other partnerships.
- To stimulate new initiatives, **national funding schemes** based on co-financing may be helpful in the starting phase of new partnerships and platforms.
- **National legal frameworks and regulations** for qualifications and other aspects of VET may need analysing and adjusting to allow for new VET programmes developed by multi-stakeholder or cross-sector partnerships.

#### **Suggestions for regional/sectoral stakeholders:**

- Define current **common challenges and goals**
- Develop **triple helix platforms** that include all relevant stakeholders; these platforms may develop long term visions and plans for developing innovative VET
- **Regional authorities** may use (and support) triple helix platforms to support their responsibilities in healthcare, education and activating labour market policies.
- Some practices show that **cross-overs between industrial sectors ('smart industry') and cooperation between education sectors** increase the success of the partnerships or platforms. Regional authorities, education institutions and industrial sectors may consider to support or invest in developing these kinds of cooperation.

#### **What can Europe do?**

- The EU can **support peer learning** in various forms and **fund innovative projects** through existing programmes (Erasmus+, ESF, EFRO, Interreg).
- It's very helpful and important to learn from others' experiences. The EU can help develop an **international triple helix network** aimed at cross-border sharing of knowledge, and coaching by experienced foreign participants. An example of such a network is the international STEM Coalition (<http://www.stemedcoalition.org>).

- It is essential that industrial and innovation stakeholders become more aware of the importance and opportunities of **VET involvement in innovation partnerships**. At the moment, mainly the higher education sector is involved and in the picture but it could also include post-secondary or higher VET. Examples of this inclusion can be found in France, Italy, Slovenia and Sweden (Cedefop, *Stronger VET for better lives* (2015; paragraph 4.1.2). The EU could play a role in stimulating awareness and strengthen the position of VET in innovation policies and programmes, for example in the new EU Skills Agenda. Concrete measures could be to promote triple helix projects in Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, include them in Country Specific Recommendations as suggestions to improve regional development, and continue emphasizing the need to include vocational education in structural funds programmes like the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Interreg.
- **Information about the availability of jobs** is crucial and should not stop at regional or national borders. When human capital supply is not adequate in a region to meet the demands of industry, the labour market should be accessible for foreign workers, especially in border regions. To facilitate cross-border mobility, the EU should support the provision of concrete and up-to-date information about job availability in European regions, including by the Eures regulation. In this respect, the EU Skills Panorama also provides a lot of information (<http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en>).
- Triple helix platforms can help to provide adequate information about jobs and professions in regions and sectors.

## ***B: Facilitating excellent students and inclusion: learning from Europe's diverse educational systems***

### ***Introduction***

*In Europe, there is a great deal of diversity in education systems, each with their own strengths and challenges. There is no such thing as a 'perfect' European education system that fits all Member States equally well. Yet, much can be learned from experiences and outcomes related to the wide variety of educational system designs in Europe. Capitalizing on the growing availability of international data in education, comparative research provides relevant insights into key characteristics of educational systems that enhance, or impede, educational excellence as well as equality of educational opportunities. The key question therefore is: taking the current state of an education system as a given, how can Member States improve their systems in such a way that it provides better chances for all of its students to realize their potential?*

- Improvement of a national system starts with the comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the specific system. A discussion at international level on the performance of a system needs **a common language** in order to initiate a dialogue. In view of this, the development of a diagnostic model that makes it possible to compare different educational systems within a common language, would be helpful.
- Education systems characteristics and their interaction **affect student outcomes**. Besides the interaction between the different parts of the education and training

system, there are also other internal and external factors that may lead to different outcomes even within the same country; e.g. different contexts (e.g. urban vs. regional, socio-economic situation, political & social values; economic, welfare and social policies; (e.g. how easy it is for young unqualified people to find jobs; differentials between social benefits and wages or wage differentials between different qualification levels).

- For instance, early tracking is a characteristic prevalent in various European educational systems. While early tracking is generally associated with greater inequalities in school careers, its negative impact can be countered if it is combined with standardisation, such as standardized performance tests. The interaction between these two system characteristics, tracking and standardization, stress the importance of working from an integrated perspective on educational system design. Of course, other features of a system may be taken into account as well, such as the degree of school autonomy and the existence of flexible pathways or a modular approach.
- Characteristics of educational systems may ***enhance a particular educational outcome while impeding the other***. For instance, a strong and well-developed VET system is generally associated with easier transition to the labour market, but at the same time it is also associated with greater social inequalities in schooling outcomes and labour market positions. These so-called trade-offs between outcomes of educational institutions call, once more, for on an integrated perspective on educational system design in which the outcomes of system characteristics are evaluated in conjunction.
- Early-tracking systems need ***cross-sector flexibility or track permeability*** to compensate for possible disadvantages.

#### **Suggestions for national stakeholders (government, social partners):**

- Encouraged by the EU ***Member States*** could work towards excellence and inclusion in education by ***evaluating their systems and defining their key areas of improvement***. Three central functions of education (cognitive development, transition into the labour market and socialization) could be taken into account.

#### **Suggestions for regional/sectoral stakeholders:**

- ***Cross-border cooperation*** in neighbouring regions
- Participate in European and international ***exchanges of expertise and experience***
- Promote ***cooperation between education sectors*** to address key areas for improvement

#### **What can Europe do?**

- In stimulating self-evaluation by and mutual learning between Member States, ***the EU could help Member States to learn from other systems*** with the help of Cedefop's information and expertise. By learning how the combination of system characteristics works out in various countries, policy makers may identify avenues for strengthening the potentials of their current system and weakening its challenges at the same time.
- Facilitate ***exchange of expertise*** within and outside Europe about the impact of combinations of system characteristics

- Tap the expertise of Cedefop and ETF and cooperate with **international organisations** like OECD and UNESCO to develop and improve expertise in this area
- Stimulate **alignment between European policy agendas of education sectors**, notably through the ET2020 Framework, especially in secondary, vocational and higher education policies
- In stimulating self-evaluation by and mutual learning between Member States, **the EU could help Member States to learn from other systems** with the help of Cedefop's information and expertise. By learning how the combination of system characteristics works out in various countries, policy makers may identify avenues for strengthening the potentials of their current system and weakening its challenges at the same time.
- The EU could play a role in supporting exchange between Member States through programmes such as Erasmus+, and may also facilitate stakeholders to learn from practices outside Europe.

## **Theme 2 - Facilitating careers through VET: Lifelong learning for Life long Employability**

### **Introduction**

*This theme is about lifelong learning: How can vocational education and training contribute to labour market mobility in a prolonged working life? In subsequent stages of life, people bring different sets of experiences to the labour market. Personal circumstances also change over lifetime, leading to different labour market orientations and perspectives. At the same time, the labour market itself is in a state of flux. How do we connect the dynamics of the labour market with career- and lifetime developments? What is the role of vocational education and training? The theme of lifelong learning raises the question how VET providers might contribute to labour mobility in a working life which is more dynamic and longer than it used to be.*

*Even when mastering 21st Century Skills I -VET students cannot prepare themselves fully for these developments as specific job positions will change over time and will demand specific training. In short, the need for lifelong learning is already high but will increase. It cannot be ruled out that in addition to the demand for training following changes in a job or in the company, training for job to job transitions will become more important.*

Thinking about what is needed to obtain a responsive infrastructure for lifelong learning, the following elements (mainly stemming from two separate workshops) can be identified:

- **More focus on the training needs of Smaller and Medium-Sized Enterprises**, more specifically concerning the more vulnerable lower educated and elderly employees within SME's. It is of great importance that possibilities for informal learning in SME-companies are improved.
- The educational sector, notably VET, needs to include learning activities aiming to improve **personal and social skills** such as creativity and social intelligence which are difficult to learn or improve in a later stage of life .

- Relevant stakeholders in the region should join forces to develop **'counters for learning and working'** operating on a strategic, tactical as well as operational level.
- It takes time to co-develop innovative processes, a long term commitment from all stakeholders is needed to establish new work routines in the field of lifelong learning, in particular when a large number of stakeholders is involved .
- A **qualifications framework** and corresponding set of training programmes facilitating that every adult citizen at any skill level at any time in his/her career can keep up with developments in the labour market. This requires accessible, flexible and tailor-made training offers, (regional ) arrangements between government, business and education for adequate guidance and quality checks. It also requires guidance and comprehensive arrangements to validate non-formal and informal learning.
- **Awareness of differences between groups of citizens** in their level of education and training experiences. The problem of low-skilled and older workers making less use of training than higher educated and younger (personal barriers, low self-confidence, willingness to invest companies) requires focused attention and investments in innovative arrangements. Those **vulnerable groups** may have a fear for conventional forms of learning, where a workplace offering abundant learning opportunities may help to develop their competences more successfully. In order to reach vulnerable groups, personal guidance is key. Available digital tools and instruments supporting learning often do not reach or activate these specific groups. A personal approach, e.g. career counsellors, might help them to find their way in the 'learning jungle'.
- Another focus point is that this **training infrastructure must be open and accessible to workers** regardless of their employment contract, the sector where they work and the financial strength of the company but also to job seekers and migrants. 7 in 10 of Cedefop's European Skills and Job Survey respondents said that they improved or acquired new skills in their job via informal methods, such as learning by interacting with colleagues at work. A significant proportion did so by learning at work through trial and error (59%). A substantial part of skill accumulation of employees takes place informally, rendering the recognition and validation of such acquired, yet unrecognised, skills crucial for enabling their continued labour market progression and mobility (OECD, 2013; Cedefop, 2014).  
See for instance:
  - Cedefop, *Skills, qualifications and jobs in the EU: the making on a perfect match?*
  - Cedefop, *Work-based learning in CVET: policies and practices in Europe*
  - The Commission's *Employment and social developments in Europe* report.
- **Financing of lifelong learning** requires attention: workers must be provided with means to follow a course. Equity may not act as a barrier to participation. Financing arrangements should even encourage participation in training. There are positive experiences with individual training budgets or learning accounts, but also examples of funding from salary budgets, national training funds or more cooperation between sectoral funds. An adequate supply and financing structure are not (for everyone) sufficient however; a mentoring /stimulation system (eg. Instruments like lifelong learning ambassadors) helping vulnerable people to engage in learning within the context of their individual needs, possibilities and regional developments is needed.



### **Suggestions for national stakeholders (government, social partners):**

- Foster **guidance** and comprehensive **arrangements to validate non-formal and informal learning**.
- **Facilitate collaboration between regional stakeholders** in order to develop flexible LLL-arrangements.

### **Suggestions for regional/sectoral stakeholders:**

- Provide accessible, flexible and tailor-made training offers as well as (regional ) arrangements between government, business and education for adequate guidance and quality checks.
- **Acknowledge the importance of (regional) cooperation.**

### **Responsibility of Employers**

- Larger companies should take the lead in **supporting unemployed people to get a better position on the labour market in general**, not merely filling in their own vacancies (e.g. the Philips Employment Plan).

### **What can Europe do?**

- Europe may play a role, as it does already now, in **raising awareness** for lifelong learning. Knowledge between member states can be exchanged, **participation in lifelong learning can be facilitated through EU-programmes such as ESF and EFRD**.
- Participants at the conference however seem to see no big role for the EU in stimulating lifelong learning in SME's and for vulnerable groups. One can only guess what reasons participants may have had; maybe just a matter of scale suitable for outreach programmes. This point might can be discussed in one of the relevant EU-working groups.

## ***Theme 3: Internationalisation in VET inside and outside Europe***

### ***Introduction***

*Studies and the experiences of parents, teachers and students reveal that international experience in vocational education generates skills and contributes to excellence, and thus to the employability of VET students in the labour market. Furthermore, the resulting transversal, "21st century" skills and often "hidden" competences will be used by students during their entire career. Internationalisation of VET can therefore contribute to its excellence. However, international mobility and exchanges are relatively limited in VET. It is time therefore to boost internationalisation in VET. This ambition can obviously benefit a lot from a European approach. The Erasmus+ programme offers already ample opportunities and can use an active approach from the side of authorities, VET providers and the world of work to create a maximum impact.*

### ***A. Mobility through cooperation inside Europe: from theory to practice***

#### ***Introduction: Future benchmark***

*The European ambition is set by the 6% benchmark VET mobility in 2020. Yet several questions need to be answered. Is it about outgoing mobility and / or incoming mobility and*

*reciprocity; about student mobility and /or staff mobility; about quantity and/or quality of mobility? From which sources should mobility be financed – from European sources or national, or both? In which ratio? A new element in the discussion is the suggestion to prolong the minimum duration of the international learning experience, up to 6 months. One might wonder how the new VET Mobility Scoreboard is connected to the benchmark. As explained by Cedefop, the scoreboard is to monitor the conditions that support or hinder learning mobility in IVET. This is to say that the information it will provide, can help Member States identify areas that may need more attention and can support peer policy learning. In this way it could support countries in reaching the benchmark.*

*When we try to answer these questions, it is essential to be aware of the difference between Member States. Their starting position (level of mobility), instruments and funding are all very different. Member States can roughly be categorized into three groups: countries with high VET mobility rates that put it on their policy agenda and fully use Erasmus+ funding; countries with little mobility that hardly use any mobility instruments or funding; and the countries in between these extreme positions. It is clear that these different situations require tailor made measures to bridge the variety of gaps towards the ambition of 6 %. The points indicated below will not fit in all countries: stakeholders may select those that will best suit their situation.*

- In internationalization, we need more **focus on quality** rather than on quantity. The Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter is a quality label and should be promoted throughout Europe to establish a network of trustworthy VET providers and potential relay points for companies accepting foreign trainees.
- The **difference between HE and VET mobility** should not be underestimated. VET students mainly participate at a younger age and through internships rather than in an on-campus experience with fellow international students such as is common within HE.
- A **general point** that is fundamental for all stakeholders and throughout the process is the definition of mobility: stakeholders need to define mobility more concretely and establish the main reasons to promote it. These will differ per member state, region and sector (or company). A standardized ambition and roadmap defined at EU level may not suit – i.e. be realistic or practical – in all Member States.
- **Cooperation and partnerships:** For VET, it's often more for personal development benefits than (just) to learn practical skills. A key step is to investigate what employers – in a region, sector, country – are looking for in their staff and describe – evidence based – in what way cross-border mobility can contribute to the development of these skills. Company demands, different for internships and apprenticeships, should be integrated in the designing process of mobility schemes at all levels. It's important to **involve all stakeholders in the designing process from the beginning**. Industry will only be truly motivated to support and participate when its own vision and objectives are part and parcel of the mobility strategy.
- **Funding:** the available funds for mobility in Erasmus+ will never be enough to cover 6% mobility of the VET population in Europe. So far, in many countries Erasmus+ has been the main source to fund mobility. Several countries have bilateral agreements or initiatives. It is often within the remit of VET providers to decide about mobility initiatives. One idea may be to see if mobility initiatives/opportunities that exist in

other areas, e.g. town twinning, in the youth and volunteering sector could be related to VET, e.g. to tap additional funding sources or by validating skills and competences that are relevant to the VET programme.

However, finding suitable partners and timing may be quite challenging. The decision about mobility initiatives is often within the remit of VET providers and may also be influenced by other factors.

VET learners come from various age groups and very different backgrounds and may face financial but also motivational barriers (issues like motivation will be covered by the scoreboard though they may be difficult to capture).

- In view of this, stakeholders at different levels should join forces and ***combine Key Action 1 of Erasmus+ with funding from other sources, such as national mobility schemes, European structural funds, regional funding, and private-public partnerships***. Also, the European Pact for Youth and the recent ideas on an Erasmus Pro programme (“Jacques Delors initiative”) offer clues for the promotion of mobility. However, they require further investigation on how to translate the visionary ambitions into practical hands-on implementation activities.
- **Border regions:** special attention is needed for mobility in border regions. Programmes and initiatives like INTERREG are well suited to support this kind of mobility, but VET institutions are not always included in the relevant networks. Mobility in border regions is a key aspect to create a better labour market perspective for VET graduates in these regions. Schools in border regions that want to join forces and develop joint programmes matching regional labour market requirements, encounter legal and practical obstacles.
- **Sectoral approach:** cooperation between the world of VET and the world of work concerning international mobility still needs to be improved. A more sectoral approach could help to boost both learning and working mobility. A next step could be to develop international qualification schemes for certain professions or (sub) sectors or skills. Good examples like the Maritime Sector (with international standardized qualifications) could inspire other internationally oriented sectors to develop for example international VET courses.
- **Information:** mobility can only happen when necessary information is available. Information about availability of work placements, recognition processes, qualifications, education programmes, etcetera. Presented in a language that is accessible for the information seeker, and comprehensible for the various target groups involved in mobility. Sources of information are far too scattered in Europe, even EU portals are known just within a limited network of stakeholders. A one-size-fits-all approach would not suit the diversity of objectives and target groups. More cooperation between EU institutions dealing with mobility (DG EAC, Employment and Internal Market) is essential to make the best use of available information and resources. Also, to facilitate mobility transparency of qualifications is needed. Present transparency instruments are often not detailed enough to ‘translate’ foreign education systems, qualifications, modules or training programmes into domestic systems, which makes recognition processes long and inefficient. We need to find ways to balance all these aspects in the way we provide information to support learning and labour mobility. For starters, it would be very helpful if each country would have one contact point for VET with all the information and expertise about diploma and training programmes. Such contact points could become part of a

European Transparency Network beyond the current Europass Centres and NCP's. This would result in simpler and shorter recognition processes.

### **Suggestion for all stakeholders**

- Allow room for tailor-made mobility strategies. Define mobility goals and ambitions at the most appropriate level and combine them with suitable instruments.

### **Suggestions for national stakeholders (governments, social partners):**

- Take care of **inclusion**, keeping the possibilities open for every student to participate in an international programme.
- Member States/NA's could integrate or **combine Erasmus+ with other programmes** (EU and national).
- Member States could conclude **bilateral agreements** on mobility and recognition of qualifications. They could also remove practical and legal obstacles for border region mobility.
- Member States could establish **national contact points for VET**, where all relevant information can be found or accessed, and link relevant national and regional labour market and VET education information to national contact points, in a language that is accessible for the main target groups. They could make national flowcharts of incoming and outgoing mobility: what is the route and who is involved.

### **Suggestions for regional/sectoral stakeholders**

- Trust on the open and proactive attitude of students in regard to quality. This becomes easier when they act within an international mobility scheme such as Erasmus+, ascertaining a certain quality.
- Involve all partners – education, industry, regional authorities – in a mobility partnership, and determine common goals.
- Integrate or combine mobility strategies with other objectives, such as economic or labour market development or inclusion. Have **a broader perspective** and join relevant other networks that use different funding schemes
- Join forces with Interreg networks and stakeholders to put VET (higher) on the multi-stakeholder border-region agendas and define common strategies.
- Join forces with international industrial sector organisations to implement Erasmus+ Sector Skills Alliances, and put mobility on their skills agendas.

### **Suggestions for VET-providers**

- Link up with companies
- Apply for an Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter to become a trustworthy partner for international mobility and cooperation

### **What can Europe do?**

- **Research** on the long term impact of mobility experiences in VET to be conducted (involving quality rather than the contemporary focus on quantity). In view of this, a model on which data to collect and how to collect could be of benefit to the countries and stakeholders involved.

- **Promote/stimulate** more **awareness for mobility objectives in Interreg projects** and allow room for border region mobility in Erasmus+.
- **Promote sectoral schemes** such as the Erasmus+ Sector Skills Alliances (SSA). The impact of SSA should be that the common sectoral training content facilitates mobility.
- **Link -and where possible integrate- sources of mobility information** from DGs EAC, Employment and GROWTH. We need to pay attention to the different objectives and target groups of the websites and other instruments, especially to students, parents and employers. These contact points could be linked in an overarching European Transparency Network also to regional, national and EU information sources, such as the national 'Assistance centres' installed on behalf of DG GROWTH (recognition of professional qualifications directive).

## ***B: Cooperation and Mobility outside Europe***

### ***Introduction***

*Though vocational education cannot profit from structural EU policies regarding mobility and cooperation in education outside Europe, many initiatives show that this topic is very much alive in the VET sector. These initiatives differ widely in scope, focus, region and duration, yet they yield a general consensus that they are useful and add considerable value to the institutions, teachers and students involved. When it comes to motivation, destinations outside Europe may seem more attractive for a young person than going to his/her neighbouring country.*

*To develop useful strategic policies at national and EU level, we first need to have a clear – preferably evidence based – view on why and how we should invest in international cooperation. During the workshop, three groups were asked to come up with arguments on these issues (why/why not and how). An important question was how to progress from ad hoc initiatives to structural and sustainable policies.*

Points to be taken into account can be summed up as follows:

- Reasons for internationalisation outside the EU are basically the same as within the EU, although a proper **cost – benefit analysis** seems more appropriate in the case of collaboration outside of Europe.
- Cooperation activities outside the EU can be clustered in four levels; policy level (e.g. policy dialogue), operational level (market research), VET provider level (capacity building) and individual level (staff, teacher and student mobility).
- **Success factors** can include the embedding of initiatives in wider outreach programmes and the realisation of an equal level of commitment (on strategic level and in resources).
- A **gradual approach** is needed, starting with 'internationalisation@home' and 'easy countries' like Canada or Australia.
- Furthermore, in many cases it would be advisable to start with a 'shadowing programme' for staff and teachers before the actual exchange of students (which often occurs difficulties in terms of visa, working permits, etcetera).

- Based on the inventory published by the European Commission in 2015, more **research** is needed to define the added value of international cooperation for VET. Key questions are about main objectives of cooperation, industrial sectors and regions (and combinations of these elements: which sector and region will suit the different objectives best?). Rather than a comprehensive research project, business cases per objective/region/objective would give quick and concrete insights on which policy agendas can be built.
- **Higher education** can provide good practices about international cooperation and mobility: VET stakeholders and research institutions could use the existing experience, expertise and networks in Higher Education. It may help – partly – to define the added value for VET and help to overcome obstacles more quickly. It may be helpful however to consider VET's heterogeneous nature (number of institutions, different types and levels of programmes, age groups, etc. that VET caters for) to understand what could be feasible and realistic for whom.
- If commonly agreed and amended, **Erasmus + could provide opportunities for VET mobility outside Europe.**
- Mobility of VET learners and VET teachers is one out of the four formats of bilateral cooperation between EU MS and **developed countries/emerging economies**. Until now there is no shared information at EU level on the extent and intensity of this mobility. Even at EU MS level information is rather fragmented as mobility is often driven by companies or VET providers. MS can reflect on ways to streamline the process with the aim to increase the added value of mobility beyond the EU for the up-skilling the labour force. The EU could facilitate further exchange of existing practices.
- Supporting the development of a strong VET sector in **developing countries** will respond to several millennium goals, and the importance of an education system that matches labour market needs is obvious for any country in the world. It is important therefore to include humanitarian objectives in the business cases. In the context of global developments, VET stakeholders in Europe can contribute considerably to better social and economic chances in turbulent and weaker parts of the world; a situation that both East and West, North and South will profit from. Moreover, involvement in humanitarian projects as part of the curriculum has proven highly beneficial to European VET students, especially regarding transversal skills and global citizenship.
- Regarding **humanitarian development**, an extensive infrastructure of programmes, policies and organisations already exists in which VET might easily be included. VET should cooperate with key players like DEVCO, companies and governments. Developing new initiatives exclusively for VET will take more time and probably be less cost effective than teaming up with the existing networks. Nevertheless some further reflections on potential funding sources may be helpful.
- **Migrants and refugees:** one of Europe's main priorities at the moment is to link skills supply to the labour market – in a sustainable, future-proof way. At the same time, thousands of young migrants and refugees with varying levels and types of skills are entering Europe and could help to fill some of the skills gaps identified by companies. This migrant labour potential must be included in overall skills strategies (EU, national, regional); hence, also in those for VET and higher education. As a starting

point, research is needed to understand how migrant supply will/could match labour market needs.

#### **Suggestions for national stakeholders (government, social partners):**

- **Member States** could reflect on their educational, labour market and social policies and regulations in order to ***identify what the obstacles (and needed amendments) are***, in order to provide quick solutions for language training, VET and integrating VET students into the labour market. Evidence for Germany shows that after the first year of arrival only 8% of refugees of working age found a job, and from previous periods – after five years, the percentage went up to 50.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Suggestions for regional/sectoral stakeholders:**

- Have not been under discussion during the conference.

#### **What can Europe do?**

- The EU could ***promote peer learning*** on policies and practices to integrate migrants in education and training as well as the labour market. This could include skills audits/demonstrations, guidance, validation arrangements; content and integrated language learning; work-based learning/apprenticeships. In this context it may be interesting for you to know that Cedefop will investigate the role of VET-related policies to promote labour market and social integration of migrants and refugees. The work on validation will also include a report on validation practices to integrate migrants.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_White\\_Paper\\_Europe\\_What\\_Watch\\_Out\\_for\\_2016-2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_White_Paper_Europe_What_Watch_Out_for_2016-2017.pdf)