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Skills

Vocational training, apprenticeships and adult education

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MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING 17-18 November 2016, BRUSSELS

MINUTES

1. OPENING AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

The Chair, Mr Detlef Eckert (Director, DG EMPL, Directorate for Skills) welcomed the participants, in particular the representatives who were attending for the first time and the VET providers and students' representatives, who join the meetings as observers since 2013.

2. A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE

The Chair gave an update on the progress concerning the 10 actions foreseen in the New Skills Agenda for Europe, some of which were in discussion in the Council while some others were in preparation by the Commission. In particular, he stressed that the, soon to be adopted, Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (formerly 'Skills Guarantee') would go into the very crucial phase of implementation, also involving ACVT.

The Commission (Ms Sonia Peressini, Deputy Head of Unit and Mr William O'Keefe, DG EMPL E2, Skills and qualifications) presented the Europass proposal adopted by the Commission in October 2016 and currently under discussion in the Education Committee.

The SK Presidency gave an update on the discussions in the Council on the Upskilling Pathways and the EQF and Europass proposals.

The Chair then opened a discussion in which ETUC called for a comprehensive and coherent governance at European level on all the initiatives (including the Blueprints for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills and Digital Skills and Jobs Coalitions) and regretted the deletion of the Guarantee in the title of the Council Recommendation. They underlined the need to discuss Europass with social partners (also at national level) as some of the proposals had an impact on areas under the remit of social partners.

BusinessEurope welcomed the new name of the Recommendation on low skilled adults, together with the reference to EQF level 3 in addition to level 4. They welcomed the efforts to improve transparency tools but highlighted the need to define the added value for employers.

UEAPME expressed concerns about the inclusion of ESCO in Europass due to different timings and underlined that the new Europass should clearly reply to needs of end users and be resources-efficient. It also underlined that they questioned the references to EQF levels and welcomed the changes agreed upon by the Member States in this respect as well as to the title.

The SK Presidency reported the key messages raised during the interest group meeting on behalf of the Governmental members. The intention to simplify and modernise EU tools and

services for skills and qualifications was generally welcomed. Nonetheless the legal basis of elements included in the revised Europass proposal (e.g. EQF, ESCO) was questioned as this meant non-binding tools and services were now included in a legally binding Decision. ESCO was still under development and the references to it in the Europass proposal would make it legally binding for public authorities. Some Member States (in particular DE and NL) pleaded for a two-step approach, first focusing only on Europass improvements and then gradually adding other tools and services, as relevant.

The DE governmental representative wished to have more clarity in the tools and expressed reservations on the possible governance by one single body.

The BE trade unions asked to clarify the purpose of self-assessment tools for users in order to avoid confusion on validation and recognition. They also reiterated that ESCO was still in a project phase and its integration in Europass was considered premature.

The DE trade unions asked that implementation of these tools would bring benefits to the users and be relevant for the labour market.

On the Skills profile tool for third country nationals, social partners asked to be involved in the discussions and testing phase as soon as possible.

The Chair clarified that for ESCO, the only obligation foreseen in the Europass proposal was the mapping of the national classifications to ESCO by national authorities, which had been already agreed before in the EURES Regulation. ESCO should be seen as a taxonomy which can be used for several purposes (SAP launched an initiative to use the ICT ESCO domain which was one of the first being prepared). In terms of timing, the tool should be available in May or June 2017 after completing quality translation and testing. He mentioned that ESCO ambition exceeded similar project on a global scale, for instance the one in the United States. He supported the view of BE trade unions on the purpose of the self-assessment which should be very clear to end-users.

Ms Dana Bachmann, Head of Unit EMPL/E3, VET, apprenticeships and adult education, concluded that a document would be prepared on the role of ACVT in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, and the proposals for discussing some actions further in the ACVT were also noted. She took note of the converging comments on Europass that the focus should be on end-users' benefits and the need to undertake some prior testing to ensure this.

3. UPDATE ON THE EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

Under this agenda item, the discussion focused mainly on the *draft ACVT opinion on a Shared Vision for Quality and Cost-effective Apprenticeships*. The Chair reminded the audience that at the ACVT meeting of June 2016, the European social partners tabled a proposal for the adoption of a tripartite opinion, following their joint Declaration "Towards a Shared Vision of Apprenticeships". The draft opinion was based on proposals from the social partners; it had been discussed with the ACVT Bureau in September and revised following comments received during the written consultation of the full ACVT in October 2016.

The Chair explained the political context of the opinion highlighting the 2013 Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the opportunity for the ACVT opinion to feed into the Commission Youth package to be adopted in December 2016 and the December Council discussions that would tackle the issue of Youth Unemployment.

Several governmental representatives expressed concerns about the format and content of the opinion, which had in their views, a too strong focus on apprenticeships rather than other forms of work-based learning and entailed engagements for the governments at national level rather than providing advice to the Commission, which was the main role of the ACVT. In

particular, they considered that some elements went beyond the remit of the ACVT and the EU cooperation in the field of VET, such as references to wages and costs, while there was possibly an overlaps with future discussions in the Council on a quality framework for apprenticeships.

The MT governmental representative thanked the Commission for having taken on board their comments sent in writing and asked to clarify what the benchmark would be about. This last point was echoed by other governmental representatives (IT).

The BEfr governmental representative proposed to base the discussions on the work launched at the DGVT meeting in Bratislava in October 2016 and scope it within the medium-term deliverable 1 of the Riga Conclusions.

Social partners clarified that on both sides they were ready to support the text of the Opinion as presented for the meeting. They acknowledged the issues raised by governmental members and indicated that they could agree to some further changes in the wording, while underlying the importance of jointly working with national authorities, on the basis of the tripartite nature of the Committee. The Committee had the occasion to contribute to the European Council discussions on youth unemployment and increase ACVT visibility.

ETUC explained the ACVT opinion would be important to bring coherence to the field of quality of apprenticeships. The opinion could also provide input to the upcoming Commission initiative on a Quality framework for apprenticeships mentioned in the CWP 2017. They underlined the initiative was not pre-empting the discussion that will take place later on in the Council. The IT trade unions highlighted the importance of the tripartite dialogue to give a signal that this was ongoing and very relevant. BusinessEurope suggested that ACVT would be informed about the benchmarks on Education and Training which are being discussed in EMCO.

The three groups agreed to amend the draft Opinion in order to reach a consensus by addressing the key concerns of the governmental group. Final changes introduced in the Opinion concerned a broadened scope to cover all forms of work-based learning, the removal of the reference to European Semester exercise, to exploratory work in relation to a possible benchmark, wages, costs aspects and adapted wording to ensure a clear delineation of activities falling within the responsibility of the Member States.

The final text of the [ACVT Opinion on a Shared Vision on Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning](#) was adopted through a written procedure on 2 December 2016. A reference to the opinion is made in the Commission Youth package which was adopted on 7 December. The final version of the opinion was shared by the Commission with other EU institutions, like the EP, EESC and CoR, and other VET bodies.

There was no time for the presentation on the 'Youth Employment initiative and Youth Guarantee three years on' by EMPL B1, Employment strategy. The PPP is uploaded in circabc and participants were invited to send questions in writing (at the time of drafting the minutes, no questions had been received).

4. ERASMUS+

The Commission (Mr Felix Rohn, DG EMPL E3 and Ms Chrystalla Petridou, DG EAC B2) presented the new elements of the recently published Call on Erasmus+ for 2017.

The budget for Erasmus+ will increase in 2017. The Blueprints for Sectoral Cooperation announced in the Skills agenda will be financed as a new lot under the Sector Skills Alliances. For the 2017 call, six sectors will be eligible.

5. VET : FOLLOW UP OF THE NEW SKILLS AGENDA

The Commission (Mr Joao Santos, Deputy Head of Unit, DG EMPL E3) presented an outline of initial proposals on how to take forward the modernization of VET as referred to in the New Skills Agenda building on the priorities agreed in the Riga Conclusions but also on a more forward looking approach post-2020.

In the short-term, the focus would be on concrete actions announced in the New Skills Agenda and the initiatives foreseen in the CWP of 2017 (mobility of apprentices and quality framework for apprenticeships and attractiveness of VET via the European Vocational Skills Week). These are supporting the implementation of the Riga priorities.

At the same time, work could start to prepare a post-2020 strategic vision, building on a wide stakeholders consultation (2017), the results of the Riga mid-term monitoring (results in 2017) and studies to collect further evidence. He explained there was a certain perception of fragmentation in the VET policy frameworks that needed to be tackled.

ETUC asked to have a discussion paper in order to provide their views. They wished to link these discussions to ET2020 and Europe 2020 for a comprehensive approach.

The BEfr governmental representative thanked the Commission for the timely contribution also linked to the preparation of the new funding instruments post-2020. They recalled that it was important to first consolidate the ongoing work, for example the Riga MTDs.

The SE governmental representative welcomed the idea of carrying out an impact assessment and while agreeing that VET governance may seem complicated, this was nevertheless well embedded in the ET2020 cooperation; they wished to have further discussions on this topic.

The BE trade unions echoed the BE governmental colleague on consolidating the work already started, as it would become difficult for the national level to keep the pace. On VET attractiveness, they believed that a campaign would not be able to solve the system problems. On fragmented policies, she confirmed that indeed several levels of policies were sometimes contradictory. The ACVT could be the place for a more comprehensive approach, and, for example, be informed on the impact of Council Regulation 651/2014 (concerning certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market) on the vocational training policy.

The Commission explained that in addition to the Vocational Skills Week which aimed at showing the excellent initiatives in VET, also structural work under the Copenhagen process was ongoing to tackle systemic issues. This presentation of first ideas was only the start of the throughout consultations which will follow and it was meant to kick off the discussions in a transparent way.

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE VET MEDIUM TERM DELIVERABLES 2015-2020

Cedefop and ETF gave an overview of the priorities identified by Member States and the Candidate countries regarding the medium-term deliverables up to 2020 and the monitoring process. Several exchanges were still ongoing with the countries to clarify terminology and some replies. The monitoring exercise will also be informed by the EQAVET surveys (MTD 2) and other relevant monitoring processes and sources.

The priorities identified by most participating countries were work-based learning and apprenticeships (MTD 1) and access to VET and qualifications (MTD 3). The information

provided on MTD 4 mainly related to IVET and school based initiatives. For MTD5 on teachers and trainers, activities indicated by countries seemed to concern mostly teachers. Overall, involvement of social partners in reforms focused mainly on implementation and delivery.

Some governmental members (FI and SK) were concerned about the reporting efforts demanded by different Commission services on similar topics and called for better coordination.

ETUC highlighted the low priority that seemed to be given to MTD 4 on key competences and proposed to discuss this issue in one of the next ACVT meetings.

Cedefop informed the meeting that the Agency had collected brief overviews on key competences in upper secondary VET which would be available soon and might be helpful to inform discussions on this issue.

During the lunch break two thematic tables were tested. These offered the opportunity to discuss in more informal way with Commission colleagues and other participants some of the topics which could not be fully covered in the plenary sessions. The topics were Erasmus+ and the Vocational Skills week. Participants could ask information on rules and Calls under Erasmus+ as well as specific information for their participation in the Vocational Skills week.

7. ANNUAL GROWTH SURVEY (AGS) – EUROPEAN SEMESTER

Ms Ana Xavier, Deputy Head of Unit, EMPL A1 Employment policies, presented the AGS package which kicked off the Semester; the main elements were enhanced structural reforms, investments and fiscal responsibility.

Labour market conditions are improving but an enhanced effort for a more inclusive recovery was necessary. She underlined the involvement of social partners and civil society in the Semester process. The topics of skills and VET featured prominently in the package.

It also comprises for the first time, suggestions for fiscal measures for the Euro area, inviting to fiscal expansion for countries that have the possibility to do so.

BusinessEurope welcomed the continuity of the approach over the last few years and acknowledged that involvement of social partners at national level was improving. They praised the initiative of Multilateral reviews which took place this year (also echoed by UEAPME). In their view, digital skills were a key priority and hoped in the involvement of social partners in the future national coalitions for digital skills, being launched soon.

UEAPME underlined the relevance of the three pillar structures of AGS and the upcoming joint EMCO and SPC meeting with European social partners. The topics of ownership of reforms by social partners, smart investment, and modernization of E&T systems were very welcome.

The DK Social Partners jointly presented the recent VET reform in their country and how they were engaged in the process. Big interest was shown by participants on this reform and clarifications were asked about obligations for companies, forms of effective financing, increasing attractiveness and participation in apprenticeships and other issues.

8. INFORMATION ON THE LATEST EDUCATION AND TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

Under this agenda items, participants could ask questions on different topics mentioned in an information note sent ahead of the meeting.

ETUC asked to repeat regularly the evaluation survey of the ACVT meeting and collect suggestions for agenda items from participants to strengthen the bottom-up approach. They proposed that the suggestions made during the survey should already be integrated in the first draft sent by the Commission for discussion in the Bureau. They proposed that the Skills tool for third country nationals would contain labour market information on each country. Their members could suggest some ideas from on going projects. The topic of integration of migrants was requested for discussion in the next ACVT meeting.

UEAPME also asked to involve social partners in the developments of the Skills profile for migrants. In addition, they repeated some comments on ESCO and Europass expressed during the previous day and asked for additional information on piloting and testing the tool. These remarks were echoed also by the BEfr governmental representative, in addition to asking clarifications on validation and recognition of the skills within this tool.

The DE employers' representative asked how the work on the Skills profile tools was being coordinated at national level and called for involvement of Cedefop in the development of this tool.

The Commission, Ms Karin Van der Sanden (DG EMPL E2) explained that the work on the Skills profile tool had just started and therefore it was a good occasion to discuss this in the ACVT. It was considered important to realise that it is a tool for first identification of skills and experiences and not a validation tool. An electronic demo version was being prepared and when ready this will be shared with ACVT for comments and testing.

Some contacts are being undertaken with national governments (for example Italian and Greek ministries) and with NGO's (for example World Bank, Ecce and Red Cross). The tool was meant to be used by different players on voluntary basis (PES, NGOs, etc.), particularly for countries which had not developed a similar tool themselves. The tool was expected to be multilingual, featuring two languages at the same time.

The Commission, Mr Pedro Chaves (DG EMPL E2) highlighted that ESCO was a regular topic of ACVT meetings to keep the Committee well informed. He mentioned that testing and piloting had been ongoing since two years on a preliminary version and there were 12 pilot projects with PES and private companies. The full version of ESCO would be available in the spring 2017.

9. INFORMATION FROM THE UPCOMING MALTESE PRESIDENCY AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Directors General for Vocational Education and Training will meet in Malta on 22-23 March 2017 to discuss VET policies, in particular the upskilling and re-skilling of adult learners using the European tools, as pathways to employability.

A high level meeting on the European Alliance for apprenticeships will take place back to back to the DGVT, concerning high performing apprenticeships.

10. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee has been announced for **8-9 June 2017** (*dates might be subject to changes – we will keep you informed as soon as possible*).

An "evaluation survey" concerning the meetings of the ACVT will be repeated (the link is https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/ACVT_evaluation_2016). **Deadline to reply is extended to 20 January 2017.**

The Chair informed the participants that according to the ACVT rules, a new round of nominations should be launched for the Committee. Permanent Representations and Missions of the countries concerned will receive a letter at the beginning of 2017.

The PowerPoint presentations have been uploaded in circabc (already prior to the meetings, when available), - <https://circabc.europa.eu>.