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**NOTE TO THE GROUP OF DIRECTORS GENERAL FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING (DGVT)
AND MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING (ACVT)**

Subject: Consultation of the ACVT and DGVT: strengthening European VET policy cooperation – outcome

1. Introduction

Following discussion at the ACVT and DGVT meetings in autumn 2012, DG EAC launched a consultation of the ACVT and DGVT on "Strengthening European VET policy cooperation" on 27 February 2013. The countries and interest groups participating in these two formations were invited to comment on the consultation note by 13 March 2013. The Commission received (sometimes partial) reactions from 14 Member States (AT, BEfl, BG, CY, DK, EE, EL, FR, IT, NL, PT, RO, SE and UK) and two EFTA member countries (NO and CH). The reply of the employees' group was transmitted by ETUC. Two replies were received from the employers' group, as both UEAPME and BusinessEurope gave their own replies, based on consultations of their respective members.

As stipulated for a written procedure in the ACVT rules of procedure, "any member who does not express his opposition or intention to abstain from voting on the draft points within the time limit [...] shall be considered to have given his tacit agreement to the proposal". In this consultation, 13 Member States and 4 candidate and EFTA countries can be considered to have given their tacit agreement.

As the autumn 2012 discussions had not reached a clear conclusion, the consultation was warmly welcomed by most respondents, as they felt that there was indeed benefit in clarifying the governance structure for European VET policy. The present note summarises the opinions given, question by question. The first version of this note was discussed at the joint meeting of the ACVT bureau and the Copenhagen Working Group on 26 March 2013. This discussion was fed into this current version and draws conclusions for the work of ACVT and DGVT from 2013 onwards.

2. The role of ACVT

Most respondents supported reinforcing the consultative role of ACVT, as they felt that this would clearly help take forward European cooperation in VET.

One response (UK) went further, and proposed that ACVT should be the only VET governance group. UK and the Trade Unions think that ACVT should also have a forward-looking perspective.

BEfl and the Trade Unions feared that examples given in the Commission proposal on the role of ACVT would, in fact, narrow the role of ACVT to monitoring implementation. BEfl also stated that ACVT should be able to give formal opinions, and the Trade Unions suggested that the ACVT should advise the Commission on future policy planning on VET. Employers' organisations stress that it is important for the ACVT to be consulted on new initiatives, such as new programmes or future Commission communications in their preparation phase, before adoption.

While agreeing with the proposed division of roles between ACVT and DGVT, IT feels that the demarcation between the two will need further clarification in practice (see also chapter 3).

NL and UK highlight the importance of good preparation of the agendas, and especially good coordination with the Education Committee. SE points out that some degree of "overlap" in topics need not be a problem, but could help ensuring continuity. ETUC requests that the European Social Partners be considered as full members of the ACVT, i.e. with voting rights. This would, however, necessitate modifying the Council Decision laying down the rules of the ACVT, which does not mention the European Social Partners.

SE, ETUC and employers' organisations feel that ACVT discussion should be linked more closely to the European semester. The Commission highlights that the ACVT could have a central role in the implementation and the follow-up of the country-specific recommendations (CSR) and the Annual Growth Survey (AGS). If necessary, the results of the discussion will feed into the debate at the DGVT. The processes currently in place for the adoption of the CSR and AGS have extremely tight deadlines and do not allow for consulting the ACVT. The agreed procedures give the possibility for governments and Social Partners to contribute via their national representatives.

2.1. Participation of observers in ACVT

9 countries (AT, BEfl, BG, EE, EL, PT, SE, CH, NO) as well as both employers' organisations were in favour of inviting both an EU-level VET provider representative and a student representative as observers when appropriate. NO stressed the importance of involving providers and students in tripartite cooperation. NL favoured inviting only VET provider associations.

Five countries (CY, FR, IT, RO, UK) as well as ETUC were against this proposal, partly questioning the representativeness of the proposed observers.

No replies disagreed with the proposal to invite other Commission services in the work of ACVT when relevant. The proposed services include DG ENTR, DG EMPL and DG RTD.

The consultative role of ACVT will be reinforced. If the timing allows, the ACVT will be consulted on wider education and training issues prepared in the DG EAC as well as in other DGs of the Commission, which are of particular relevance to VET.

Representatives of other Commission services (e.g. Directorates General for Enterprise and Industry, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, as well as Research and Innovation) will be invited to participate in ACVT meetings when relevant.

When appropriate to the ACVT agenda items, the Chair will invite VET provider associations (one representative) and a student representative (through Obessu) as observers to ACVT meetings.

3. The role of the DGVT

Most responding countries, as well as ETUC, BusinessEurope and UEAPME, agreed that the DGVT should be the main forum for discussion of VET OMC progress and results. Two countries (BG, UK) were against this proposal. The reason behind the UK rejection of the proposals was a preference for a single VET governance group, namely the ACVT (see above chapter 2). Furthermore, IT questioned whether this would be in line with the roles proposed (DGVT being an informal body, and ACVT a formal one). On the contrary, CH and PT see that the informal nature of DGVT would make it an especially suitable forum for disseminating OMC results. SE proposed to keep also ACVT informed about the developments under the OMC.

ETUC and BEfl expressed conditions for supporting the Commission proposal. BEfl supports the proposal provided that DGVT members have a clear (political) mandate, and that the Education Committee formalises the opinions from the DGVT meetings.

ETUC's condition is that the Social Partners are included in the discussions on OMC as full partners. In any case, ETUC thinks that the DGVT members "usually do not have the competence to make instant decisions without consulting their ministries". The Commission understanding is that DGVT representatives are Directors General from ministries, who normally have the competence to speak on behalf of their own ministry.

As for the proposal that the DGVT meetings should have stronger links to Presidency priorities (derived from those agreed in the Copenhagen process), all respondents except DK (and UK, for reasons see above) accepted the Commission proposal. DK finds that the DGVT meetings should maintain a good balance between the Presidency and the broader Copenhagen priorities. Also EE found it important to bring in to the DGVT also other VET policy priorities, not only the specific Presidency priorities.

Many replies confirmed the Commission proposal of a forward-looking role with space for informal discussion: Only ETUC was strongly against this proposal. CH stressed that DGVT should concentrate on main lines and strategic alignment of VET policy.

Replies included some other roles for the DGVT: SE and UEAPME propose that DGVT should continue to have a leading role in governing the Copenhagen process, including the follow-up of the semester priorities, short-term deliverables and the long-term goals. BEfl suggested that DGVT should have a role in the European Semester (the same role was suggested for ACVT by SE, ETUC and employers' organisations – see chapter 2 above).

In general, the Social Partners expressed their regrets that they are not considered as "full members" of the DGVT. In addition to some reservations concerning VET policy formulation by this group, they expressed concerns that the financing of their participation was not always secured.

DGVT will be the main forum for discussion of VET OMC strategy and will monitor progress and results.

DGVT meetings will be more closely linked to Presidency priorities, as well as wider Copenhagen process priorities.

DGVT meetings will offer to a greater extent opportunities for informal discussion and forward-looking activities.

4. Interaction of the DGVT and the ACVT

The note proposed two options for the interaction of the two governance groups. Option 1 (Each group meets twice a year – approximately termly) was supported by 11 responding countries (AT, BEfl, CY, DK, FR, IT, NL, SE, UK, NO, CH) and UEAPME. Only three countries (BG, EL, PT) as well as BusinessEurope and ETUC supported option 2 (Each group meets twice a year – back-to-back).

NL proposes to hold joint meetings (not back-to-back) when discussing very important questions, and ETUC proposes to open the "preparatory meetings" to DGVT members. DK, RO and CH stress the importance of having a clear mandate for each group, good coordination at national level, ensuring continuity and not mixing the roles and responsibilities.

UEAPME proposes to define the timing of the ACVT meetings according to the calendar of the AGS and CSR.

Both ACVT and DGVT will continue to meet twice a year. When possible, the meeting rhythm will be approximately termly. The future Presidencies are invited to take this into consideration when defining dates for the DGVT meetings in consultation with the Commission.

5. Executive bodies: Copenhagen Working Group and ACVT bureau

15 responding countries (AT, BEfl, BG, CY, DK, EE, EL, FR, IT, NL, PT, RO, UK, NO, CH) as well as ETUC and the employers' organisations agreed that a single executive body would help ensure complementarity and continuity of work between DGVT and ACVT. No opinions were expressed in favour of keeping two separate executive bodies.

13 countries (AT, BEfl, BG, DK, EE, EL, FR, IT, NL, PT, RO, NO, CH) as well as ETUC were in favour of the composition of the current Copenhagen Working Group, whereas two countries (CY, UK) favoured a more limited composition.

Although in favour of one single executive body, UEAPME proposed to clearly distinguish items concerning the ACVT from those concerning the DGVT. BusinessEurope found it particularly important that a clear set of working priorities are established for the meetings.

ACVT Bureau and Copenhagen Working Group will be merged in order to benefit from synergies in bringing the ACVT and the DGVT closer together.

The composition of the new structure will be an "enlarged ACVT bureau" consisting of 5 consecutive Presidencies, the 4 European Social Partner organisations (with maximum 2 persons per country / organisation, out of which one can be reimbursed), together with Cedefop, ETF and the Commission.

The agenda of the enlarged ACVT bureau will clearly identify items that concern either the DGVT or the ACVT, or both.

(signed)

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