



Brussels, 3 March 2020

MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING
10-11 December 2019, BRUSSELS
MINUTES

1. Preparing for the future policy agenda

The Commission highlighted the three actions announced by President von der Leyen, on education, training and skills: update of the Skills agenda, the European Education Area, and the Digital action plan – all contributing to the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The update of the Skills Agenda and the proposal for a VET Recommendation are provisionally foreseen for adoption in March 2020. The discussions were based on two background documents one focusing on the Skills Agenda and one on the Future of VET.

The Governmental members highlighted the relevance of the priorities, the need for a holistic approach for VET, as an integral part with all education and training sectors. Teachers and trainers are very important for responding to the labour market. The impact of demographic changes should be more emphasized. The EU initiatives had inspired work at national level; nevertheless more progress is needed in Key competences, validation and C-VET.

Employers outlined the importance of continuity of work on the 3 priorities of the Skills agenda, importance of solid basic skills, the role of Vet to provide STEM skills, the need for more skills intelligence/feedback loops. They favoured the graduate tracking initiative for both VET and HE as well as the European Semester as the vehicle for monitoring and driving reforms. On the job training and validation were also mentioned as important elements.

In the view of the Trade unions, reforms need time, and asked to have initiatives more linked among one another. The updated Skills Agenda and VET Recommendation should take account of the ACVT Opinion, EU Pillar of Social Rights and the Framework for quality and effective apprenticeships. They underlined that skills shortages are not only due to lack of skilled workers and a more thorough approach is necessary, that also looks into the quality and attractiveness of jobs. They also asked to put the accent on STEAM skills, including arts.

Issues that could be further addressed in the update Skills Agenda include green skills (to facilitate workers transition) as well as promoting European values.

Several participants highlighted that delivery of the Skills Agenda actions is still on going and highlighted the need to ensure a continuity of actions, also taking into account that reforms and implementations actions require time and impact cannot be immediately assessed. (for instance on the Upskilling pathways or the Key Competences Recommendations).

Participants acknowledged the achievements in the field of VET reforms, mostly in apprenticeships and work-based learning, creation of less fragmented VET systems and validation (IT Trade Union), the gradual shift in policy focus also towards C-VET and the important role of mutual learning and exchanging of good practices at European level.

The main suggestions for the future VET priorities were: support for teachers and trainers (also their well being), promoting VET as an engine for innovation (CH TU), promoting VET to accompany the green and digital transition (LT TU, BE Gov), strengthening CVET (DK TU, ETUC), supporting attractiveness of VET (SE Gov), key competences, need of social dialogue (ES TU, ETUC) and foster flexibility of provision and responsiveness to labour market (SMEUnited). Several participants called for better comprehensive support for individuals, in terms of information, guidance and funding (ETUC, SMEUnited).

The 2018 ACVT Opinion was mentioned as a good basis for the future proposals and many interventions highlighted the very positive impact of the Copenhagen process in terms of making VET more “visible” (CH TU, BusinessEurope, FI Gov).

Trade unions proposed that the ACVT would also be involved in the discussions regarding individual learning accounts.

The Chair indicated that the Commission plans to engage into a series of consultations on this issue, and is planning to have a targeted discussion during the upcoming ACVT meetings. A dedicated conference will also be organised in 2020 to zoom in on several concrete national examples and bring in the perspective of various international organisations that recently published reports on this topic.

BusinessEurope highlighted the need for capacity building support by EU, for example on intermediary bodies and suggested to extend the benchlearning services approach beyond apprenticeships. A clear understanding and common approach on higher VET would also be crucial.

VET providers pointed to the challenges they face, for example the need for a strengthened focus on cVET while continuing to modernise iVET, responding to climate change and the existence of regional/national disparities. In their view, the exchange of good practices is very beneficial. They welcomed the possibility to attend the ACVT meetings as observers and to be able to bring their experience in the debate.

The DE governmental representative underlined the importance of permeability from VET to HE and having VET embedded in the comprehensive education and training system in order to increase its attractiveness.

Cedefop and ETF announced that in the DGVT meeting in March 2020 they will provide a first outline of the results of the Riga monitoring, while a Conference would be organised on 4-5 June in Thessaloniki, under the auspices of the HR Presidency and in cooperation with the DE Presidency. First results from the analysis confirm the interim report. Countries reported mostly developments related to work based learning with special attention to apprenticeships (MTD1) and improving access to VET and qualifications for all (MTD3). Cedefop’s analysis revealed challenges related to involving social partners and companies, especially SMEs, in WBL. Initiatives related to upskilling and reskilling have been reinforced by the 2016 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Implementation of national qualifications frameworks improved access, progression and mobility and supported recognition of VET qualifications. Since 2015, countries reinforced their work on career guidance and validating non formal and informal learning. With regards to information and feedback loops (MTD2) countries worked on developing forecasting mechanisms and graduate tracking systems but still the capacity to interpret and use data remains a challenge. Most actions related to key competences (MTD4) focused on strengthening digital competences for teachers and learners. The important role of teachers and trainers (MTD5) was evident across different MTDs for example in strengthening apprenticeships, guidance services and developing key competences; focusing mainly on their continuous professional developments.

The Chair suggested that further comments on the discussions paper could be sent in writing.

2. Upskilling Pathways and Adult Learning policies/ Upskilling and Reskilling

The Commission provided an overview of work being carried out, the recent Council Conclusions and policy debates with stakeholders, including social partners. Two rounds of mutual learning on Upskilling Pathways took place in 2018 and 2019, and Member States that have not yet participated were invited to join a third round in 2020. The Commission reminded of the evaluation report for the the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation foreseen five years after the adoption date (end of 2021) and indicated that Eurydice forthcoming report on adult learning will have a focus on provision for low qualified and low skilled adults and would therefore help map the factual situation across the countries. A formal evaluation study in line with the Better Regulation requirements will build also on the data that will be made available through the Eurydice adult learning report.

The HR governmental representative confirmed their very positive experience in the UPs mutual learning and encouraged other countries to join the next round.

A presentation by the European Basic Skills Network, a non-profit network, showed the tools they developed for teachers and trainers to foster basic skills. These are being made available on EPALE. The importance of basic skills in the workplace was underlined, and successful practices in Norway cited.

Several governmental members showed interest in the network. ETUC highlighted that also trade unions are providers of basic skills, provide guidance and organise, for example, learning ambassadors to motivate low skilled adults.

The DE governmental member and social partners jointly presented the new national C-VET strategy. It entails greater coordination of stakeholders, adapting funding arrangements, a structured counselling service, one stop shop platform of training offers, better branding for higher VET, partial qualifications and measures for equal access to learning opportunities. Germany is also implementing a VET excellence initiative with a budget of EUR 80 million.

Participants welcomed the German joint tripartite presentation and exchanged on different topics: creating a culture of lifelong learning, engaging with teachers and trainers, promoting advantages for individuals, gender gaps, on-line courses, impact of artificial intelligence (with the FI Governmental representative announcing that a MOOC on the topic will be available free of charge in all EU languages as a contribution of the Finnish presidency).

The PT trade union representative presented some examples of collective agreements that allowed the creation of joint training centres, skills assessment and the recognition of prior learning linked to the national qualification framework.

3. European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)

The Commission provided an update on the activities of the EAfA and on the Apprenticeships Support Services, including the key activities for 2020 and the next steps of the bench-learning process. The possibility of enlarging the European Apprentices Network to all VET learners was also mentioned. Social partners requested to have a report of the work done so far and more details on the mandate of the network. The Commission suggested to invite a representative of the network at the next ACVT meeting. Social partners also requested to be informed about the possible dates for the visits of EAfA award winners. BusinessEurope highlighted that bench-learning should be implemented by Member States with the full involvement of social partners and that before starting the second cycle a reflection should take place to assess the outcomes of the first cycle.

ILO informed the meeting about their ongoing consultations on global standard on apprenticeships. Consultations were just starting among governments and social partners and the process would be concluded around mid-2022. ETUC expressed concerns about the term “standards” and asked for clarification regarding the age group and off-the job and on-the job training, ILO provided explanations.

The BE trade union representative presented an Erasmus+ project (CoTrain) on collaborative training (on a dual learning basis) offering guidance and tools on how to provide a comprehensive learning experience to an individual learner by offering different complementary workplaces.

SMEUnited underlined the challenges for SMEs in implementing apprenticeships and stressed that, in order to tackle these challenges, the right framework together with specific support measures are necessary to motivate SMEs and to make apprenticeships more accessible and attractive for them. SMEUnited concluded that SMEs are willing to engage in apprenticeships if the right legal framework, enabling conditions and support system are in place. It was also highlighted that there is a need to promote a new mindset in favour of apprenticeships.

4. Platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence

The Commission provided an update on this initiative and in particular on the 5 pilot projects that initiated their activities in November 2019, as well as the ongoing Call under Erasmus+ with the closing date for applications on 20 February 2020.

Governmental members showed interest in the pilot projects and received further clarifications on the role of public authorities.

5. Presentation by the upcoming HR Presidency

The upcoming Croatian Presidency presented their priorities and events planned. The DGVT meeting will take place on 23-24 March 2020, with morning of 24 March organised jointly with DGHE.

The Presidency Conference on 24-25 March 2020 would be on teachers and trainers covering all sectors of education and training. The Presidency planned to prepare Council Conclusions on teachers and trainers.

ETUC welcomed the HR Presidency topic of teachers and trainers as their role was crucial.

6. InvestEU

The Commission presented the InvestEU programme - a successor of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) - which will support key EU policy areas, including social investments and skills. They presented the financial products to be proposed: access to financing to individuals willing to upskill and reskill, to companies who want to invest in upskilling their employees as well as to E&T providers seeking to start or scale up their services. The European Investment Fund presented the features of Skills and Education guarantee pilot that will be launched soon under EFSI2 and asked ACVT members to disseminate the information to financial intermediaries. The results of these pilots will contribute to the final design of the skills related product fiches under the future InvestEU programme.

Follow up:

- ACVT members to show their interest in the **third round of Mutual Learning on Upskilling Pathways** that will start in 2020
- ILO consultation https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/110/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS_731155/lang--en/index.htm
- Links to Erasmus+ calls:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/social-inclusion-and-common-values-the-contribution-in-the-field-of-education-and-training_en
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/european-policy-experimentations-in-the-fields-of-education-and-training-led-by-high-level-public-authorities-2020_en
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/ka3-centers-of-vocational-excellence_en
- Share link on EFSI2 pilot projects when available

The *next meeting* of the ACVT will take place on *10-11 June 2020*.