



Advisory Committee on Vocational Training Meeting of 10 June 2020

Minutes

1. *Political developments*

The Commission gave an update on the recent proposals for a recovery plan for Europe, based on two-fold response: Next Generation EU, a new recovery instrument of EUR 750 billion that will boost the EU budget with new financing raised on the financial markets for 2021-2024, and a reinforced long-term budget of the EU for 2021-2027 (EUR 1 100 billion). In total, the recovery plan proposed by the Commission will mobilise EUR 1.85 trillion to help kick-start our economy and ensure that Europe bounces back as quickly as possible. [Actions](#) to protect jobs and support a green, digital, inclusive society and economy were highlighted.

The **Croatian Presidency** provided an overview of its achievements under difficult circumstances, including Council Conclusions on [teachers and trainers](#) for the future, on [countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training](#), and on [reskilling and upskilling](#). It also pioneered two online DGVT meetings to allow for more in-depth exchanges on the COVID-19 impact on VET, while also advancing the policy topics originally planned. On 29 June, a (video-) conference on *Teachers and Trainers for the Future: Towards the 'New Normal'* will conclude the actions in the field of education and training.

The **German Presidency's** programme is being revised in light of the corona crisis. A final programme should be ready by end of June. The Presidency will emphasize the role of education and training, research and innovation for a strong, sovereign and resilient Europe.

Priorities will be the following: (1) digital education, (2) strengthening VET, education and research for a more resilient society, (3) boosting the European Research Area and the European Area of Education and Training, and (4) strengthening technological sovereignty in Europe, linking this with the Green Deal.

Three flagship initiatives are: the [Cedefop-ETF conference](#), in cooperation with both the Croatian and German Presidencies, the Informal Meeting of Education Ministers on 16-17 September, and the Vocational Skills Week (see below). The Osnabrück Declaration will aim to give a new boost to the Copenhagen process of European cooperation in VET. A first discussion will take place at the Ministerial meeting in September. An additional meeting with Ministers in charge of VET, social partners, the Commission and VET providers is planned at the end of November, back to back with the EYCS Council meeting (30 November), with the aim of adopting the Declaration. The ACVT and the DGVT will be consulted on the text of the Declaration. The DGVT meeting will take place on 10-11 November in the context of the Skills Week, followed by a Conference on VET for the digital and green transitions, one of the highlights of the Vocational Skills Week.

2. Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on skills and VET – Lessons learnt and priorities for action

The health crisis has revealed the need for increased investment in digital learning content and infrastructure, and digital skills of learners and teachers and trainers– even if online learning cannot replace all in-person learning, in particular work-based. It also raised concerns about equality of opportunities and the wellbeing of learners, increased the need for support, guidance and outreach towards vulnerable learners, and led to a rising risk of drop out. Other messages passed included:

- Need to support companies, in particular SMEs and micro enterprises, to maintain in-company training provision, and in particular apprenticeships' places, and ensure fair working conditions.
- Need to reinforce cooperation between VET providers and companies and update skills forecasts. CoVEs can play an important role in this respect.
- Investment in education and training, both at national and EU level, will be even more important than before to limit the rise of long-term unemployment and ensure an inclusive and just transition. Social dialogue plays a key role in this context.
- The updated Skills Agenda should put increased focus on upskilling and reskilling of adults and acknowledge the key role of social partners in this context.
- Need to rethink mobility of learners and teachers and trainers, optimising the use of digital tools ("blended" mobility) and giving increased attention to sustainability concerns (e.g. accessibility by public transport).

3. Pact for Skills

All acknowledged the need for a strong and sustainable mobilisation, in shared responsibility, of all actors – including learners and teachers/trainers – involved in up- and reskilling of adults, both employed and unemployed. Synergies should be sought with other initiatives, such as the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills, the CoVEs and EAfA. An integrated ecosystem approach – with a focus on sectors and/or regions – was given broad support as a key element of a new form of governance.

Specific attention should be paid to: sustainable EU and national-level funding mechanisms (which could include PPPs, and with a single entry point for EU funding, accessible also for social partners); close cooperation between governments and social partners; equal access to training, in particular for small and micro companies; the training of teachers and trainers for the increased focus on adult education and training; and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The Pact could be embedded in a broader strategy of lifelong/life-wide learning, with specific targets that are monitored through the European Semester. It should stimulate investment in skills, seizing the opportunities offered in the new MFF and the Recovery Package.

Reservations were expressed regarding the pledges, calling for more concrete and focussed actions. Participants were invited to make suggestions in that respect.

4. Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are emerging as a new way of certifying people's skills, gained for example through short, tailored courses or acquired through experience. In a fast-changing labour market, they can play a crucial role in meeting employers' skills needs, as well as individuals' desire for flexible and targeted learning – which appears at first glance to fit quite well to VET. The learning outcomes approach would make it easy for employers to understand the value of a given micro-credential.

It was considered that the concept is worth exploring further, with a first step being the need for a clear and common definition. At this stage, the use of micro-credentials in (initial) VET appears to be limited, their focus being rather on adult up- and reskilling. In this context, the VET providers stressed

that the focus of IVET should remain on full qualifications. SMEUnited highlighted the specific interest of the concept for small and micro enterprises, given the lack of time and resources to offer longer training courses.

Attention should be given to: quality assurance and transparency (consistency with NQF/EQF) to foster trust among learners and employers; the relation with/difference from full qualifications – with ETUC recalling that the latter are often used as a basis in collective bargaining on salary scales; how micro-credentials will be recognised/validated; synergies with Europass and EURES, with governments wondering in that context about the legal basis for micro-credentials. Eurochambres called for the role of the chambers to be clarified.

Consultation with experts from higher education has started. The Commission will organise dedicated webinars for VET and other labour market stakeholders to further explore the topic.

5. Europass

The new Europass platform will be launched by the Commission in July to coincide with the launch of the updated Skills Agenda. The new features are welcomed.

For further developments, a focus on skills intelligence emerged. Data at local/regional/sector level should be enriched and tailored towards individuals' needs. Cedefop's work in this area is of particular relevance. Other avenues for action mentioned included: modernising the Europass documents, developing digital self-assessment tools, further exploring the skills *supply* side, and linking Europass with graduate tracking.

6. Core profiles for VET

Building on existing tools (EQF, ESCO) and Cedefop's work on comparing VET qualifications, the aim of core profiles is to enhance the transparency of VET qualifications and programmes within the EU and identify common elements of occupations. The high interest in the Erasmus+ calls on joint qualifications seems to indicate that there is quite some interest in the VET sector in developing common content. The health crisis has also shown the potential of such common content on digital and green topics.

Participants expressed the need for further clarification of the concept. How does it link with NQF/EQF, ECVET and ESCO, and with the Europass certificate? What is the added value compared to the Blueprints for sectoral cooperation that already develop training for sectoral needs? Quid quality assurance? How will one take account of the needs of national/regional labour markets?

It was stressed that the approach should – and would – be voluntary and flexible, not normative or aimed at harmonisation. Transparency should be one of the key objectives/features.

7. European Vocational Skills Week

The Commission provided an update on the preparation of the Week, highlighting the specific challenges created by the health crisis (see powerpoint presentation in CIRCABC).

8. Skills and Education Guarantee Pilot

The European Investment Fund presented the features of the Skills and Education Guarantee pilot that was launched on 14 April 2020 (deadline for applications is 31 October) and asked ACVT members to disseminate the information to financial intermediaries (see powerpoint presentation in CIRCABC). A Live Webinar will be organised on 25 June; ACVT members will receive an invitation.

9. Other information points

Participants were reminded of the usual information note, providing updates on initiatives/actions of potential relevance to ACVT members (available in CIRCABC).

For information on measures taken in the context of the Erasmus+ programme to address the COVID-19 outbreak, members are referred to the Erasmus [website](#).

ETUC asked that the planning of the graduate tracking survey for the following years be discussed with the ACVT.

The future of the ET2020 working groups is under examination as it will have to be aligned with the new policy framework.

Cedefop and ETF reminded participants of their upcoming joint conference European cooperation in VET on 30 June and 1 July.

The **next meeting** of the ACVT will take place on **15-16 December 2020**.