

The drive toward European Credit Transfer within Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the new LLP programme 'Erasmus for All' 2014 - 2020

Recommendations to the European Commission from the Four VET Associations – EfVET, EVTA, EVBB and EUproVET

Rationale

In January 2011, members of the policy group from each of these four VET organisations, met with officials from DG EAC primarily to examine and discuss the short-term and longer-term objectives outlined in the Bruges Communiqué, but also to offer constructive assistance to the European Commission by giving access to thousands of practitioners and learners in these associations' member institutions throughout the European Union and beyond. These four associations would serve as a two-way conduit to stage consultation exercises and gather examples of tried and tested good practice and innovative initiatives and developments. They could tap into the expertise and experience of the whole range of VET specialists and then into appropriate national, regional and local agencies, employer and employee representative bodies as well as companies served by their member institutions.

EfVET, in organising its twentieth annual conference in Malta in October 2011, used as its theme: ***The EU Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training setting out the future priorities of Vocational Education and Training to meet the policy objectives of the EU Strategy 2020***. There were several key note speeches covering this theme, but, as important was the programme of workshops, in which more than 200 VET stakeholders analysed, discussed and made recommendations on the Bruges Communiqué's strategic objectives and priorities for 2011-2020.

In October 2012, EfVET took as its theme for its annual conference in Mallorca, ***The drive towards European Credit Transfer within Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the new LLP programme 'Erasmus for All 2014 – 2020'***

This document now represents the views of the four leading VET associations on behalf of all their members throughout the European Union. The four Presidents of EfVET, EVTA, BVBB and EUproVET, as joint signatories, present this document to the European Commission, with the intention that the recommendations identified by VET Stakeholders at all levels will be incorporated in the implementation of the objectives outlined in the ECVET initiative and the new Lifelong Learning Programme, currently still named "Erasmus for All 2014-2020"

RECOMMENDATIONS

Workshop 1.

Employability – meeting the needs of ‘unemployed’ – preparing for work skills

Background

Since 2008, the total number of unemployed youth in the EU (under twenty – five years) has seen a dramatic increase, about 50% making it one of the groups hardest hit by the economic crisis. The unemployment is over 20% and it peaks at over 45% in some Mediterranean Members States.

The challenges and root causes of youth unemployment are:

- Early school leaving without qualifications
- Lack of relevant skills and lack of work experience
- Previous employment followed by spells of unemployment
- Limited training opportunities
- Insufficient/inappropriate active labour market programmes

These are also the key aspects of EU 2020 in initiatives such as

- New skills and Jobs
- Youth opportunities Initiative
- Youth on the Move
- Employment Package

Recommendations on Early school leaving

- More graded systems of obtaining basic qualifications
- On-the-job ways of getting a qualification
- More practical work – learning by doing
- Looking at the person as an individual
- Development of learners’ self-empowerment and self-confidence
- More flexible learning work placements in shorter periods
- More involvement of parents in education
- Regular monitoring of the landscape of the national labour market
- Think outside of one’s country for a training offer for national needs and work placements for the unemployed
- Encourage higher education to provide more practical work experience
- Make employers understand that the lack of work experience is not equal to “not skilled”
- Develop appropriate political subsidies for young unemployed with no experience
- The image of certain professions/skills is too low to interest people in gaining employment in those jobs
- Record work experience as skills and not as years in a profession
- Disseminate knowledge of what skills are relevant in apprenticeship schemes
- Summer temporary jobs should be organised across Europe by schools/colleges
- Widen the level of meaningful cooperation of key stake holders

- Identify regularly local, regional and national changes in skill needs
- Young people should show more clearly their productiveness in their Curriculum Vitae
- Finance new skills development
- Develop more reliable labour market monitoring
- Employers themselves should improve their own skills
- Unemployed people might be able to teach younger people their skill or life skills
- Proper validation of an earlier education
- Policies defining goals/targets for local schools to achieve in terms of employability
- Focus more on shortage jobs
- Money management efficiency
- Finance the upgrading of skills with new equipment
- Monitor more closely focused training
- It might be that you get more money when you are on social benefits than working. There must be a difference.
- Narrow the gap between school and labour market
- Monitor more accurately the students who are not going to get work or study (NEETs)
- Guide students to sell themselves to industry
- More guidance for the students when they leave school to avoid the gap between school and labour market
- During their training periods, students should produce model products to show their ability as an introduction to the labour market
- We need people with broad skills since the future labour market is very unpredictable
- Teaching employment skills helps people find a job. This we have to do within VET. Students have to recognise their competences and realise how these are transferable to various professions and contexts
- Career management lessons/international skills development at VET school level
- Increasingly projects should be funded by social funds
- Continue to develop benchmarking all over Europe

Workshop 2.

Tackling early 'Drop out' – re-engaging young people

Background

- It is difficult to discover the actual reasons for dropping out, but these are the common ones:
- Personal problems
- Lack of self-esteem
- Lack of future orientation

- The system forces people to make choices they are not yet ready to make or wrong choices at an early age
- False expectations
- Too much theory – Insufficient “hands-on” learning
- Family influence

Recommendations

- Discovering and tackling drop out at 15-16 is too late. There is a need to find potential drop-outs at an earlier stage. There should be more effective counselling in primary and secondary schools
- Involve all stakeholders – social services, local authorities, counsellors, teachers, families – in a holistic approach
- Connect teaching to companies’ needs in the labour market – local and beyond
- Closer contact and communication with students – recognition of the need to assess level of self-esteem – not only formal assessment
- Give students the opportunity to explore different jobs before they have to choose a profession
- Offer students hands-on, practical work in the classroom as well as work-based learning
- Focus on the competences students have and not those they lack
- Devise more flexible systems. Allow easier change of course without losing or wasting a whole year
- Teachers should raise expectations, stop complaining, pitying. Expect everyone to achieve excellence – “Yes you can!”
- Develop and improve counselling systems, introduce “buddy” systems and peer-coaching

Workshop 3

Developing Entrepreneurship skills

Background

Developing Entrepreneurship skills is not just training for self-employment but includes the development of people in terms of an entrepreneurial mind set. Not a capitalist perspective but more about initiative; innovation; social and economic well-being.

The Lisbon key competence describes entrepreneurship as:

“the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance.”

The Life 2 project offers this definition:

“The ability to induce changes in oneself and welcome, support and adapt to innovation brought about by external factors. This involves taking responsibility for one’s actions (positive or negative), developing a strategic vision, setting objectives and meeting them and being motivated to succeed.”

Victor Kiam defines entrepreneurs thus:

“Entrepreneurs are simply those who understand that there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to their advantage.”

The Problem for Entrepreneurial Teachers:

“Entrepreneurial teachers imbued with such qualities who try to achieve their objectives in un-entrepreneurial schools may well find themselves suffering from ‘burn out’ quite rapidly as they constantly run into constraints and boundaries”.

From: Entrepreneurship Education: Enabling Teachers as a Critical Success Factor (2011)

Recommendations

- **It was felt by all that Entrepreneurship in the VET sector was lacking initiative and sometimes there were negative perceptions about entrepreneurship**
- **Entrepreneurial skills should be fully integrated into the curriculum in all disciplines.**
- **In most cases these curricula had to be developed now.**
- **Change from negative attitudes had to be achieved in small steps, obstacles turned into opportunities, successes promoted, developers working in teams, with the full support of institution’s management team.**
- **Ownership of the creative elements in projects should rest with the students.**
- **These projects must be realistic and authentic and must involve the cooperation of local companies.**
- **Teachers would act as mentors in the project.**
- **Teachers need to accept the challenge to be trained in Entrepreneurship themselves, although training is not enough and teachers must also work in cooperation with local companies.**

Entrepreneurial skills can be included in VET in several ways:

- **Teachers attached to companies for a period to experience entrepreneurship**
- **Establish “practice firms”/mini-companies in VET institutions**
- **Invite personnel from companies into the institution to act as trainers and mentors and assist in the design and development of projects.**

Workshop 4.

Expanding opportunity through transnational mobility – for both learners and staff

Recommendations

- There is a need to create synergies between EU Programmes and other national funding schemes, including ESF (European Social Fund transnational measures)
- There is a need to raise awareness of funding schemes other than EU funding (recent study published in June 2012 identified over 900 funding opportunities across Europe)
- Create Benchmarking Clubs: members of the community undertake peer learning on key quality aspects
- Create a Quality Observatory to support members in adoption of existing Quality Assurance systems for learning mobility
- Importance of increased cooperation between educational providers and business world in order to promote: better curriculum development, entrepreneurial attitude, making learning mobility a reality for all via increased learning opportunities
- Importance for transnational partnerships to be composed of two educational partners (in sending and hosting country) plus the hosting organisation (the company offering work-based learning)
- Importance of raising awareness and adoption of EU transparency tools, such as EQF, ECVET, Europass, Youthpass, EQAVET
- Importance of validating and recognising transversal competencies, “soft skills” as they are highly valued by business world when hiring new employees
- Importance of conducting evidence-based research on the impact of learning mobility among VET learners (many studies focus only on Higher Education!) as a tool to demonstrate “Return Over Investment”
- Measuring impact at the level of the individual learner, the host Company, the sending Educational Institution

Workshop 5.

Innovation in teaching and learning – curriculum development; learning outcomes and delivery methodologies including ICT

Recommendations

- Discussions centred upon how, during the economic crisis, it was necessary to do better with fewer resources.

- Currently teachers were not sufficiently passionate about innovative teaching but glad to have a job!
- In some countries, teachers had to retire later, thus not making way for younger trained teachers to enter the profession.
- It was essential, however, to overcome these challenges and introduce innovative teaching and learning methodologies into the curriculum as this would prepare students better for future employment as the economies improve and re-motivate the teaching profession.
- Many innovative resources are available on the Internet
- Students would prefer using ICT – phones, iPad etc – to access content
- The use of Social media – facebook and twitter encourage students to work collaboratively – Co-operative learning can make a difference!
- Teachers can become “curators” – browse the Internet and select appropriate resources, create on-line menus to create the more flexible curriculum of the future.
- Young teachers coming into the profession are enthusiastic about the new tools and media. This enthusiasm must not be dampened. Good leadership is essential to avoid this.
- It is becoming increasingly essential to share knowledge between teachers, between students and between countries

Workshop 6.

Collaboration and partnership in the VET arena – bringing stakeholders together – greater partnership between business, education and training.

Recommendations

What should be your personal role in the relationship with companies in your region?

- Create a bridge between the school/curriculum/ student and the industry’s needs and working practice
- Know how to convince companies to host students and outline benefits to companies
- Persuade the students of the benefits of placements in local and international businesses
- Make regular visits to companies and match students appropriately to companies
- Plan and organise work with the companies, agree placement training goals, monitor, assess and evaluate the placement
- Organise customised joint/separate training courses for company personnel and student in the school and/ or in the workplace
- Involve the company in the design of modules or courses with identified learning outcomes and in the transfer and development of innovation projects
- School should work with groups of companies and Sector Skills Councils to ensure courses will meet future known and potential training needs

- **Company personnel to offer master classes to students in the school and/or workplace**

There are challenges to establishing cooperation between companies and schools

- **Lack of sufficient time and resources for companies to devote to quality placements**
- **Difficulty of sustaining partnerships**
- **Schools not speaking the same language as the industry and students ill-prepared for working life**
- **School and company sometimes have different perspectives – each considering own perspective as the most important**
- **Difficulty of encouraging SMEs to host a student**
- **Restoring an employer's confidence after one unsuccessful work placement experience**

With proper commitment all these can be overcome.