

How to Establish Bridges Between VET and HE (AGORA/WORKSHOP)

Report

Setting of the theme

Traditionally, VET is seen as aligned to the labour market, occupationally specific and focused on immediate employment. As our world and economies are changing rapidly – as Joao Santos from the European commission illustrated so well with the video he presented – see (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITJUQre19Mg>) , another focus seems necessary. In order to ensure long-term employability of people a different skills set is needed. Apart from employability, “future” skills must also cover civic and social skills that enable people in a changing world to take their own futures in their hands. Hence, learning pathways must be opened across systems and through EQF levels.

Why is there a need to build bridges between VET and HE and make Higher VET, the area of overlap, more attractive, fair and beneficial? There already is an expansion of Higher Education systems throughout Europe. 40 % of the EU – 28 population is supposed to have tertiary education by 2020. The demand for highly-qualified people is projected to rise by over 16 million, while demand for low-skilled workers is expected to decline by around 12 million. The share of jobs requiring high-level qualifications will rise from 29% in 2010 to about 35% in 2020, while the number of jobs employing those with low qualifications will fall from 20% to 15%. Considering this situation core skills and competences for **everyone** are e.g. digital skills, thinking/analytical skills and civic skills.

Main topics in the workshop

The questions, with which we dealt in the workshop, are

1. What are the barriers to establishing Learning Pathways across systems and through EQF levels?
2. What is the nature and role of ‘Future Skills’ and how can their achievement be embedded in VET?
3. How can the transition be facilitated for certain unprivileged groups, such as for instance mature learners and skilled migrants?

EFVET Central Office

Rue d’Arlon 40
B-1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 721 90 84
www.efvet.org



Results of the discussion

The participants of the workshops provided the following ideas and recommendations:

1. Barriers to establishing Learning Pathways across systems and through EQF levels

In most cases, there are no legal obstacles, but social barriers or barriers in the mind set.

People coming from VET and starting HE often have a more difficult social background. Therefore, there often is a high dropout rate. In some cases, it is necessary to attend a private school and take an exam there in order to continue to further education as for instance in Greece, where neither public schools nor many students do have the means to do so.

On the other hand teachers (especially in VET) do not regard students as 'learners', but doers and adapt their teaching to this thinking. In addition, in the general perception students coming from general education are considered as more talented than VET students. Sometimes students may lack the necessary skills and competences. HE is not the right pathway for everybody. Some may have gained them, but in non-formal or informal learning environments and have difficulties getting these competences acknowledged. Or they do not believe in their own competences and skills and are scared to move on.

In order to overcome these barriers certain measures are required: First, there need to be legal options and pathways to bridge the gap between VET and HE, which in some cases may require to change the system. Secondly, enough and qualified information is needed for everybody about all options and pathways that are available. As these pathways are often not straight and require greater effort, thorough guidance and counselling for students in VET is necessary. Especially with regard to social barriers such as low income and difficult personal circumstances, for instance single parents, means and support must additionally be provided.

Perceptions of both VET teachers and students and HE lecturers and students could be changed by selective chances for cooperation, such as co-operative and transdisciplinary projects between VET and HE, field labs, campuses or fairs where VET and HE teachers and students meet and work together. Especially for talented VET students there could be 'taster sessions' where they could get some insight in single modules at HE institutions and 'test' their abilities in order to facilitate the transition. Real life examples, experts and employers, who made a successful transition from VET to HE and work-life later, could be role models and maybe even mentors for both sides. Modules of HE could also be implemented during the last year of VET for talented VET students in order to create "gates" to enter HE, especially if they are acknowledged at HE. There could also be enhanced and enriched contents and tasks in VET for them right from the beginning. By involving companies dual systems could be created for HE. These measures could also help changing the attitudes of parents towards VET.

Nature and role of 'Future Skills' and embedding in VET

The skills and competences needed in the future and also for the transition from VET to HE can be summarized under the heading '21st Century Skills'. In our workshop participants gathered the following:

- Adaption
- The feeling of 'being able to'
- Creativity
- Autonomy
- Practical intelligence
- Understanding for problems and their reasons
- Capacity to resolve problems
- Ability to learn independently (Learning to learn)
- Project management skills
- Entrepreneurial thinking and acting
- Communication skills of all sorts (in groups and in person-to-person relations, especially in professional contexts)
- Intercultural competence

It is essential that these competences and relevant learning outcomes are already implemented in VET in order to facilitate the transition. Ways how these skills and

competences could be embedded in VET were already mentioned above as means to bridge the gap between both sectors, such as selective chances for cooperation, co-operative and transdisciplinary projects between VET and HE, field labs, campuses or fairs, 'taster sessions' or modules of HE during the last year of VET.

Facilitation of the transit for unprivileged groups

The structure of VET and HE must be designed in a way that is allowing and supporting these transitions, in particular by providing flexible options, by guidance and counselling as to pre-existing skills and competences and the allocation of the necessary resources. Profile portfolios, which show skills and competences acquired in informal and non-formal education environments could be accepted as entrance qualification for the field they apply to, instead of formal diplomas.¹

Ute Schmitt

Moderators: Stavroula Bibila, CU Coventry (UK)
Stylianos Mavromoustakos, EfVET vice president, Intercollege Nicosia (Cyprus)

Rapporteur: Ute Schmitt, National Representative of EfVET Germany, BBS
Wirtschaft 1 Ludwigshafen, (Germany)

¹ Example for studying at a university of applied sciences without a formal entrance qualification https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_4MFnLbEX0 (Hochschule Ludwigshafen, English subtitles might be required if we would like to use it for members)