



VET4EU2 Declaration on the medium-term deliverables of the Riga Conclusions

Preamble

We, the European Associations of VET providers EfVET, EUCEN, EUproVET, EVBB and EVTA (participants of the platform 'VET4EU2') welcome the new medium-term deliverables of the Riga Conclusions presented by the Latvian EU Presidency on 22 June 2015. We reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the Bruges Communiqué and express our support and commitment to contribute to the realisation of the new medium-term deliverables. In particular, we welcome the strong focus on partnerships with relevant stakeholders and sectors, including companies, VET providers (public or private) and higher education institutions.

VET4EU2 is very pleased and hopeful about the new focus on VET in EU strategic policies. The medium-term deliverables give direction to the EU VET policy agenda and determine key areas for modernising VET systems and form important pathways along which participating countries can raise the quality of VET, ensure a good connection between VET and the labour market, support inclusive and sustainable growth and ensure the development of lifelong learning and permeability of VET towards higher education.

Recognition of the national responsibility for education and training is combined with European indicators for the direction of national educational systems. This joint commitment will strengthen the efforts of participating countries and Europe as a whole to enhance both social inclusion through employment and economic competitiveness in a global arena. We, the partners of the VET4EU2 platform, commit ourselves to cooperate constructively with the European Commission and help to implement the medium-term deliverables, using our networks to create support at national and grassroots level.

VET4EU2: involvement of VET providers

The associations of the VET4EU2 platform work together to improve the quality of I-VET and C-VET in Europe and the permeability of VET to higher education. The joint declaration of EfVET, EUproVET, EVBB and EVTA about the Bruges Communiqué in 2010 was the first formal initiative to collaborate in the field of EU VET policy development. The organisations elaborated and intensified their cooperation with organisations (EUCEN and EURASHE) that also operated in the field of C-VET and/or higher education. This resulted in the Frankfurt Declaration in 2012 and in the Barcelona Declaration in 2014.

In recent years, the VET providers have actively contributed to EU VET policy development by participating in experts and working groups on VET at European level, conferences and formal and informal dialogue with the European Commission. The cooperation is based on the vision that the implementation of European and national policy measures will become successful at grassroots level if VET providers associations join forces and are actively involved at all stages. Therefore, VET4EU2 looks forward to further develop the cooperation between the platform partners and with the European Commission in order to achieve the objectives of the Copenhagen process in general, and the Riga Conclusions in particular.

Recommendations

VET4EU2 recommends to the actors who are responsible for cooperation in and development of VET at national and European level, to pay special attention to the points below to promote effective implementation of the deliverables.

I. Governance principles for effective implementation of medium-term deliverables 2015-2020**From policy into practice, ensuring testing, monitoring and peer learning**

Translating EU VET policy into taking concrete steps to realise objectives at national and grassroots is a key challenge. It requires involvement of end-users from the very first phase of policy development. VET4EU2 stresses the importance of an integrative approach to improve the quality VET, which may require involvement of different stakeholders at different stages, including on testing and monitoring. All VET providers' leaders, trainers and teachers, trainees and students and companies must benefit noticeably from EU measures and activities, by their own standards and needs. Peer learning is a key instrument to increase impact at local level and visibility of EU support.

Recommendations:

- Define key actors for change for each topic and participating country and include them in policy development and implementation processes. For example: national innovation platforms may help to integrate VET measures into national or regional innovation schemes.
- Stimulate involvement of VET providers associations in the discussion on the formulation, implementation and monitoring of VET relevant country specific recommendations issued in the framework of the European Semester, including round tables, conferences, bilateral or multilateral cooperation.
- Stimulate involvement of EU institutions in national implementation activities about the medium-term deliverables, such as round tables, conferences, bilateral or multilateral cooperation.
- Include VET providers in peer learning outside Erasmus+, alongside public authorities.

II. Thematic recommendations

Diversity in work-based learning (deliverable 1)

Most VET stakeholders at European and national level are now well aware of the crucial importance of work-based learning in VET systems and programmes. Because of the diversity in national situations and VET systems, tailor made measures and approaches are required. VET4EU2 emphasises the need for local and national solutions, which can only be reached by involving all stakeholders and promote cooperation between authorities, VET providers and industry. Moreover, it is critical to include all types of employers in the development of work-based learning schemes: corporate businesses, SME's and non-profit organisations, including public authorities. Special attention should be paid to monitor the implementation of work-based learning measures – to learn from successes and failures and to improve the systems – and to further develop links with European quality tools such as EQAVET.

Recommendations:

- Intensify campaigns to sensitise and commit business stakeholders to take on learning responsibilities.
- Include SME's providing apprenticeships in apprenticeship networks, as key actors of employment, innovation and entrepreneurship. Their participation can be enhanced through representatives of regional and sectoral networks.
- Integrate work-based learning in quality assurance tools and systems at all levels.
- Stimulate integrative peer learning communities (involving all stakeholders) to exchange information and experiences throughout the implementation process.

Quality assurance: quality breeds quality (deliverable 2)

Further development of quality assurance mechanisms in VET is a key issue for VET providers. It will work as a leverage to improve work-based learning, excellence and social inclusion, if certain conditions are met. An integrative approach, adaptation to new developments and focus on peer learning are measures that will help to strengthen national and local quality assurance systems.

Recommendations:

- Stimulate peer learning: identify forerunners, stimulate exchange/dissemination of good practices, including practices in the Higher Education sector. Extend peer learning to other international mechanisms such as ISO and EFQM.
- Stimulate the recognition of European quality assurance mechanisms at international level.
- Integrate essential EU and national goals in key areas such as work-based learning, employability, learning outcomes, triple helix cooperation and a focus on disadvantaged target groups into EU quality assurance systems.
- Develop new quality goals and indicators to promote sustainable (green and smart) training for employment, including work-based learning actions.

Permeability, continued and higher VET (deliverable 3)

Permeability towards higher VET and university is increasingly identified as a key factor to develop career perspectives and increase employability. There is a growing need for more cooperation and alignment between initial VET, continuous VET and higher education, to raise qualification levels and design effective and sustainable lifelong learning schemes.

New effective policies can only be developed when VET and higher education networks and policymakers join forces at EU, national and regional level. VET4EU2 provides a platform for dialogue with stakeholders such as EURASHE and EUCEN to address this issue and strengthen cooperation.

VET4EU2 regards EQF as a key instrument to support transparency and recognition and enhance permeability. To optimise further development, some issues need to be addressed. Among these are the systematic low appreciation of VET in many NQF systems, the international recognition of the EQF system beyond Europe and aligning the NQF values of VET in participating countries.

Recommendations:

- Intensify the integrated dialogue with all stakeholders in order to improve smooth transitions from VET to Higher Education, both in initial education programmes and lifelong learning.
- Continue to stimulate cooperation between VET and Higher Education networks on topics of common interest.
- Facilitate a study into the positioning of VET in NQF systems in comparison to general education and use results to improve NQF systems.
- Speed up national actions to align NQF – and subsequent regional and Sectoral qualification schemes - with EQF through country specific recommendations.

Focus on social inclusion (deliverables 3 and 4)

Research and experience show that disadvantaged groups, including unemployed, under-skilled NEETS and migrants, face the most persistent problems in the labour market. They need to be addressed and coached as individual students, trainees, workers and citizens, aimed at their integration in the labour market as well as affirming self-esteem, up-skilling and social support.

Medium-term deliverables 3 and 4 - enhancing access to VET and strengthening key competences – offer starting points to align VET policy measures with employment and social inclusion policies.

Recommendations:

- Create partnerships between VET and social inclusion stakeholders at EU level, and join their networks.
- Promote social impact evaluations, support orientation, counselling and skills enhancing (counselling coaching, prior learning assessment tools to enhance experience and individual knowledge and abilities).
- Integrate new migrants and refugees in this approach.
- Ensure a strong alignment between short term employment objectives and long term employability objectives.

Teachers in the frontline (deliverable 5)

The successful implementation of the medium-term deliverables will not be possible without the instrumental and effective involvement of teacher, trainers and mentors. They must be equipped with the necessary competence to cope with the multiple challenges ahead, both in their areas of expertise and with respect to their pedagogical skills.

Recommendations:

- Facilitate peer learning activities for teachers at regional, national and European level.
- Create incentives for teachers to work in industry, and for industry trainers and mentors to work at VET institutions.
- Teachers, trainers and mentors should not only be trained in academic and technical skills, but also in social and counselling skills.
- Stimulate international mobility of teachers to increase vocational and pedagogical excellence.

Contributions of VET providers

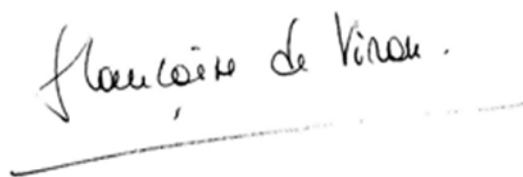
VET4EU2 is looking forward to help achieve the medium-term deliverables and support the recommended actions mentioned in this declaration. The participating organisations will continue to develop the dialogue on all issues and stimulate their members to participate in EU dialogue, spread awareness about the medium-term deliverables and ensuing policies, contribute to peer learning and identify forerunners in the areas addressed in the medium-term deliverables. In particular, they are committed to:

- Participate in expert and working groups that are related to and have impact on VET topics, such as skills for labour market, innovation, social impact and social inclusion.
- Provide access to research institutions involved in VET innovation, in order to enhance participation in policy development and implementation.
- Use their contacts with national, regional and sectoral networks to support the participation of SMEs engaged in training and work-based learning.

- Strive to engage their regional and national networks in activities such as expert groups, conferences, projects and research.
- Stimulate their networks to provide integrated actions for the social inclusion target groups and cooperate with national authorities.
- Work with the European Commission to develop and strengthen EU social inclusion and employment policies by taking into account the VET perspective, on topics such as early school leaving, adult education and opening up VET pathways for people with psychological or physical limitations, with a disadvantaged position in the labour market.
- Continue to stimulate members to actively participate in EQAVET networks and meetings and address these issues therein.
- Stimulate exchange of good practices between the VET and higher education sectors through their networks.
- Stimulate members to actively participate in the development of NQF systems.
- Support research on NQF systems by providing information about national situations.
- Stimulate members to participate in European and national discussions on permeability and lifelong learning.
- Promote the establishment of testing spaces at EU and national/regional level in order to identify realistic solutions for the challenges described in the Riga Conclusions.
- Promote and create European events open to institutional, public and private stakeholders in order to share and monitor mid-term deliverables, to share the concrete results reached at local/regional/national level and to bring out new ideas for achieving other goals.



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