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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education and vocational training
Vocational training and adult education; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING
MEETING OF 2-3 JULY 2013

LEIPZIG, GERMANY

MINUTES

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair, Xavier Prats Monné welcomed the ACVT members to this meeting, which is exceptionally held in Leipzig on the occasion of WorldSkills 2013. He also welcomed Croatia as a new Member State, as well as the new observers, the representatives of European level VET provider associations, and OBESSU, representing student organisations.

Mr Prats Monné also informed about the reorganisation in DG EAC which brought the VET and the Adult Learning units together to create a new unit B.2 – Vocational Training and Adult Learning; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig. He presented the new Head of Unit Ms. Dana Bachmann and the Deputy Head of Unit, Ms. Alison Crabb.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

ETUC proposed to start the agenda item 6 with the points on the Country-specific recommendations and "Education and training in cohesion policy 2014-20". The proposed agenda was adopted with this modification.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES

In the draft minutes of the ACVT meeting of 19-20 November, ETUC requested to change the text on page 6 from "national federations" into "national confederations". The minutes were adopted with this change. The final version is sent to ACVT members together with the draft minutes of the meeting of July 2013.

4. ACVT AND DGVT CONSULTATION ON STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN VET POLICY COOPERATION

Mr Prats Monné summarised the discussions on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which took place at the High Level Group meeting in Vilnius, following extensive consultations with Directors General for VET, Higher Education and Schools. The aim is to focus the efforts in education and training on a limited number of key priorities linked to

Europe 2020, and thus increase the efficiency of the processes and guarantee concrete outputs. The work of the Thematic Working Groups (TWG) should follow these principles.

Commission will send out for consultation draft mandates for the future technical working groups to DG groups. As regards VET, when sending out the draft mandates for consultations, DGVT members will be asked to liaise closely with their colleagues represented in ACVT forum.

Countries will soon be invited to nominate their experts in six future groups. These experts are expected to make an active contribution to the working of the TWGs. Social Partners are encouraged to participate in the TWGs and to bring their country experience into the policy discussions.

The chair welcomed the intention of the Lithuanian Presidency to organise a peer review back to back with the DGVT meeting. This initiative will permit a focus on country-specific challenges. He also informed of the forthcoming Education and Training 2020 mid-term stocktaking which will aim at refocusing the broad priorities of ET 2020.

The ACVT members were informed of the results of the recent ACVT and DGVT consultation which included a clearer distinction of roles (see background document for this agenda item). The consultation confirmed the following main issues: willingness for ACVT to take on a reinforced consultative role on wider issues on the European agenda, relevant for education and training (e.g. labour market issues, skills agenda). It also defined a clearer division of responsibilities between the DGVT and the ACVT to ensure continuity and avoid duplication of efforts. For example, in the context of the future reviews under the Copenhagen process, the ACVT will have a stronger role in discussing progress so far and defining future priorities based on results of forward-looking orientation debates in the DGVT meetings. One single executive body will further ensure coherence and priority setting in these two bodies. Finally, when relevant, items will be brought to the ACVT from outside the specific field of VET, but which are of high importance for VET (e.g. employment and enterprise policies).

The Chair emphasised that one of the strengths of the ACVT was that it brought together the views of a wide range of stakeholders: national Social Partners, VET provider associations and student representatives.

It will be particularly important to bridge the work done in different groups (e.g. ACVT, DGVT, ECVET, EQAVET, EQF, TWGs, etc). In this, strong coordination at national level, as well as bringing in country representatives with relevant expertise, is very important.

Finally, the chair informed that a new nomination round (required every 3 years) for the ACVT will be launched after the summer.

In the discussion that followed, the Commission clarified that the invitations to nominate Social Partner members for the TWGs would be sent via the European Social Partner organisations, and that it would be up to them to nominate persons with the right expertise, and to channel views of national social partners in this work. However, ETUC pointed out that even though it is important to include Social Partners in the policy processes (for example in setting CSRs) this is sometimes difficult due to the lack of involvement of Trade Unions in education and training issues at national level.

As for questions on the role of ACVT in European cooperation, including the VET-related Country Specific Recommendations and TWGs as well as the forthcoming Bruges review, the

Commission emphasized the need to coordinate at national level, so that national - rather than personal - views are expressed in the different cooperation bodies. The Chair also highlighted the need to contribute to the processes in a timely way and with strong expertise.

ETUC expressed its support and wish for the ACVT to influence European policies. However, it regretted that the European Social Partners are not full members of the ACVT.

Concerning the decision to invite representatives of VET provider and student associations as observers to the ACVT meetings, the Commission highlighted the expected benefits. ETUC proposed to examine the possibility of inviting sectoral organisations as observers.

While the delegates welcomed the timely sending of documents, some found the lack of interpretation at group meetings as well as short group meeting time to be problematic.

Conclusions by the Chair:

A new nomination round for ACVT members will be launched after the summer. ACVT will play a full role in the shaping of VET policy, notably through the Bruges review process, where ACVT will play a reinforced role for defining a new set of short term deliverables under the Bruges strategic objectives.

5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Alison Crabb presented the concept and the Commission's work towards a policy guidance document (a Staff Working Document) in the field of Entrepreneurship Education, to be published in November 2013 (see background document for this agenda item). She also informed the ACVT of upcoming country reports on which the ACVT members of each country will be invited to comment.

ETUC recalled that Social Partners should also be seen as stakeholders in this question, and BusinessEurope suggested taking into account the recommendations in the European Social Partners' Framework of Actions on Youth Employment.

The Commission stated that ESF and Erasmus + would provide the main support for the implementation of the SWD. The French government representative highlighted the need to start entrepreneurship education (including by fostering autonomy and responsibility) already at primary school level. As for the lack of data which was felt in this field, ETF reminded that it has worked on this issue for a long time and has been able to gather some useful data.

Delegates requested further information on several aspects: details of the planned actions; whether the outcomes of the different Education and Training systems would be analysed with regard to entrepreneurship education; and whether Council Conclusions or similar were foreseen on this topic. The Commission undertook to follow up.

Conclusions by the Chair:

On the request of the participants, the country reports will be sent for comments to all ACVT members, not only government representatives, from mid-July onwards. Deadline for reactions will be around mid-September.

6. INFORMATION NOTE ON LATEST DEVELOPMENTS/Q&A

Dana Bachmann explained that the purpose of this agenda item was to provide delegates before the meeting with information on latest developments, allowing more time for discussion and questions. She also presented information on the following additional points, not included in the information note:

- There will be a public on-line consultation on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications between September 2013 and February 2014. This consultation will cover issues such as the compatibility of the Quality Assurance principles applied in Higher Education and in VET, and how to ensure better permeability and transparency of credit systems.
- The next Bruges review is approaching. At the December ACVT meeting, its roadmap will be discussed in more detail. There will be a first orientation debate at the spring 2014 DGVT meeting, followed by a detailed discussion at Spring ACVT. The new set of short term deliverables should be agreed on by end 2014 and a communiqué adopted early 2015.

The delegates were given the possibility to ask questions or to comment on the items in the information notes.

On the Country Specific Recommendations, ETUC stated that it would like to increase the involvement of the Social Partners in the adoption process. They noted that EU suggests investing in Education and Training even though budgets are cut in many Member States. Also several national Trade Union representatives considered lack of funding to be problematic.

ETUC proposed that the ACVT would address a declaration to the European Council and the Parliament supporting a minimum share of ESF funds to be used for Education and Training, and that Education and Training should be a clear priority in ESF funding in the programming period 2014-2020. As this proposal was not communicated to the ACVT delegates in advance and members did not have a mandate to sign such a declaration, it was rejected. The Commission felt that its added value was not clear, since ACVT has no formal role in the ESF negotiations. It encouraged strong coordination at national level.

On item 7 "Standardisation", it was clarified that the main message concerned the important role which standards play in the work of VET professionals. The Chair proposed to invite a representative from DG Enterprise and Industry to the next ACVT meeting to give more details of this initiative, if delegates wanted to follow up further.

On the European Skills Passport, BusinessEurope questioned its added value for employers, and the Dutch Trade Union representative felt that this tool was too complicated to use.

Conclusions by the Chair:

No need was felt for the statement proposed by ETUC. The Commission has explained that it has proposed to allocate a minimum of 25% of the total Cohesion Policy envelope (ERDF+ESF+CF) to the European Social Fund, allowing for more investment in education and training. Negotiations are underway, the Commission is maintaining its proposal and at his stage it is important that national positions are strongly coordinated in the overall

negotiations. For the other items for which requests for clarifications were raised, given the lack of time, the Commission will provide clarification after the meeting.

7. EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS (EAfA)

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships, one of the EU's measures to raise the quality of VET and tackle youth unemployment, was launched by Commissioners Vassiliou and Andor in a separate event on 2 July. A first ever joint declaration by the Commission, the Presidency and social partners was signed, as well as a number of pledges from businesses, chambers, VET providers and organisations. The ACVT members were among the 200 participants from government, social partners, business, chambers, youth organisations and others.

Dana Bachmann presented the progress achieved on the implementation of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (see background document for this agenda item). The principles of the Alliance are partnership and cooperation. As the political commitment exists, joint efforts are now needed for the implementation of the Alliance, in particular bringing together the education and employment sectors, and closely involving companies, intermediary bodies and other stakeholders.

Ulrike Storost (DG EMPL) explained the main features of the Youth Guarantee Recommendation, which specifies apprenticeships as one of the four options for its implementation (the other three options are employment, training or traineeships). A helpdesk offering tailor-made measures has also been put in place for the best use of ESF funding.

In the subsequent discussion, all representatives expressed their support to the Alliance. Comments focused on the following points:

- the long period of time needed for sustainable system reform;
- the governance structure (planning, monitoring, reporting) of the Alliance should be clarified;
- the current lack of minimum standards/ definition of apprenticeships, as different apprenticeship schemes exist in Europe - the important quality dimension in apprenticeships;
- more detailed information on the Alliance actions and timeline would be helpful;
- the need for all stakeholders involved to take up their responsibility while respecting the subsidiarity principle in education.

The trade unions group representative pointed out that the ACVT should remain the main forum for discussion, supported by Cedefop and ETF. Besides, many more resources are needed; a better coordination of ESF funds would be helpful. Reform should not be imposed. On national level the involvement of social partners is crucial, at company level, the quality of training must be assured. The issue of attractiveness of apprenticeships has also to be addressed.

The employers' group representative commented that the declaration launching the European Alliance for Apprenticeships notes that European social partners will channel their contribution through actions to be undertaken by national social partners in the context of their follow-up of the Framework of Actions on Youth Employment. Moreover, the 3 European employers' organisations (BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP) together with ERT, chambers of commerce and VET providers intend to submit a proposal within the forthcoming Erasmus+ call for a joint project that will aim to make the business case for

apprenticeships and companies' involvement in such schemes. UEAMPE was pleased that SME specific needs were highlighted at the launch and introduced a paper on how SMEs and crafts can increase the number of apprentices.

In response to the points raised, the Commission stated that the Alliance should be seen as a platform aiming to trigger and pull together wide range of efforts. The strong embedding of work based learning in IVET curricula is already a strategic objective of the Bruges agenda. With regard to governance, the creation of new structure should be avoided as the ACVT and the DGVT are the appropriate bodies. Top-level political commitment is clear, including in European Council Conclusions; it is now up to Member States to take action and work closely together with other stakeholders.

The French government representative presented the Youth Guarantee scheme to be implemented as from September. The pilot phase will encompass ten territories helping 100,000 young people by better integrating them in school and social services. The need for better mobility, language training and taking care of all forms of drop-out was also addressed.

The Spanish government representative reported on the first results of its efforts in the development of a dual system. The main goal is the increase of in-company training from (currently) 20 % to 75-85 %. The projects are currently in a pilot phase, 550 companies and 140 learning centres with some 4,000 learners participate.

The European social partners made a joint presentation of the Framework of Actions on Youth Employment (see background document for this agenda item) that was officially launched in June and invited Member States to take note of it.

Conclusions by the Chair:

The Commission will ensure the monitoring of the Alliance and invites all stakeholders to get involved in the Alliance and report on major projects and policy developments that contribute to the Alliance objectives. At the next ACVT meeting the Commission will present the Erasmus+ Programme and set out what the programme can offer in terms of support to the Alliance in more detail.

8. VET ATTRACTIVENESS

Ms Mara Brugia, Acting Deputy Director of Cedefop, presented the findings of the study "Attractive VET: What really matters?" (to be published in the autumn) (see background document for this agenda item).

Attractiveness of VET is a sum of many aspects. Issues such as relevance and quality of VET, competences of teachers and trainers, flexibility of pathways, etc, have an impact on attractiveness. But also other elements which VET policy cannot influence directly, affect its attractiveness, such as employment prospects, image of professions and perceptions of family and friends.

Three examples on how to improve the quality and the attractiveness of VET were presented. First, Director General Lars Mortensen from the Danish Ministry of Children and Education presented a pilot project which facilitates exchange of best practices on quality in Denmark. This case showed how important it is for Ministry officials to have a good knowledge and understanding about VET institutions. Dr. Věra Kolmerová from the Czech Ministry for Education presented the campaign of the City of Prague to raise the prestige of crafts and

skilled occupations "Craft is alive!". This example showed that it was necessary to address several specific aspects to raise the attractiveness of the crafts sector. Finally, under this point, Counsellor of Education Ms Seija Rasku from the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture presented the role of skills competitions in increasing the attractiveness of VET. Finland uses skills competitions as part of its strategy to increase the attractiveness of VET, with the aim of Finland becoming "the most competent country in the world by 2020".

Due to lack of time, there was no discussion on this issue. However, delegates were invited to send comments and questions to the Commission.

9. UPDATE BY THE LITHUANIAN PRESIDENCY

Ms. Aleksandra Sokolova from the Lithuanian Ministry for Education presented the education and training –related programme of the incoming Presidency.

The DGVT meeting and a VET-related conference will be organised on 11-13 November 2013 in Vilnius. As part of their Presidency programme, and following discussions on the effectiveness of the OMC cooperation, the Lithuanian Presidency proposes to organise a peer review on VET to help address CSRs. This pilot peer review will be organised as part of the DGVT meeting.

10. AOB

The Dutch government representative announced that his country is hosting a seminar the following day at the Dutch pavilion at WorldSkills. The seminar will demonstrate the Dutch approach to VET and focus in particular on excellence and attractiveness.

The meeting was concluded with warmest thank you from the Commission and all the participants to Germany for offering to host the meeting during the WorldSkills Competition in Leipzig and the excellent organisation of the meeting.

