

THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF VET TRAINERS

First meeting, Brussels, 2 February 2012

BACKGROUND NOTE (REVISED)

1. MISSION AND TASKS OF THE GROUP

The European Commission and Cedefop are jointly launching a thematic working group on professional development of trainers in VET. The main focus of the working group is on VET trainers at the workplace in both initial and continuing VET. Through peer learning among policy-makers and experts in the field, the working group will strengthen knowledge sharing and help develop policies as regards vocational trainers' competences and continuing professional development.

The objective of the first meeting of the working group is to agree on its mission, overarching thematic priorities and working methods, issues for peer learning activities, work plan and main outputs that are presented hereafter.

The Council in its conclusions of 22 October 2010⁽¹⁾ stressed that 'Member States should work together in identifying best practices and guiding principles with respect to changing competences and the profiles of VET teachers and trainers'. The Bruges Communiqué⁽²⁾ foresees that support at EU level will be provided to achieve this objective, to which the working group will contribute.

Quantitative and qualitative data on developments in several countries are scarce, especially as regards those who ensure training in enterprises. This leads to a lack of analysis and comparison at European level. The accessibility and availability of information on in-company trainers will be a transversal dimension for all the group's activities to fill the existing gaps and map policies and practice across all countries.

The work of the thematic group on trainers in VET will build on and expand the work of the previous [EU Sub-cluster on VET teachers and trainers](#) and Cedefop's Training of

⁽¹⁾ Council of the European Union (2010). Draft conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training for the period 2011-2020. Available from Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/council10_en.pdf [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

⁽²⁾ The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020 of the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission, meeting in Bruges on 7 December 2010. Available from Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

Trainers Network (TTnet)⁽³⁾, which were both focusing on the changing roles, competences and professional development of VET teachers and trainers. Further work on teachers will be covered by the already existing thematic working group on ‘Professional development of teachers’.

2. POLICY CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

The Europe 2020 strategy (Council of the European Union, 2010)⁽⁴⁾ set a goal for Europe to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. To achieve these ambitious goals, it is necessary to improve the quality of education and training, strengthen research and business performance and promote transfer of innovation throughout the EU.

The current economic downturn, the need to increase productivity and competitiveness, technological innovation, often coming at an incredibly rapid pace, new trends and approaches in human resource management, and rising skills demand for the workforce put a tremendous pressure on companies in Europe to seek high quality and up-to-date training for their staff. Learning at the workplace increases opportunities for lifelong learning and developing the potential⁽⁵⁾ of the workforce and allows for continuing upgrading of their skills.

In this context, the role of in-company VET trainers cannot be underestimated and for this reason, the competences of VET trainers receive increased policy attention. Highly competent trainers today increasingly take up broader and more complex training-related functions than before. They are more and more expected to contribute to a company’s development strategy, identify training needs, provide guidance and counselling, design training plans and curricula⁽⁶⁾. Many of them perform management and administrative tasks and responsibilities, including quality assurance⁽⁷⁾.

As a result, knowledge and competence in a specific technical domain and/or occupation (which also require continuing updating) are no longer sufficient. In-company trainers should have opportunities to acquire a broader set of competences, such as transversal competences (communication and interpersonal skills) and foreign language skills. They should have access to information on new pedagogical methods and approaches, various learning styles and specificities of adult learners; they need to be capable to support learners’ autonomy and facilitate individual learning, including with ICT and social

⁽³⁾ The TTnet network was established by Cedefop in 1998 as a pan-European forum for key players and decision-makers involved in the training and professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. It aimed to foster cooperation between key national actors; produce recommendations, guidance and tools for practitioners and decision-makers, and support the implementation of EU priorities for VET teachers and trainers. In agreement with the European Commission, TTnet has been dismantled and its activities taken over by the new Thematic Working Group on trainers in VET.

⁽⁴⁾ Council of the European Union (2010). Council Conclusions on Europe 2020. 3003rd Economic And Financial Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 16 March 2010. Available from Internet: <http://ec.europa.eu/ceskarepublika/pdf/press/ecofin.pdf> [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

⁽⁵⁾ See footnote 2.

⁽⁶⁾ Cedefop (2009). *Consolidation, continuity and change. Towards a European era of vocational education and training*. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/528/3055_en.pdf

⁽⁷⁾ Kristiina Volmari, Seppo Helakorpi and Rasmus Frimodt (Eds).(2009). *Competence framework for VET professions: handbook for practitioners*. Helsinki : Finnish National Board of Education. Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/560/111332_Competence_framework_for_VET_prof_essions.pdf [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

media. They should be able to deal with more heterogeneous pool of employees in companies than before, including re-qualified adult workers, low-skilled, ageing workers, and migrant workers with various levels of qualifications. Entrepreneurship is also considered as an essential competence ⁽⁸⁾.

New working and training environments ask for more collegiality and team work, networking and collaboration with various professionals (for example, guidance counsellors) and with other education and training institutions. Increased cooperation between education and training institutions, local and regional authorities and enterprises (which is a key issue on the policy agenda) would also benefit VET trainers. Through establishing mutual learning and collaboration between VET teachers and in-company trainers, VET teachers can get more possibilities of upgrading their knowledge of the workplace while VET trainers would increase their awareness about pedagogical approaches and new learning methodologies. International dimension of training and benefits of mobility are so far insufficiently exploited by trainers, the low participation of trainers in international cooperation and mobility is of particular concern. The thematic working group might wish to explore this issue in more detail too.

Regardless of the significant role that trainers play, so far in most European countries in-company trainers are not recognised as a distinct occupation ('profession'); training is often a function or role within a company that skilled workers perform in addition to other tasks ⁽⁹⁾. Trainers in companies are not required to have a qualification in training; moreover, in some countries such qualifications do not even exist. It is worth mentioning that more often publicly-funded training schemes (for example, those funded through the EU structural funds) require that training is provided by certified/accredited providers, but there is no unified pattern either.

Whereas in initial VET, teachers and trainers in many cases work in a regulated system, continuing training, including at the workplace, is in fact largely unregulated in Europe. The responsibilities for learning within companies are shared by various actors: managers, trainers, mentors, coaches and skilled workers. The opportunities for in-company trainers to update their knowledge, skills and competences are scarce and there are few professional bodies representing trainers' interests in Europe. It is important to develop policies that ensure support to trainers throughout their career to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date. Providing such opportunities should be accompanied by incentives and awareness-raising of current demands of the labour market and the training sector so that trainers become better motivated to pursue continuing professional development lifelong.

Against this background, it is important to create specialised initial education and training programmes for people who are interested in making adult training (including in-company training) a career choice, develop more systematic coordination between such programmes and in-service training and continuing professional development, including validation of experience acquired at the workplace and certification procedures.

⁽⁸⁾ See Footnote 6.

⁽⁹⁾ Some studies suggest that this group is probably the largest training category across Europe: European Union. European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture (2008). Eurotrainer - Making lifelong learning possible: A study of the situation and qualifications of trainers in Europe. Brussels: European Commission. Available from Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/eurotrainer1_en.pdf [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

Implementation of such policies requires a stronger cooperation of all stakeholders, ministries, regional and local authorities, the labour market (social partners), professional organisations and associations and training providers.

European, national and sector-based initiatives have recently evolved aimed at enhancing status, qualifications, core competences and professional development opportunities of VET trainers. Some countries have established accreditation systems for training providers that set out competence requirements that their training staff should meet⁽¹⁰⁾. There are interesting initiatives of certification of trainers that also include recognition skills and competences gained on the job. Certification is one of alternative routes for trainers towards professional recognition and higher esteem. Although many trainers have no formal training qualification and may not wish to acquire it, for others formal qualification may be a good opportunity for career progression and continuing professional development, including to other teaching profession.

All such initiatives bring about experience from which important lessons can be drawn for improving the support to training and ‘professionalisation’ of trainers and their contribution to innovation and growth of enterprises in Europe. In 2009, Cedefop in cooperation with the Finnish National Board of Education and the TTnet network developed a competence framework for VET professions⁽¹¹⁾ that examined the changes affecting the teaching and training environment in VET and relevant competences that are needed to perform new tasks and exercise responsibilities. In 2010, Cedefop published an overview of good practice in continuing professional development of in-company trainers⁽¹²⁾. All of the above can serve a valuable starting point for peer learning within the framework of the group.

3. THE GROUP’S THEMATIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES

3.1. Thematic priorities

The thematic working group on trainers in VET focuses on workplace trainers, operating in both initial and continuing training in the following situations:

- skilled workers who conduct induction of newly recruited staff and continuing training of co-workers in addition to their regular tasks (as part of their job tasks), including tutoring and mentoring;
- workplace tutors and mentors in apprenticeship schemes.

Whenever appropriate, the group will also examine learning needs and professional development opportunities for training specialists in training departments of large companies and in establishments that provide continuing training externally to enterprises, for example, in workplace learning schemes for the unemployed, low-skilled, etc. Specific attention will be paid to training needs and provision in SMEs.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cedefop (2011). Assuring quality in vocational education and training: The role of accrediting VET providers. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3061_en.pdf [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

⁽¹¹⁾ See Footnote 7.

⁽¹²⁾ Cedefop (2010). Professional development opportunities for in-company trainers: A compilation of good practices. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6106_en.pdf [accessed on 21.12.2011.]

The group will explore the following broad thematic areas:

- changing roles and corresponding competence requirements linked to lifelong learning and employment policy priorities and to work organisation changes in enterprises;
- status of trainers in VET, their career paths and recognition, for example, through occupational profiles and standards, certification and validation of their on-the-job learning;
- learning needs and opportunities for continuing professional development of trainers in VET.

To support the above thematic areas, peer learning activities will be organised:

- *Portrait of in-company trainers* (September 2012). The peer learning activity will take stock of the existing situation. Participants will discuss the roles of in-company trainers, qualification and competence requirements, certification and validation of their competences. The participants will also discuss the role of governments in providing/supporting training.
- *Effective approaches and support to the continuing professional development of trainers, career opportunities* (April/March 2013). During this peer learning activity, participants will discuss continuing professional development opportunities for trainers provided by the state, sectors and professional associations. The participants will also look at the cooperation between teachers and trainers, schools and workplace, exiting communication mechanisms and challenges. One of the aspects will be the need to keep the trainers aware of the developments in their industry.
- The third PLA will specifically focus on *training opportunities in SMEs* and for SMEs, trainers' competences to meet specific training needs of SMEs and support mechanisms available for SME to motivate the owners and managers to invest in training.

Other issues can be added as the work evolves.

3.2. Peer learning

As mentioned before, the main tool of the working group will be peer learning from one another and about others. Peer learning activities will explore effective policy measures, ongoing and future developments with regard to trainers' competences, status and professional profiles as well as to continuing professional development opportunities. Peer learning will be based on examining and comparing the approaches taken by countries to policy development and implementation. The thematic working group will validate the findings of the peer learning activities and identify success factors and areas that require and will benefit from policy attention at sectoral, national and European levels.

A typical format of a peer learning activity includes preparatory work (a concept paper, contributions of the participants, background information), a peer learning meeting⁽¹³⁾

⁽¹³⁾ Peer learning activities are organised in cooperation between the hosting country, the group and the Commission. They would last typically 2-3 working days and be focused on the policies and practices in the country visited. Concerning funding, the basic

(usually hosted by one of the participating countries) and follow-up activities (a synthesis report on findings and dissemination). Cedefop will provide content support to these activities. During a peer learning visit, field visits to training institutions, associations and/or companies can be organised by the host.

3.3. Main outcomes of the working group

As its main deliverable, the group will formulate guiding principles on changing competences and profiles of trainers by 2014.

In its work, the group will describe emerging trends, needs, challenges and opportunities for training policy and practice and potential areas for cooperation and support at European level. The group will also identify main knowledge gaps related to training in enterprises and recognition and professional development of trainers where evidence should be gathered and fed into policy making.

Based on the analysis of and reflections on the examples of existing policies and practice, the working group will formulate a set of core knowledge, skills and competence that can serve as a reference tool and recommendations to various stakeholders on promoting and supporting VET trainers' continuing professional development. The group will consider core and optional knowledge, skills and competence for trainers to work in various training settings and with various groups of learners.

The group's policy messages and conclusions will be widely disseminated among policy makers and key stakeholders at national and EU level. The findings will be provided online to reach a wider audience of training decision-makers and practitioners; a pro-active promotion action will be undertaken, using available networks and resources.

The working group members maybe asked to participate in focus groups/task forces to contribute to the deliverables of the Bruges Communiqué as well as in workshops organised by Cedefop.

The proposed work plan is provided in the Annex.

4. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

The members of the group are invited to reflect and share their views on the following:

- Which of the proposed thematic aspects seem most relevant and need to be explored (in order of priority)? Which of the proposed topics for the peer learning activities are more relevant? Why? Are there countries particularly interested in a certain topic and would like to host a PLA on it?
- How are trainers defined in your national contexts? What are the national priorities and initiatives in your countries as regards in-company trainers and training providers? What actors deal with in-company trainers' training?
- What are pros and cons of the professionalisation of the trainers' profession?

- Is the proposed work plan feasible?
- (Just preliminary reflection): What should, in your opinion, guiding principles look like? What purpose should they serve? What would be the benefit (impact) of such principles?
- Which other research questions would be of interest to the group?

Annex 1 – A work plan and main outputs

Activity	2012												2013												2014		
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02	03
First plenary meeting of the working group: <i>Agreement on thematic priorities and work plan</i>																											
PLA 1 – ‘Portrait of in-company trainers: existing and changing roles and competences, trainers’ role in enhancing productivity, capacity for innovation and competitiveness of enterprises and in contributing to the development of skills of the low-skilled and updating of ageing workers;																											
• <i>Preparation (concept paper, participants’ contributions)</i>																											
• <i>PLA</i>																											
• <i>Synthesis report</i>																											
Preliminary guiding principles for professional development of trainers																											
Second plenary meeting of the working group: <i>Discussion on preliminary principles</i>																											
PLA 2 – ‘Effective approaches and support to the continuing professional development of trainers, career paths, recognition’																											
• <i>Preparation (concept paper, participants’ contributions)</i>																											
• <i>PLA</i>																											
• <i>Synthesis report</i>																											
Draft consolidated guiding principles																											
Third plenary meeting of the working group: <i>Discussion on draft key policy messages and guiding principles</i>																											
Virtual consultation on Bruges Communiqué outputs																											
PLA 3 – ‘Developing training opportunities for SMEs and trainers’ competences needed for meeting training needs of SMEs’																											
• <i>Preparation (concept paper, participants’ contributions)</i>																											
• <i>PLA</i>																											
• <i>Synthesis report</i>																											
Fourth plenary meeting of the working group: <i>Final report of the working group, key policy messages and guiding principles</i>																											