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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education and vocational training  
Vocational training and adult education; Erasmus+

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**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING**  
**MEETING OF 11-12 DECEMBER 2013**

**MINUTES**

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair, Mr António Silva Mendes, Director for Education and vocational training, welcomed the ACVT members to this meeting. He welcomed in particular the newly nominated members following the new round of appointments held in autumn 2013, in line with the rules of the Committee which require renewal every 3 years. In this context, he invited countries that have not still done so to submit their nominations as soon as possible. Mr Silva Mendes also welcomed, as observers, the representatives of European level VET provider associations and OBESSU, representing student organizations.

The Chair reminded that documentation concerning the ACVT meetings is to be found in CIRCABC and that the Commission services would gradually move away from sending documents by e-mail directly to the members.

**2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The Trade Unions' representative welcomed the broad outlook in the information note presenting Education and Training topics relevant for VET and wished to discuss the nomination process of Trade Unions' representatives in the ACVT. This was agreed for discussion under AOB.

The Lithuanian Governmental representative requested, on behalf of this group, a brief overview of the PISA and PIAAC results which had been sent to the Committee in advance of the meeting as background reference. This was subsequently presented under point 4, relating to the information note.

**3. ADOPTION MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 2-3 JULY 2013**

The Chair highlighted that the minutes had been amended following comments received by BusinessEurope and France. The Trade Unions asked for clarifications on some topics dealt

with in the previous meeting, i.e. the DG ENTR Standardization initiative, the nominations for the new OMC groups and lastly on DG EAC policy work on entrepreneurship<sup>1</sup>.

Ms Dana Bachmann, Head of Unit Vocational training and adult education; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, explained that there was no further follow-up in the ACVT on the European standardisation initiative of DG Enterprise and Industry since no ACVT member requested a follow up to this item, nor did the Enlarged Bureau raise this issue when preparing the agenda for the meeting. If members express an interest, this issue can be covered in a future meeting. The nominations of the newly created ET2020 Working Groups were about to be communicated to the register of the Commission's Secretariat-General, and the work would start in 2014. The Chair reminded that nomination of members was the responsibility of Member States.

The minutes were adopted in their version as sent to the ACVT members on 26 November 2013.

#### **4. INFORMATION ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING ISSUES**

An information note with updates on various Education and Training issues had been sent to the ACVT members in advance of the meeting. The Chair invited the members to comment on the topics of the note or to ask questions.

On **Opening up Education**, the Trade Unions' representatives asked about their future involvement in the initiative since they had not been consulted before this stage. They underlined that quality needed to be assured and also a further appropriate support to the learners, since on line courses should not leave the learner alone. Several representatives raised the issue of copyright and the protection of intellectual property.

Employers' representatives also wished to be associated to the initiative, in particular to the platform on a benchmark for digital skills; they welcomed the reference in the Communication to validation of informal and non-formal learning, which was in line with the need to take account of learning acquired in this way by 2018 in National frameworks. They also proposed to explore further how on-line learning could best be associated with work-based learning.

The Commission (Mr Koen Nomden DG EAC, Skills and qualifications strategy, multilingualism) underlined that open resources should not replace but complement other forms of learning, with the aim to increase training options and the interest of the learner. He recalled that under Erasmus+, it was foreseen that all material produced should be available to the public. The Commission did not tackle the issue of copyright in the Opening up Education Communication, but this aspect is being studied by other Commission services. He undertook to further provide information in writing.

Linked to the results of the **Thematic Working Groups on Quality and Financing in Adult Learning**, the Commission (Ms Bachmann) gave an overview of the PIAAC findings, highlighting main implications for VET and Adult Learning policies. She stressed that follow up at European level will be ensured at different levels: **policy dialogue** through the work of

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<sup>1</sup> A report on the work of the TWG on Entrepreneurship Education will be published early 2014, including a short country analysis based on country fiches that were sent to ACVT members between September and October 2013. Some MS have sent comments on their country fiches: AT, BE, BG, CY, DE (trade unions only), EE, EL, ES, FI, LT, LV, NL, NO, RO, SE.

national coordinators for Adult Learning Agenda, the future ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning that will look into the issue of basic skills and the follow-up given by Member States to the PIAAC results, enhanced dialogue on AL policies in the context of VET governance structures, such as DGVT and ACVT, and Ministerial debate on PIAAC and PISA results under the Greek Presidency; **improving the evidence base** through further exploitation of PIAAC and PISA results by the Commission, but also by CEDEFOP, CRELL, and Eurydice; - **strong partnership with OECD** including for the launching of the Education and Skills Online Portal; and last but not least, **financial support** under Erasmus +, including the set-up of a central information platform for adult learning in Europe, and the strategic use of ESIF funds for comprehensive adult learning policy measures. One of the key findings of PIAAC is that once individuals are out of the formal education system, no matter the skills level achieved, the workplace is becoming the main learning environment for up-skilling and re-skilling. The political debate will include a comprehensive approach under the progress review of ET2020 and the new OMC Working Groups in VET, AL and Schools will join forces to tackle the issues in a comprehensive manner.

Trade Unions' representatives welcomed the revived attention on adults but underlined that some Governments do not dedicate sufficient resources to this policy and lack comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning.

The Employers welcomed the integrated approach and considered that many of the problems should ideally be solved at an early stage in school education.

The Governmental representatives asked for the results of the AL TWGs to be made available and if the new ET2020 WGs would take on the analysis of the PIAAC results.

The Commission explained that the reports of the recently concluded AL TWGs on quality and financing would be made available on the website and work done so far was being summarized in a policy guidance document, combining data on quality, funding and participation with the recent results of PIAAC; further reflection will be encouraged in the future ET2020 Working Group on Adult Learning in cooperation with WGs in other sectors.

On the **quality framework for traineeships**, social partners and governmental representatives asked for clarification about the target groups of such a framework and about the synergies between DG EMPL and DG EAC in this initiative.

The Commission (Ms Alison Crabb, Deputy Head of Unit for vocational training and adult learning, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig) explained that the framework concerned open market traineeships, i.e. those undertaken outside a formal education and training framework, on the initiative of unemployed and learners, and excluding traineeships regulated in the framework of one's studies. DG EAC had closely cooperated with DG EMPL to prepare the draft Recommendation and had in particular contributed its experience of ensuring the quality of trainees' mobility in the Lifelong Learning and predecessor programmes; many of these elements could be found reflected in the proposed framework.

UK trade unions pleaded for a form of remuneration of traineeships to ensure that also those from less favorable backgrounds could benefit from this experience.

The Commission (Ms Fiorella Perotto, Deputy Head of Unit for Education and training in EU2020 governance) informed the meeting about the recent **Education, Training and Youth Forum** of October 2013 (see information note).

The Trade Unions' representative welcomed the High Level Meeting of Commissioner Vassiliou with Social Partners and stressed the importance of inviting those MS where social dialogue is less developed to include Social partners in their National debate.

The information on the **ESCO, the multilingual classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations** portal and **Skills panorama** triggered several observations by the participants.

The Governmental representatives asked about the links between these two initiatives and the impact on the final users, for example job-seekers.

The Employers' representative questioned the added value of the ESCO tool.

Trade Unions asked if an evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of ESCO was foreseen.

The German government representative echoed the need for a future assessment of the effectiveness of the tool, since their national experience with this sort of initiative was slightly negative. Yet, he stressed the usefulness of the process linked to ESCO, of defining occupations on the basis of learning outcomes and thus bridging education and employment, which would be a useful exercise in itself for stakeholders.

The Commission (Mr Koen Nomden) clarified that the Skills Panorama had been launched in 2012 and there had been limited development in 2013. From next year this tool will be managed by Cedefop and further strengthened. The ESCO portal had been launched in October 2013 and aims at setting up a European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations facilitating e.g. interoperability between IT applications; one of its purposes is to facilitate job matching on the labour market (via EURES). He replied to the Trade Unions that no evaluation was foreseen for ESCO at the moment (as its full version will be ready in 2017 only)<sup>2</sup>

Mr James Calleja, Director of Cedefop, pointed out that the Skills Panorama and ESCO are to be linked together in a common policy vision for classifications and recognition of qualification as well as skills intelligence on sectors and anticipation of skills needs. By end 2016, a flexible online platform should be in place, tailored to the needs of different target groups.

#### **Conclusions by the Chair:**

Additional information on Opening up Education would be sent later by e-mail. Delegates were invited to submit in writing further suggestions if they wished. At the next ACVT meeting, PISA and PIAAC results will be further discussed.

## **5. THE 2015 BRUGES REVIEW**

Mr Jan Varchola, DG EAC, Vocational training and adult learning; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, presented the plans for the next review of the Copenhagen process, the so-called 2015 Bruges Review. He also reminded that the Bruges Communiqué set a strategy vision for

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<sup>2</sup> Concerning the Skills Panorama, no specific evaluation is foreseen at the moment given the ongoing developments, but it is likely that a future evaluation will be carried out in line with the general evaluation policy of the Commission.

VET systems by 2020 and defined a list of short term deliverables (STDs) for the period 2011-2014.

The up-coming review should be a forward looking exercise to define a new list of STDs for 2015-2017 and monitor the progress achieved by Member States during the period 2011-2014; the integration is foreseen of the results/conclusions of the VET review into the ET2020 mid-term review in the first semester of 2015. He underlined that this proposal was being discussed also with the High Level Group in Athens, taking place at the same time as this ACVT meeting.

Mr Varchola explained that following the adoption of the (Commission's and Council's) Joint Report in May 2015, a new Communiqué could be adopted in June 2015 to ensure specific commitment by a large range of stakeholders, i.e. Social Partners, EFTA and candidate countries.

Ms Lore Schmid from Cedefop underlined that the main sources of information for the Bruges monitoring would be ReferNet and interviews with ACVT and DGVT members and Social Partners. In the days before and after the ACVT meeting, small focus groups were organised by Cedefop in which all Committee members were invited to participate, in order to gather feedback on national progress towards the current Bruges deliverables.

The Governmental Representatives welcomed the methodology which was considered effective and comprehensive. They considered it particularly important to bring the matter to ministerial level to ensure maximum political support. They asked the Commission to clarify the timing of the data collection and the link with the future ET2020 WG in VET.

The Trade Unions' representative recalled the importance of involving Social Partners and welcomed the focus group meetings held with their national representatives back to back with the ACVT meeting. They regretted that they were not represented in the High Level Group which was taking place at the same time in Athens and which regularly discusses topics which have an impact for VET.

The Belgian government representative highlighted the need to clarify the rules concerning the adoption of communiqués, as they had had some problems with this aspect while having the Bruges communiqué adopted under their presidency.

Employers' representatives agreed with the methodology and the involvement of Social Partners as well as the intention to streamline the STDs. They remarked that the Bruges communiqué would benefit from more dissemination and awareness raising at national level.

The German government representative requested to clearly identify the role of each stakeholder in the Bruges review and invited the Commission to take a more active role. On the assessment of the tools' implementation, he also wished a reflection on the effectiveness of the tools.

The Commission acknowledged the need to increase the visibility of the Bruges communiqué and the Copenhagen process and confirmed that the EU tools would be looked at critically during the review.

#### **Conclusions by the Chair:**

The Commission's proposal for a timeline and method for the 2015 Bruges review was welcomed and the Committee appreciated its overall alignment with the wider ET2020 mid

term review and the Joint Report. The proposal by the Danish Governmental representative to include adult learning and C-VET aspects in the upcoming review was welcomed by the Commission and should be pursued further in the debates on the next short term deliverables.

## **6. EUROPEAN AREA FOR SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS (EASQ)**

The Commission (the Chair and Mr Nomden) introduced the initiative, which aims to reduce fragmentation due to different tools developed in parallel, bring a common approach to facilitate mobility, and achieve more coherence on the interaction between the different European initiatives related to recognition and transparency of skills and qualifications. The Commission stressed that when moving to a new job or to further learning, whether within or across national borders, learners and workers need to see their skills and qualifications quickly and easily recognised. This is essential to raise skill levels and help combating unemployment. Issues addressed by the initiative are: (1) how to place a stronger focus on higher and more relevant skills? (2) further strengthening links between education/training, mobility and the labour market, (3) adapting to internationalisation trends, (4) ensuring overall coherence of tools and policies and further implementing the learning outcomes approach, (5) ensuring clarity of rules and procedures for the recognition of skills and qualifications for further learning, (6) increasing the focus on quality assurance and (7) providing learners and workers with a single access point to obtain information and services supporting a European area of skills and qualifications.

The Commission emphasised that the public consultation was one of the first, but most important steps in collecting the views of stakeholders on the problems faced by learners and workers with regard to the transparency and recognition of their skills and qualifications when moving within and between EU Member States, on the adequacy of the related European policies and instruments and on the potential benefits of developing a “European Area of Skills and Qualifications”. It emphasised that at this stage it does not put forward a specific proposal but wants to explore the extent and nature of the current obstacles to the recognition and transparency of skills and qualifications across Europe, possible solutions and the potential added value of EU action in the current and future economic and technological context. Stakeholders are invited to respond to the public consultations, by answering all the questions raised or only part of them, submitting position papers or any contribution that they deem useful to be taken into account.

The Governmental representatives felt that this initiative focused too strongly on (improving synergies between) the European transparency tools which could be better tackled under existing initiatives. They requested to analyse the effectiveness and appropriateness of the tools before progressing with their further development. In addition, they expressed doubts about the technical nature of the public consultation and the added value of receiving comments from the general public who would not be familiar with these technical issues. They further felt that the title of the initiative was not corresponding to its actual content as the title would rather indicate a focus on developing skills strategies. Links to the OECD skills strategy would be welcome, as well as to academic recognition of qualifications. Therefore, the governmental representatives proposed to shift the focus of the initiative from tools to objectives. Finally, they highlighted the overlap of this new initiative with the Bruges review and feared that it would reduce visibility for VET policy.

The Italian governmental representative underlined that the tools had been useful in their country to facilitate a learning outcomes approach and the introduction of a national qualifications framework. Yet, the consultation should foresee additional information for

stakeholders at national level, who were not always familiar with all the technical details of each tool. She also asked clarification about the targeted (educational or professional) qualifications considered by the EASQ.

The Employers' and Trade Union representatives asked if a meeting with Social Partners was foreseen on the topic, in the framework of the recently launched structured cooperation. They questioned the usefulness of some of the tools and asked to reflect on their streamlining.

The Commission (the Chair and Mr Nomden) reassured the meeting that all educational sectors will continue to play a key role and that the aim was to create stronger interaction between the different sectors. They emphasised that given the complexity of the process and the impact on a wide range of stakeholders across all education sectors, but also end users, a broad consultation should be ensured before taking further initiatives on a possible revision of existing legal bases. In doing so, the focus should be on how to best achieve the overall objectives of the initiative rather than on the individual European tools only, which are instruments or means to reach these objectives. It was clarified that the initiative concerned both learners and workers. Committee members were invited to respond to the consultation (open till 15 April), including by position papers, by focusing on all the questions or only some of them, depending on their interests and expertise on the subject. A background document will accompany the consultation and will provide further information on each of the seven topics. Further consultations will also take place in different expert settings, such as the EQAVET network, ECVET users' group, Education Committee, through a Eurobarometer survey and a public event in June 2014. Also Social Partners will be involved.

The Commission (Ms Sophie Weisswange, DG EAC, Vocational training and adult learning; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig) presented the results of the EQAVET external evaluation and the main messages of the Commission report to the Council and the European Parliament, to be adopted in January 2014. The results confirm that the tool should be further streamlined with other Quality Assurance tools and EQF, complemented with quality assurance measures in WBL and AL, and that other stakeholders, such as students and businesses, should be involved in the implementation.

The governmental group was not in agreement with the overall conclusions, finding that the report overemphasises minor issues and overlooked essential ones. They also stressed the importance of having in place policy process and strategies for quality assurance, and to understand that EQAVET was a tool to meet policy objectives and to build mutual trust in the systems.

The employers' group highlighted that the report indicated that the recommendation had a systemic impact in a number of countries, and called for a stronger focus in implementation on employability and use of the EQAVET indicator n° 5 related to labour market outcomes. She also highlighted that EQAVET was a toolbox, and that quality assurance should be adapted to the needs of the companies.

The Trade Union representative called for a stronger involvement of social partners in governance structures at all levels, as the external evaluation report indicated this was lacking in certain countries. They recalled they had organised several information seminars for their members on EQAVET.

The Chair explained that the EQAVET evaluation was a legal requirement from the Recommendation but the results were being integrated in a holistic approach in the framework of the EASQ.

**Conclusions by the Chair:**

Remarks were noted about the need for an overarching strategy to achieve better education and employment results rather than a straightforward assessment of the implementation of the tools. The Chair invited the ACVT members to reply to the upcoming on-line consultation on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications (EASQ).

**7. IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANNUAL GROWTH SURVEY FOR VET**

The Commission (Mr Jan Varchola) presented the recently adopted Annual Growth Survey (AGS) underlining the main messages concerning VET. The main focus of the AGS was to sustain recovery and ensure implementation of existing measures. He underlined that in the priority area relating to tackling unemployment, the Commission called for modernisation of E&T systems, including LLL and VET, and strengthening dual learning schemes.

The Employers requested clarifications on the CSRs for Estonia and France where specific mention was made of involving Social Partners in their policies.

The Trade Unions' representative called for including sustainable funding of education and training in the future CSRs, while the Employers' representative was concerned that entrepreneurial skills were not mentioned in the AGS as compared to previous years.

**Conclusions by the Chair:**

Note was taken of these remarks.

**8. WORK BASED LEARNING – YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT**

The Commission (Ms Nadia Elhaggagi, DG EMPL, Sectorial employment challenges, Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship) presented the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (YG) Recommendation of 22 April 2013. She highlighted that the YG is a long-term approach to youth employment and required structural change and new partnerships to reach out to non-registered unemployed. The offer should be of good quality (towards sustainable labour market insertion), as a targeted, individualised solution for each person.

She also presented the main elements of the Finnish YG (for more information, see [http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/en/youth\\_guarantee](http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/en/youth_guarantee)).

The Italian Governmental representatives presented their national plans for implementation of the YG, showing how it builds on already existing legislation, but is complemented by new legislation progressively entering into force. Measures being implemented are comprehensive and relate to incentives to companies hiring young people, simplification for the existing apprenticeships system and, in particular for the South Regions, facilitation of traineeships and self-employment. In addition, the Italian YG shall strengthen guidance in secondary education and transition from school to the labour market and support awareness raising measures and advice to youth.

While agreeing that such a guarantee can be beneficial in providing short term relief for the young, especially the Social Partners underlined that long-term structural reforms are needed to create good quality jobs.



The Commission (Ms Nadia Elhaggagi) confirmed that actions are taken at both levels, with the 6 bn Youth Employment Initiative offering immediate relief measures for young people, while at the same time countries are working on long term reforms; YG should be seen in the context of long-term systemic reforms.

During the discussions on the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)**, one of the EU's measures to raise the quality of VET and tackle youth unemployment, the Commission (Mr Wilhelm Vukovich, DG EAC, Vocational training and adult learning; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig) provided an update on recent and upcoming activities under EAfA, namely the launch of the restricted call for proposals in 2014 and a Cedefop conference to help countries set up partnerships under the Alliance.

The Swedish government representative (Mr Fritjof Karlsson) presented a Nordic project in which countries are learning from one another when implementing apprenticeships and work based learning. Each participating country focuses on aspects most relevant to them. This cooperation was an interesting model of how countries can work together to improve the quality and attractiveness of WBL.

While the Social Partners reminded that they are jointly supporting EAfA, and are planning a joint project, they also highlighted the need to specifically increase support for SMEs and proposed to use ESF funding for the development of WBL. Trade Unions proposed that the next set of CSRs should mention, for example, the need for sustainable funding for WBL.

In this context, the Swiss government representative informed the ACVT about an international congress on 15-18 September 2014<sup>3</sup>. This event will be linked to the first national Swiss skills competition and will contribute to EAfA.

### **Conclusions by the Chair:**

The Commission will organise together with Cedefop a conference to identify and match countries' needs to support the development of apprenticeship systems and work-based learning.

The report on the peer review on apprenticeship schemes, carried out in the context of the DGVT meeting in Vilnius, will be circulated in due time<sup>4</sup>. The results should be of use to countries developing or modernising such schemes. EAfA progress will further be followed-up at future meetings.

## **9. ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME**

Felix Rohn, DG EAC, Vocational training and adult learning; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig gave an overview of the possibilities offered by the new Erasmus+ programme for 2014-2020, which are relevant for VET. The meeting was informed that the programme guide providing detailed explanations on the programme was available on the DG internet site : [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> For more info: [www.vpet-congress.ch](http://www.vpet-congress.ch)

<sup>4</sup> Note: The draft report was sent to the DGVT members on 19 December 2013 and will be uploaded in CIRCABC for the ACVT members.

## **10. UPDATE BY THE UPCOMING GREEK PRESIDENCY**

Ms Despina Karantinou from the Greek Permanent Representation presented the education and training –related priorities and events during the incoming Presidency.

Council Conclusions of particular importance to VET will be adopted on the following themes: on Efficient and innovative E&T to invest in skills (in the February Council), on Quality Assurance at all levels of E&T, as well as on Teachers' Education (May Council).

The DGVT meeting will take place on 27-28 March and a VET-related conference on tackling skills mismatches on 26 March 2014 in Athens.

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

ETUC explained the difficulties encountered by Trade Union representatives for the nominations of their ACVT members via the Permanent Representations. It was suggested to follow-up bilaterally concerning the countries for which difficulties were experienced (contacts followed by telephone and e-mail).

The tentative dates for the next ACVT meeting are 2 and 3 June 2014. Please note that for agenda setting reasons, dates have been changed compared to those announced at the meeting.

All documentation from the meeting is available in Circabc <https://circabc.europa.eu> in the interest group DG EAC Advisory Committee for vocational training.  
For further information and assistance please contact: [eac-ccfp-acvt-meetings@ec.europa.eu](mailto:eac-ccfp-acvt-meetings@ec.europa.eu)