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Lifelong learning: policies and programme
Vocational training; Leonardo da Vinci

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING MEETING OF 14 NOVEMBER 2011

DRAFT MINUTES

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair (Hélène Clark) welcomed the members of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT).

She recalled the importance of VET in the current economic situation especially with the rising youth unemployment. She referred to the initiative recently proposed by the Commission President on a "Youth Opportunities Initiative" which would be focused on apprenticeships and traineeships. She invited participants to get a copy of the new publication "Supporting vocational education and training in Europe: the Bruges Communiqué" which had been made available in the meeting room.

The Chair referred to the new programme "Erasmus for All" which would cover the whole education and training sector. The programme proposal was planned for adoption by the Commission on 23 November. The negotiations on the legal base for the new programme were likely to last at least until end 2012. One of the key issues in relation to the programme was to provide more resources to mobility, notably in the VET sector, and to support the modernisation of education and training systems, including VET systems. The new programme should be operational as from 1 January 2014.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Chair clarified that the update on ESCO was part of the agenda under item 9.

The **employers group** (France) drew attention to the G20 initiative to set up a task force which will work as a priority on youth employment. She added that apprenticeships are key to this initiative. She wondered whether the ACVT could have a role in this respect.

The agenda was adopted.

3. DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 15-16 JUNE 2011

The minutes of the meeting of 15-16 June were adopted.

4. UPDATE ON ECVET AND EQAVET

The Chair gave the floor to Sophie Weisswange (DG EAC/B.4) who presented recent developments in the area of ECVET and EQAVET.

João Delgado (DG EAC/B.4) recalled that, as of 2012, Member States should create the necessary conditions to gradually implement ECVET. He conceded that some Member States and sectors were more advanced in using ECVET than others. As a result of a call for nominating National Teams of ECVET experts, 22 applications had been received so far. The deadline had been extended to ensure that all Member States will respond.

The **trade unions group** representative, Hermann Nehls, stressed that it was important to have a common understanding of ECVET in the Member States. With regard to EQAVET, the "toolbox" approach was not encouraging a systematic implementation of all quality indicators. Member States implemented different indicators, which leads to a "random" application of the indicators. The group supported the sectoral seminars as a positive way to show the practical side of EQAVET.

The **employers group**, represented by Susanne Müller, suggested that more information about the added value of ECVET should be made available. She noted that the set-up for ECVET was quite complex. She also asked for improving the information about seminars which are organised by the supporting team ECVET. Regarding EQAVET, she supported the "toolbox" approach as the indicators do not apply to Member States in the same way.

João Delgado recognised the difficulties in implementing both instruments but stressed that it should not be seen as a top-down approach. The thematic networking of ECVET and the pilot projects in quality assurance were valuable. He added that since the new Erasmus for All programme would focus on mobility, this would help to put ECVET into practice.

Sophie Weisswange (DG EAC/B.4) stated that the EQAVET survey was done following a thorough consultation process and confirmed that the survey should be seen as a monitoring exercise. The reporting process on the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation will start in the spring 2012 and a formal report is foreseen for spring 2013. She further highlighted the crucial role Network members played in disseminating information about EQAVET in the Member States. She mentioned that VET providers associations were now also involved in the work.

Conclusions of the Chair:

- The chair stressed that the implementation of ECVET and EQAVET are essential for the implementation of the Bruges Communiqué. The involvement of all stakeholders was important. She invited the ACVT, in particular the government group, to ensure commitment from their administrations and support to the national contact points.

5. ATTRACTIVENESS

a) Results of the Eurobarometer "Attitudes towards VET"

Jan Varchola (DG EAC/B.4) presented the results of the survey. The main conclusions of the presentations are:

- Vocational education and training offers strong career prospects but fails to attract sufficiently many young people.
- There is a need to improve guidance and better communicate the benefits of vocational careers.

b) Results of WorldSkills London 2011

João Delgado presented the WorldSkills London event by stressing its innovative features such as "tasting" possibilities for different vocational trades and guidance services. He underlined that most winners did not come from European but from Asian countries. The next skills competitions will all take place in Europe: 2012 in Spa, Belgium; 2013 in Leipzig, Germany; 2014 in Lille, France and 2015 in Madrid, Spain.

Discussion on the two presentations:

The **government group**, represented by the Polish Presidency, suggested that the Eurobarometer results could be used to develop European and national policy, while paying attention to areas where Member States strongly deviate from the medium values of the EU.

The **trade unions group** pointed out that attractiveness of VET should be seen in comparison with other education tracks. He called upon the government group to work on making VET a truly attractive option in comparison to higher education.

Referring to the current German discussion on the referencing of the school leaving certificate "Abitur" to the German national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (DQR) to level 5 whereas an initial VET qualification would be referenced to level 4, he expressed the fear of a devaluation and loss in attractiveness of qualifications provided by the dual VET system.

According to the **employers group**, the Eurobarometer did not come as a surprise and reflected the current situation. The group had noted some interesting differences between Member States: when VET is well organised, it also seems well perceived. However, even in those countries where VET is well developed, there is still room for improvement. There also seems to be room for progress in some new Member States where VET has a particularly low image. This was confirmed by the Latvian member of the group who stated that most of the financing in the 1990s in Latvia went to higher education. The group welcomed World Skills as an important event to raise the attractiveness of VET but expressed concerns about the high cost of the event.

Another member of the employers group (DIHK) commented about mobility of VET students being identified as one of the challenges in the Eurobarometer survey. She

asked whether sufficient resources will be allocated to mobility under the new "Erasmus for All" programme.

The **government group** (Austria) stated that strengthening the bridge between VET and university could improve the image of VET.

The **trade unions group** (Turkey) added that the decrease in the enrolment rate in VET was a matter of concern.

The **employers group** (UEAPME) expressed concerns about the lack of entrepreneurship and self-employment provided by VET which the survey had revealed. She underlined that funding for more guidance and support is needed. In this context, the representative of UEAPME welcomed the encouraging examples of the EU micro-finance facility.

Conclusions of the Chair:

- Welcomed the survey but acknowledged disparities between the positive view of VET on the one hand and its overall attractiveness on the other. Despite a positive evaluation of VET, young people still preferred higher education.
- The value of employability should be emphasized not only at European but also at national level. For that the employability benchmark could be useful for Member States. At national level more should be done to develop guidance services for young people.
- She invited the members of the government group to examine and compare the national results of the Eurobarometer survey with those of other countries and with the average European results.
- In response to DIHK, she stated that mobility would be one of the central points of the Erasmus for All programme: the objective is to double the mobility opportunities but all will depend on the final allocation of resources.
- The Commission followed with interest and concern the German debate on the classification of initial VET in relation to the school leaving qualification "Abitur". For the Commission it is important to have a consistent approach across Europe, to ensure mutual trust and facilitate recognition. All (school leaving) qualifications that give access to higher education should be referenced to the same EQF level across the EU. As EQF level 5 is already part of tertiary level qualifications this should be EQF level 4. The Commission shares the concern of the trade unions group about the possible damage to the attractiveness of VET, if VET certificates resulting from "dual training" and general education certificates such as "Abitur" are assigned to national level referenced to different EQF levels.

6. WORK-BASED LEARNING IN INITIAL VET

a) Presentation of planned work of the Commission

Aline Juerges (DG EAC/B.4) presented the current status of work on a "vademecum on successful work-based learning (WBL) models in Europe.

The **government group** (Austria) commented that stressing the aspect of inclusion too much would point to VET as a secondary option for young people.

The **trade unions group** pointed out that examples of WBL were relevant but WBL was first of all a "learning method" which needed to be supported by high quality standards. From the Bruges Communiqué it becomes clear that WBL is closely linked to vocational training. Framework conditions for WBL must be developed since professional training is more than just learning.

The Chair agreed with the comments made and suggested communicating a balanced image of VET.

b) Contribution from the three interest groups on inspiring examples in the field

i. Presentation by Piotr Barosiak (Polish presidency), of the Polish apprenticeship system.

The discussion after the presentation included the involvement of social partners in creating/developing WBL models in VET, the level of remuneration of apprentices and the amount/share of students participating in VET.

ii. The Swedish representative of the employers group, Johan Olsson, presented two cases of WBL in Sweden. The first example describes "technical colleges" model. One feature of the model is the creation of so-called "regional competence centres" which bring together the schools, municipalities, companies and social partners. The different actors work together on the criteria to allow a VET programme to be of high quality and to prepare students for jobs in the industry or for further studies. The second example describes the "Scania Industrial School" which can be compared to an "industrial" upper secondary school. It is publicly financed but run by companies such as Scania, Astra Zeneca and Telge. The students are guaranteed practical training in the companies and a six-month job after their training in one of the companies.

iii. The representative from OECD, Simon Field, presented the OECD view of workplace learning in initial VET. The presentation was based on the study "Learning for Jobs" (2009) for which the OECD reviewed 16 countries. Mr Field suggested three policy solutions as essential to ensure work-based learning: Mandatory workplace learning as part of all vocational programmes, quality standards for workplace learning and effective support and incentives for employers to offer workplace learning.

The Chair thanked the three presenters for their stimulating contributions.

7. PRESENTATION OF A COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR A RECOMMENDATION ON VALIDATION OF INFORMAL LEARNING

Koen Nomden (DG EAC/A.2) presented the background of a Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

The **trade unions group** said that validation is central for the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). However, he regretted that social partners had not been consulted in the process. He also stressed that several points were missing in the proposal such as a definition of "competencies" which are acquired informally.

Furthermore, the three-month deadline to provide individuals with the opportunity to undergo a skills audit of an identified need required regulations at national level

The **government group** (France) stressed the link between validation and employment policy.

The **employers group** (UEAPME) pointed out that employability should be the key objective of the recommendation. The representative stated that the meaning of non-formal learning varied according to national contexts and that the principle of subsidiarity needs to be ensured. Validation should have tangible benefits for SMEs and individuals and not force employers into validation mechanisms. She supported the trade unions group call to involve social partners in the process.

Koen Nomden clarified that an annex with definitions is foreseen to accompany the recommendation. Also, in the recommendation strong link with employability will be made.

The **Chair** concluded that the recommendation will highlight general principles, but not prescribe detailed validation processes to Member States.

8. INFORMATION ON THE PREPARATION OF THE BUSINESS-VET FORUM

João Delgado presented an update on the preparation of the Business-VET forum which is planned to take place on 7-8 June 2012. It will be a high-level conference-type event taking place every two years. Relevant stakeholders from different levels (EU, national, regional etc) will be invited. A survey will be sent to employers and stakeholders in Europe to identify their perceptions of cooperation between businesses and VET institutions, including its challenges and changes.

The **employers group** (France) suggested addressing the role of social partners in skills development in the forum.

João Delgado replied that the survey will focus on the needs, changes and trends in skills development and which support actions could be taken at EU level.

9. UPDATE ON THE EQF

Carlo Scatoli (DG EAC/A.2) presented this point.

The **employers group** (UEAPME) referred to the EQF referencing debate in Germany which had been discussed under item 5. The representative said that the Commission should coordinate to ensure that referencing is organised in a coherent manner and that the new education programme should be used to finance projects carrying out plausibility checks on the referencing of similar qualifications in different countries.

Carlo Scatoli concluded that consistency in the referencing of qualifications will be ensured through the EQF advisory group. The referencing is an ongoing process and referencing systems needed constant updating.

No questions were asked in relation to the ESCO note which was made available during the meeting.

10. PRESENTATION BY THE DANISH PRESIDENCY OF UPCOMING PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES

The Danish government representative presented the upcoming activities during the Danish presidency in the first half of 2012.

The **Chair** closed the meeting by thanking the Polish presidency for their work during their presidency. She encouraged the ACVT to disseminate the information provided at today's meeting to their stakeholders.

