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Directorate for Skills
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MEETING OF THE PLATFORM OF EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS OF VET PROVIDERS BRUSSELS, 24 FEBRUARY 2016

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

The 3rd meeting of the Expert group 'Platform of European Associations of VET providers' took place on 24 February 2016, in Brussels.

Participants: 6 Associations members of the expert group, active in the field of initial VET, tertiary VET, continuous VET, professional higher education, lifelong learning and HE (EfVET, EVBB, EUproVET, EVTA, Eucen, Eurashe), Cedefop, ETF.

1. Welcome

Ms Dana Bachmann, Head of Unit Vocational training, apprenticeships, adult education, welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the agenda, which included also a short slot for preparing the meeting in the European Parliament on mobility in VET. She explained that for the working groups' selection, the participants accepted in the AL and VET WGs should involve the other organizations. For the groups managed by EAC, where no VET organization had been selected, it will need to be seen how to ensure that the expert group is informed.

EUproVET, on behalf of all Associations, asked to ensure a good level of information about the DG EAC working groups, in order to allow the VET organizations can contribute when relevant.

2. European Skills agenda

The Chair explained the initiative and its 3 strands of action. More detailed information was given on the "Skills pathways" initiative aimed at providing a response to the needs of the low skilled, as well as on other initiatives to strengthen vocational training (work-based learning, partnerships etc.).

The participants provided several comments and suggestions. As a general remark, participants highlighted that VET is multifaceted and all its dimensions should be considered, by providing labour market relevant skills as well as key competences.

EVTA mentioned the initiative undertaken by AFPA (France) on Social utility, a tool based on 20 indicators related to human capital (measured in terms of qualifications and career progressions throughout life), return to employment, fight against discrimination, territorial development (a description of the tool was subsequently sent).

Higher VET/Professional higher education was discussed at length (EfVET, EURASHE, Eucen). There is the need for national qualifications frameworks to better reference higher VET at levels 5 and 6 (taking into account some concerns by traditional university system). Branding and specific funding might also be beneficial for higher VET (EfVET). Funds for research in applied sciences were mentioned by Cedefop. It is necessary to ensure permeability among various levels of

education and within E&T sectors otherwise VET (and also higher VET) will suffer from an image problem.

EUproVET and EVBB highlighted the importance of having common tools for all VET systems independent of the education level (e.g. quality assurance and credit systems)

On Performance based financing, there was a lack of consensus on the utility of PBF systems in promoting quality and performance in VET.

VET is effective in providing skills for employability, but should ensure long term flexibility to reply to the changing needs of the labour market. Flexible training courses should be available for learners wanting to address challenges of their previous qualifications that may not be relevant for the labour market. There is a need for measures to motivate adults to engage in upskilling and reskilling (both demand and supply), in an active ageing perspective (EURASHE). Need for a stronger focus to provide opportunities for the inactive and the non-motivated low skilled adults.

The organizations suggested that the EU added-value is essentially in elements that (avoiding complex structures) support learner and labour mobility, transparency, recognition, and European qualifications (by showing what works and fostering tools implementation at national level) (Eucen, EUproVET).

EVBB underlined the growing need for mechanisms for recognition of international industry qualifications (including quality standards and referencing transparency).

3. European VET week

Mr Joao Santos, Deputy Head of Unit, presented the initiative of the VET week that will focus on VET excellence as a means to increase its attractiveness and image. The current plans have taken into account the suggestions made by the expert group in October 2015. He explained that DGVT representatives have also been involved and asked to mobilise for events at National level.

The European VET Week will be a combination of events taking place at EU level (Brussels) and at local, regional and national level in EU Member States. The non-EU Member States that participate in the Copenhagen process or are partner countries supported by the ETF, can also participate through national events linking them to the VET week.

An opening event featuring Commissioner Thyssen on Monday 5 December will mark the opening of the 1st ever European 2016 VET Week. This opening ceremony (web-streamed) will then be followed at national, regional and local levels with a series of events including "open days" for VET providers and companies engaging in initial and continuous VET.

The closing event will include representatives at a high political level from all European Institutions, and possibly be hosted at the European Parliament. During this closing event, and to emphasise the focus on "excellence", a series of awards could be delivered by the EU leaders. These could include awards to the young winners of the Euroskills event taking place the week before in Gothenburg, the best VET research paper, the most innovative VET provider, the most engaging and inspiring teacher and trainer, the best VET learner video, etc. Web-conference connections could be established to liaise with stakeholders reporting from their national events.

The VET week will include 2 days of EU level events: 1) The European Business Forum on Vocational Training (held previously in 2012 and 2014), with a morning plenary session for all VET stakeholders, and afternoon with various parallel sessions, ii) Other regular VET meetings that will be rescheduled to take place during this week (e.g. EQAVET Annual Forum).

Building on its work in research, policy analysis and knowledge brokering, Cedefop will support the VET week by showcasing how VET can benefit the different target groups it addresses. Cedefop

will also contribute to a number of communication activities related to the VET week and will organise events under the auspices of the VET week, both in Brussels and Thessaloniki. The ETF will build on its expertise and work in its "Partner countries" by mobilising and coordinating activities with the non-EU countries willing to be part of, or contribute to, the VET week.

The very best Erasmus+ projects will also be highlighted throughout the week, thus providing an opportunity to discuss those results and exploring ways to mainstream them in national and European policies.

The VET Week will be an opportunity to engage with learners, parents, companies, business organisations, education and training providers, adult learning organisations, researchers, career counsellors, local, regional and national authorities, social partners, and society at large. We will have many examples of excellence in vocational training provision, of innovative teaching practices, of creative and entrepreneurial learners, and of companies that excel and prosper through engagement in apprenticeships and business-education partnerships.

EUproVET asked for a swift formal announcement of the initiative so that organizations can already start preparing. A possible EUtube channel was mentioned as well as the possibility of VET providers to nominate one person in each country to coordinate the events. They were considering organizing their annual conference during the VET week.

EfVET asked to have a good slogan for the VET week and explore the possibility of coordinating among the six Associations at National level. If not enough time to organize awards, the VET week could act as catalyst to promote future initiatives in this direction.

EVBB asked for a logo and a video message from the Commissioner to be used for federating the initiatives and call for engagement at local level. They stressed the importance of connecting with public authorities. They proposed that results of events at local level would be presented in the final closing ceremony in Brussels.

It was confirmed that also third countries can organize events in the framework of the VET week (cooperation with ETF can be sought).

Suggestions about events (short description, dates, location) can be sent to Susan.Bird@ec.europa.eu and Pirkko.pyorala@ec.europa.eu (cc: Anna Barbieri anna.barbieri@ec.europa.eu)

4. Mobility in VET – Meeting in the EU Parliament

The expert group met with MEPs or representatives from their offices (Mr Arthuis, Ms Dlabajova, Mr Rübig, Mr Benifei, Mr Muresan, Mr Denanot, Mr Calvet Chambon, Ms Kallas).

Mr Jean Arthuis, Chair of the Budget Committee an initiator of the Pilot project, introduced the aim of the action to promote mobility of apprentices for a period of 6 months or longer, in order to provide solid skills (ex. foreign languages, transversal skills, self-confidence) and work experience. He acknowledged that short term mobility had positive effects as well and it would allow participants to develop their willingness to a longer stay abroad.

Mr Detlef Eckert, Director for Skills in DG EMPL, presented the expert group and its cooperation with the Unit in charge of Vocational education and training, apprenticeships and adult learning.

All Associations welcomed the pilot project, but highlighted the importance of tackling the barriers to long term mobility as long-term mobility duration could be a challenge in several countries.

Differences in VET and apprenticeships systems in the MS were acknowledged and the review of national systems foreseen by the pilot would be beneficial for defining common elements at EU level. The project would allow some MS to learn from more experienced ones and to create a common approach to learning mobility of longer duration.

Participants thanked the Parliament for their interest in Vocational education and training.

Some examples of the barriers to mobility above 6 months, that were highlighted included:

- Decreasing funding in Erasmus+ when duration increases, lack of funds – discouraging for learners from disadvantaged groups.
- Non compatibility with National rules for education; minimum number of theoretical hours, risk of delaying the achievement of the qualification;
- Contracts with companies, in particular SMEs, for which it might be difficult to send an apprentice abroad.
- Military obligations for youngsters in certain countries;

The VET providers also highlighted the following:

- Risk of not obtaining Erasmus+ funding once an application was accepted under the pilot project.
- There should also be an investment in the mobility of teachers and trainers (as multipliers for learners)
- Would have been better to enlarge the pilot project to all forms of work-based learning and not only apprenticeships,
- The Pilot project should engage large companies with already established transnational exchanges,
- Split the long term mobility in segments during the qualification period, and not a consecutive long period.
- Provide the possibility of the mobility for learners having completed their qualifications

Mr Arthuis thanked the participants for the constructive ideas and encouraged them to embrace the challenge and be pragmatic in order to fight unemployment of youngsters.

An information day would take place on 17 March on the initiative.

5. Information by the EU Associations on their initiatives and events

In a tour de table the organizations presented their activities.

EfVET : Ongoing process to create national Boards in each country; companies can also become members. their Annual Conference will take place in Valencia on 25-29/10. They were considering funding activities of their members promoting European tools (ECVET, Learning outcomes, EQAVET). The Europemobility network (300plus members drawn from 31 countries) completed the initial project implementation; EfVET proposes to hold a promotional mobility network event in Brussels during the VET week, including Europemobility. Commission and other support would be most welcome.

EVTA/EVBB : the focus of their work will be on refugees this year (in particular by a group created between Enaip (IT), IB (DE) and AFPA (FR) with concrete initiatives, also open to other partners); joint Annual Conference in Brussels on 20-21/10/16.

The Chair proposed to share more information on this project with the DG EMPL task force on migration and with DGVT members who were planning to start a focus group on refugees and migrants.

EUproVET : Annual Conference during the VET week; possible application for the Call on policy experimentation (teachers and trainers).

EURASHE : annual Conference in Belgrade on 21-22/4 'Cooperation for excellence; Professional Higher Education and the world of work'; Workshop on refugees on 4 May; Permeability between higher VET and higher Education workshop on 16/6; for further information see file enclosed.



EURASHE_update on
activities.pdf

EUCEN : annual Conference on 1-2/6 in Dublin concerning Crossing borders for quality and equity of Lifelong learning; they are also developing reskilling courses for higher education graduates not finding employment and a course for teachers.

6. Update on current Commission policy issues related to education and training

Mr Felix Rohn, Unit for VET, apprenticeships and adult education, gave an overview of the ongoing Calls in Erasmus+ and future possibilities.

Mr Giorgio Guazzugli Marini, Deputy Head of Unit, DG EAC, Erasmus+ programme coordination and National agencies management, collected several comments and issues from participants concerning the functioning of Erasmus+ (different approaches by National agencies, difficulties in incoming mobility, high burden of proof for lump sums, staff from members' organizations, issues with ICT tools, etc.)

He explained that meetings and training sessions for the Agencies are planned in order to ensure they have a similar approach. Therefore, the issues raised will be flagged in the upcoming meetings and training courses. He informed the meeting that several initiatives were being undertaken to ensure a better functioning of the programme. Further comments can be sent by e-mail by 11 March, with specific examples.

DG EAC was invited to participate also to the next meeting of the expert group.

On the project by OECD, called Entrepreneurship360, the Chair explained that information will be sent to participants with a list of possible actions that could be developed in the tool. The expert group should provide their remarks and indicate if the initiative seems interesting.

On the follow-up of the feasibility study for the creation of a network of national Associations of VET providers, Anna Barbieri, Unit for VET, apprenticeships and adult education, highlighted that, following the recommendations contained in the study, the Unit had undertaken to keep informed the Advisory Committee on vocational training about the work of the expert group and that it was foreseen to invite additional stakeholders to the next meeting (ex Social partners, PES representative etc). The organizations at National, regional level, identified through the study would be kept in a database and informed regularly about EU VET initiatives and possibly involved in the EU VET week. The study and the list of organizations with internet sites (where available) would be published soon.

It was proposed to put the expert group in direct contact with the ACVT members (EfVET, EUproVET).

7. Any other business and closing of the meeting

The Chair informed the meeting that in EPALE the week of 25-29 April will be dedicated to migrants and refugees. In addition it was asked to participants to collect examples of successful quality assurance tools that VET providers are using (this is also planned in the mandate of the expert group), in order to discuss this in an EQAVET event during the December VET week.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS FROM MEETING 30 OCTOBER 2015

1. Send provisional calendar of events where the expert group would be invited (done)

2. Group to nominate one participant for the Leaders' Group of 24/5
3. Group to inform Commission about participants to the Convention of March 2016 on social inclusion (done)
4. Send link to published Pilot project with European Parliament when available
5. Send Excel list of action point from previous meetings (with final minutes)
6. Send list of National Coordinators for Adult learning
7. Send link of Entrepreneurship 360 with additional information on possible further developments.
8. When the study on higher VET will be published, foresee a discussion in the expert group
9. Explore how expert group can interact with ACVT
10. Group to send remarks on Erasmus+ issues (copy of the letter sent to MBO Raad forwarded to the group) by 11 March.
11. Group to send comments by 11 March on the Skills agenda and EU VET week
12. Group to send examples of Quality assurance tools for an EQAVET event in December
13. Invite DG EAC to next meeting (Erasmus+)
14. EfVET to provide example on Entrepreneurship education in Cyprus (done)
15. EVTA/EVBB to send more information on their initiative on refugees (done)
16. Next meeting : May/June 2016 (with additional stakeholders).