ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING
MEETING OF 29 JUNE 2012

DRAFT MINUTES

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair, António Silva Mendes, welcomed members and presented himself as new Director for Lifelong Learning: Policies and Programme.

He referred to the economic situation recalling the high youth unemployment and called on the ACVT members to join forces to enhance the EU’s capacity to address current challenges. He recommended adjusting training and education to labour market needs, since, as he underlined, 4 million vacancies remained unfilled.

He urged for a proactive participation of all actors involved and underlined the importance to open education and training to the outside world.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The employers group, represented by Susanne Müller, stressed the importance of advancing the item on the proposed ET 2020 Annual Peer Review which was proposed under AOB.

The trade unions group, represented by Hermann Nehls, wished to address the planned recommendation on the validation of informal and non-formal learning as an additional point on the agenda.

The Chair agreed to handle the planned ET 2020 Peer Review item after lunch and agreed to include the item suggested by the trade unions group under AOB, when the Commission would also update the ACVT on the planned Commission Communication on Rethinking Skills.

The agenda was adopted.

3. DRAFT MINUTES OF THE 14 NOVEMBER 2011

The minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2011 were adopted.
4. VET BUSINESS COOPERATION

a. Results from the European business forum on vocational training

The Chair highlighted the efforts of the Commission to increase the involvement of companies in helping young people to have a smooth transition to the labour market. In this context, he also referred to the Commission initiative "We Mean Business", alerting companies to the benefits of hosting Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus trainees.

Jan Varchola (DG EAC/B4) presented the Business forum held for the first time on 7-8 June 2012. The forum was dedicated to "challenges and trends in skills and career development of the European workforce" and focused on companies' approaches to skills development of both adult workers and young people. The Forum had plenary sessions and parallel workshops on the identification of skills needs by companies, the role of formal learning and of work-based learning in competence development, the role of companies in promoting youth employment and the EU support of vocational education and training. The conclusions and detailed reports would be made available on a dedicated Forum page (http://ec.europa.eu/education/vocational-education/forum_en.htm). He then presented a snapshot video of the event.

The Belgian representative of the government group pointed out that the event would have benefited from a stronger thematic focus and greater SMEs participation.

The employers group welcomed the event, while recognizing that time constraints had made it difficult for more companies to participate. She also suggested inviting more SMEs to the next forum.

The trade unions group regretted the low participation of trade unions. He also criticized that trade unions had not been involved in the organization of the event.

Jan Varchola clarified that the choice for large companies was made deliberately as a starting point and that SMEs would be involved more extensively in the future.

The Chair concluded that the forum had been successful, with lessons for future editions, and proposed to have a preparatory meeting with stakeholders for the event organised in 2014.

b. Results from the Danish Presidency “VET Business Partnership” Conference and the DGVT meeting

Jan Reitz Jorgensen reported about the results of the Danish Presidency conference of 24-25 April on “VET Business Partnerships Promoting New Skills, Innovation and Growth for the Future” and the DGVT meeting of 23-24 April. A major outcome of the last DGVT meeting was the adoption, by the Directors General for Vocational Training, of the statement “Promoting VET-Business Cooperation and Partnerships in Vocational Education and Training” aimed at enhancing the delivery process of the objectives agreed in the Bruges Communiqué. The Conference outcomes can be downloaded from: http://www.eng.uvm.dk/~UVM-EN/Content/News/Eng/2012/120529-EU-conference-on-the-challenges-of-vocational-education-and-adult-learning

The Polish representative of the employers group called for a wide dissemination of the conference conclusions.

c. Progress of the work on work-based learning and VET excellence

Aline Juerges (DG EAC/B4) gave an update of the work on a vademecum on work-based learning in initial VET for which participants received an information note before the meeting. She recalled the background of the initiative, the working method and the main content. An expert group
meeting had been organised the previous day which several ACVT members had attended. The document is planned to be finalised in the autumn.

The **government group** representative was glad to see that the document will be a short and practical tool.

The **employers group** representative said that the group would have liked to have access to the material beforehand. The Austrian employers representative expressed his surprise that the material did not seem to address the institutional structures involved in the process which influence the companies' and federations' involvement in the governance of work-based learning. The representative of CEEP stressed that the right circumstances needed to be created for quality training to happen. In particular the question of which support would be offered to companies needed to be answered.

The **trade unions** representative underlined the need to mention the actors involved in work-based learning. He expressed the hope that the vademecum will be a constantly reviewed instrument on how work-based learning is organised in different Member States. The UK representative of the **trade unions group** who had participated in the expert workshop the previous day underlined that the role of social partners would be considered in the document.

The Chair agreed with the vision shared by the trade unions group that this is an on-going work.

In relation to the work on excellence, João Delgado (DG EAC/B4) explained that due to time constraints, the agenda item on VET excellence would be cancelled. Further to a comment by the **trade unions group** that the concept of vocational excellence should not be limited to economic competitiveness, Mr. Delgado replied that the note sent to the ACVT was a working document and invited ACVT members to contact either him or Jan Varchola with further comments.

**Proposal for an ET 2020 Annual Peer Review (Additional item)**

João Delgado, Head of Unit EAC/B4 chaired the meeting from this point.

Fiorella Perotto (DG FAC/A1) gave an update of the planned pilot peer review likely to be organised on 17 September within the ET 2020 framework. An information note on the peer review, including the country-specific recommendations (CRS) 2012, was sent to the ACVT prior to the meeting.

She explained that after the peer review, a concise report would be drawn up by the Commission and circulated for comments. On the basis of the report, the presidency and the Commission would report at the informal Council in October. The reporting would help to prepare the Council Conclusions in November. The report would be circulated also to relevant thematic working groups which could take the discussion further.

João Delgado emphasized that 8 of the 2012 CSRs referred to skills and 11 CSRs addressed the area of VET with a particular focus on work-based training and apprenticeships. He stressed that peer reviews were likely to become a regular exercise in the future.

The spokesperson of the **employers group** stated that the information note did not refer to the involvement of social partners in the peer review. She also enquired whether the review would involve all Member States or only those having received a CSR.
The Austrian member of the government group questioned the term "peer review" explaining that it could be misleading and suggested instead the term "policy review". The ownership of the process needed to be clear and reflected in the terminology. He also questioned the learning dimension of such a review. He feared that the review would trigger a defensive approach from participants.

The spokesperson of the trade unions group welcomed the presentation but questioned the consistency of this exercise with current restrictive budget policies in many Member States. The representative of the government group asked if the peer review could be moved to a later date. He also questioned the likely degree of detail and quality of the review’s outcomes and how useful these would be for the ministerial meeting.

Fiorella Perotto replied that the peer review was conceived as a collective learning exercise of Member States. The aim was not to give any recommendations to Member States but to have a review between peers and to have the results eventually endorsed by the Council. The review would not involve social partners, but only government representatives, discussing their policies among "peers". Social partners however could be consulted through other fora such as the Education and Training 2020 Forum. The Member States would be asked to nominate two delegates per country. Replying to the trade unions group, who questioned the cuts in national education and training budgets despite the need for reforms, Ms Perotto observed that the aim of the European Semester was precisely to ensure consistency between economic policies and reforms. In reply to the question on whether all Member States will participate in the exercise, she emphasized that the latter would enrol on a voluntary basis. She also reassured the government group that an explicit purpose of the review is to deliver useful results to the ministerial meeting.

The Chair concluded that participants will be kept informed on the peer review and that the item would be discussed at following ACVT meetings.

5. TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION TO THE LABOUR MARKET

a) "Implementation" of the employability benchmark
Richard Deiss (DG EAC/A4) presented the new benchmark on the employment rate of young people and other benchmarks and indicators in the fields of education and employment. The new benchmark on employment states that by 2020, the share of employed graduates (20-34 years old) having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year should be at least 82% (as compared to 76.5% in 2010).

The Italian representative of the government group requested information about the expert group to work on the issue as announced in the Council conclusions. She drew attention to the use of the correct terminology, i.e. a European reference level (benchmark) and not a target.

Richard Deiss said that the setup of such a group would be announced in the near future and the ACVT be kept informed.

b) Commission study on the apprenticeship supply in Member States
Christiane Westphal (DG EMPL/C3) presented a comprehensive study released in April on the Apprenticeship Supply in Member States. The report offers an overview of apprenticeship-type schemes, discusses their effectiveness in raising employability and facilitating labour market transition and provides recommendations for improving the functioning and performance of VET schemes.
The spokesperson of the employers group informed that Business Europe had released a report with recommendations on how to improve the quality and image of apprenticeships, through for example the use of the European Social Fund and the future Erasmus for All programme.

While welcoming the study, she underlined that it referred mainly to weaknesses of apprenticeships. The only positive aspect of apprenticeships mentioned was the smooth transition to the labour market. She further highlighted that in the case of Germany the economic crisis had not hit the apprentices as indicated in the summary report. The decline of apprenticeship contracts was mainly due to the demographic development and not the crisis. In general the country descriptions were not very accurate.

The Polish employers' representative said that the study was in line with international concerns. For example, Australian researchers had found that apprenticeship systems can be an antidote for the crisis. He also referred to the significant investment of the US government to develop apprenticeship schemes.

The representative of the trade unions group welcomed the study. However, he warned against the use of broad definitions by stating that if the definition of apprenticeships is kept as broad as was the case in the study, there was the risk of no clarity and it would be more difficult to lay down quality conditions. He also referred to the need for a systematic application of the EQF and to put in place minimum standards.

Christiane Westphal acknowledged that enhancing apprenticeships is a topic which was also discussed within the G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial meeting. She recalled that many countries are reforming their VET systems in order to bring in more work-based learning and that in 13 Member States more and more apprenticeship-type learning happens at ISCED level 5.

c) Quality framework for traineeships

Else Husa (DG EAC/ B4) presented the Commission Staff Working Document on a Quality Framework for Traineeships which is under public consultation until 11 July.

The government group representative acknowledged the complexity of a quality framework and drew attention to the fact that the scope of the document seemed too narrow and was apparently not including VET students. He also enquired about the final form of the document, whether it would be a simple checklist or a binding document. The representative recalled the need to link this framework to current quality tools, such as EQAVET.

The trade unions group welcomed the proposal as a good initiative heading in the right direction. The social partners should be strongly involved in the design of the framework. A clear distinction between traineeships and apprenticeships should be made. The framework should include the following mandatory provisions: the prohibition of staff replacement by trainees, clear duration and a "no successive traineeships" clause and detailed provisions on the labour terms. Furthermore, measures should be in place in case of non-compliance with the mandatory provisions.

The CEEP representative with the employers group supported the trade unions view on the importance of social partners' involvement. One special concern was the support offered to companies to be able to host trainees for which she suggested using European funding. She also stressed the value of platforms gathering networks of stakeholders who exchange best practices.

The employers group representative expressed her scepticism with regard to this initiative as the target groups were not sufficiently clear and seemed not to include apprentices. She questioned whether such a framework would be useful because of the difficulty to accommodate so many
differences between countries. The group also referred to the quality tools already used in the area of mobility.

João Delgado reminded the ACVT of the important role of EU transnational mobility schemes and thus the legitimacy to act at European level. He expressed the need for more transparency and access to information with regard to the legal and regulatory differences relevant to traineeships between Member States. He also highlighted the need to strike a balance between, on the one hand, measures which ensure that companies offer a quality learning experience during the traineeship and, on the other, avoiding an unduly burdensome approach.

Else Husa clarified that VET students who are doing traineeships which are either an optional or compulsory part of their curricula are indeed included in the scope. Apprenticeships are not included as these schemes are more strongly regulated. Leonardo da Vinci transnational trainees include both apprentices and students from school-based VET; both categories are doing traineeships abroad.

Marco Fantini (DG EMPL) replied that the Commission is definitely not intending to discourage companies from hosting trainees and underlined that quality assurance is also beneficial to companies themselves. He also referred to the varying skills gaps and employment situations between countries and recalled that in this respect, ensuring a proper mobility of people is fundamental.

6. CEDEFOP ON THE STATE OF PLAY OF THE BRUGES MONITORING

Mara Brugia (Cedefop) gave an update on the monitoring of the progress in implementing the priorities for vocational education and training within the Copenhagen process. She referred to the two key milestones: (a) interim stock-taking in 2012 focusing on progress in addressing the 22 short-term deliverables set at national level and (b) the fully-fledged VET policy report that Cedefop will produce in 2014.

The spokesperson of the government group asked whether the future Rethinking Skills Communication would include elements from the Bruges Communiqué monitoring process. The Belgian representative asked how the reporting would be done and in which document the results would be integrated.

On the latter point, Mara Brugia replied that the interim stock-taking will include fiches by country and by short-term deliverable and will be a Cedefop publication. She said that as Council Conclusions on VET were no longer foreseen, the outcomes of the interim-stock taking will be presented at the DGVT meeting on 22-23 October, in Cyprus and possibly at the High Level Group in Dublin (December).

7. REPORT ON ETF ACTIVITIES

a) ETF work with social partners in the partner countries

Petri Lempinen (ETF) gave an update on the current situation of the social partners' involvement in the policy making and governance of VET in ETF's partner countries. There are many challenges faced by social partners in these countries, in particular the organisational framework, the low membership and the lack of resources.

b) Update on the Torino Process
Madlen Serhan, ETF Director, stated that the Torino process concerned 25 countries and was a policy learning exercise with the aim to develop ownership of VET. She referred to the recent inclusion of Libya into the cooperation process, while Turkmenistan and Syria remained outside. She also recalled that Croatia's participation in the Torino process was coming to an end since Croatia had become an EU candidate country.

8. INFORMATION POINTS

a) Synergies between the tools: EQF, ECVET and EQAVET
Sophie Weisswange (EAC/B4) presented the state of play of the existing cooperation actions to better link and cross-fertilise the work on the three tools. After a first joint seminar organised in Bonn in November 2011, a second joint seminar involving VET and HE experts will be organised in Paris on 1-2 October 2012. She mentioned that a proposal for a new mandate for the Learning Outcomes Group had been made at the last EQF Advisory Group meeting.

The representative of the trade unions group asked for the reasons behind reviving the Learning Outcomes Group. The representative of UEAPME welcomed the initiative and requested details on the procedure foreseen for the nomination of the group's members.

Ana-Carla Pereira (DG EAC/A2) explained that the EQF Advisory Group aims at a more pro-active Learning Outcomes Group in order to ensure the needed convergence amongst tools. The Group would most likely be a cross-sectorial one but this will be discussed at the next EQF Advisory Group. On the nomination procedure, she replied that this was not yet clarified but reassured social partners that they would be invited to participate.

b) Progress on VET Trainers Thematic Working Group
Mara Brugia (CEDEFOP) presented the mandate and the scope of this group, as well as the planned activities.

c) Rethinking Skills Communication
Ana-Carla Pereira (DG EAC/A2) gave an update on the planned Commission communication on Rethinking Skills which is planned to be adopted in November.

The future communication has a threefold focus on: relevance and level of qualifications and skills, necessary reforms for open and flexible learning, funding and partnerships. The Communication will be accompanied by a several Staff Working Documents on the following topics:
1. Education and training monitor (as announced in the ET 2020 Joint report);
2. Teaching professions;
3. Excellence in VET and work-based learning;
4. Language competences (a new benchmark on languages will soon be adopted);
5. Evidence on lifelong learning.

The Communication will be timed with the next Annual Growth Survey/European Semester.

d) Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on informal and non-formal learning
Ana-Carla Pereira (DG EAC/A2) presented the state of play of the proposal which had now reached the inter-service consultation stage. It is expected that the recommendation will be adopted at the Education Council of November. Once adopted, the Commission plans to organise a working
seminar to discuss ways of implementing the recommendation. Governments, social partners, youth organisations and others interested in validation will be invited.

e) Update on the upcoming Cypriot presidency
Andreas Eleftheriou set out the education and training themes of the Cypriot presidency. João Delgado closed the meeting and thanked participants for their active participation and announced that next year’s ACVT meeting will take place in Leipzig on the occasion of the World Skills competition (planned dates 1-2 July 2013).