ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING
MEETING OF 19-20 NOVEMBER 2012

MINUTES

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair, Antonio Silva Mendes welcomed the members.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES

The minutes of the ACVT meeting of 29 June 2012 were adopted without any changes.

4. INFORMATION NOTE ON LATEST DEVELOPMENTS/Q&A

The Chair informed the ACVT that the Commission Communication on Rethinking Education was planned for adoption on 20 November.

Risto Raivio (DG EAC/B4) explained the reasons behind the information note. The aim was to update the ACVT on recent developments without making those agenda items. In the past, too many presentations on the agenda had limited the opportunity for discussion.

The employers group representative thanked the Commission for the note. On the European Skills Passport he asked its added value for employers.

UEAPME referred to Cedefop’s mid-term review of the Progress towards the Bruges Communique and the need for progress in the area of data collection and the transition of young people into the labour market and employability. To this end, she asked what type of incentives and good practices the study had identified, as well as referring to the work undertaken by EQAVET on case studies and the employability benchmark.

The Swedish government representative stated that the note was helpful but some of the issues needed further discussion, such as Europass/Skills Passport.

The French government representative thanked the Commission for the note and welcomed that the contact details of the responsible Commission official were included. He then
highlighted the contradiction between the need for more apprenticeship places and companies' reluctance to take on apprentices, as the crisis had obliged them to make many of their employees redundant.

The Italian government representative suggested discussing Cedefop's Bruges mid-term review. During the crisis, Member States did not necessarily focus on the same short-term deliverables of the Bruges Communiqué. A discussion was needed on which deliverables were still relevant.

The trade unions representative welcomed the information note. On the point of the different transparency tools, the Commission could make a short description of these tools to be disseminated to citizens.

In response to questions, the Commission provided the following additional information:

**European Skills Passport/Europass**
Carlo Scatoli (DG EAC/A2) presented the changes in Europass which are being prepared. He highlighted the evaluation process of Europass, EQF and EQAVET which could result in one single final report plus different working papers. Europass documents will soon focus on two elements: the Europass CV and the European Skills Passport. Through the Europass portal users will be able to complete their CV and compose their European Skills Passport, by linking the relevant CV section to the relevant document of the Skills Passport. This will provide for a comprehensive portrait of the skills of an individual.

Another development is a new document, the "Europass Experience", a sort of companion of the Europass Mobility document which mentions skills acquired through mobility experiences. This underlines the close links which exist between Europass and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Europass documents, the future Europass Experience and the existing ones, such as the Language Passport or the Europass Mobility, will help citizens to identify their skills and may contribute to their documentation. This can open the way to validation by competent authorities.

**Update on EQAVET**
Sophie Weisswange (DG EAC/B4) reported on the main outcomes of the EQAVET meeting of 15-16 November. The recent national progress reports gathered on the implementation of EQAVET in the Member States had shown that EQAVET was known at system level: 24 countries have national reference points and 19 countries developed a national approach. The meeting also confirmed that a more user-friendly language was needed to inform the final user about EQAVET. She mentioned that social partners are present in all EQAVET instances. EQAVET is currently under external evaluation which will contribute to the drafting of the report on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of EQAVET in 2013.

**Mid-term review of the progress towards the Bruges Communiqué (2010-2012)**
Mara Brugia (Cedefop) presented this point. According to Cedefop mid-term review, progress had been made on the implementation of EQF/NQF and EQAVET, the attractiveness of VET and work-based learning (WBL). Countries seemed to have shifted their focus from continuous VET/Adult Learning to initial VET, which included measures to prevent early leaving from VET and support the transition from general education to VET.

Among the issues on which limited progress had been made was the monitoring of the transition and employability of VET graduates. There was also limited progress across countries regarding incentives, such as those to encourage partnerships for creativity and innovation or public-private partnerships. Another challenge for Member States was the
implementation of ECVET. Cedefop’s synthesis report is expected to be online by the end of December 2012.

The German government representative mentioned the need to look carefully into the quality of the data used in Cedefop's mid-term review. Some Member States did not have the right infrastructure in place to collect data and these differences needed to be acknowledged. On the implementation of ECVET, he explained that the credit system was not yet implemented by Member States as it was still being tested until 2014.

The French government representative thanked Cedefop for the work and asked for sending the report directly to the ACVT once it was available. He also asked not to introduce new tools for Member States to be able to consolidate those already in place.

The Chair concluded that there was no time to wait for the Copenhagen process to prove its success and requested immediate action. He also highlighted the need to increase the number of apprenticeships and to better involve SMEs. In this context he referred to the initiative for a "European Alliance for Apprenticeships" which would also be announced in the Commission Communication on Rethinking Education.

5. GOVERNANCE OF THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS

The Chair referred to the governance note sent to the ACVT members in advance. He explained that this note had also been discussed at the last meeting of the DGVT in October.

The trade unions representative welcomed the approach to make the ACVT more effective. She recalled that the ACVT was established in 1963 by a Council decision laying down its Rules. In the recent past, meetings had developed into an information session rather than a discussion forum; yet the committee could be useful as a platform to discuss VET-related policy issues. She also asked for the official mandate of the DGVT (The question was answered by the German government representative, see below).

The employers group representative shared the views of the trade unions, considering that the committee needed to give input before decisions are taken. He agreed with the proposal to combine the ACVT Bureau and the Copenhagen working group meetings.

On behalf of the government group, the French government representative stated that the group wanted to become more efficient and improve the preparations of the committee at national level. To this end, he asked to provide everyone with the ACVT membership list.

The German government representative recalled the mandate and history of the ACVT, stressing its "consultative" role. In the meantime, the ACVT had become an ex-post group which received information instead of being consulted on Commission initiatives. In response to the trade unions question on a DGVT "mandate", he explained that the DGVT was an informal group without rules/mandate. He proposed that the DGVT could develop into a kind of forward-looking policy "think-tank".

Conclusions by the Chair:

The Commission will reflect on a more specific proposal taking into consideration the following key points of the debate:

- The role of the ACVT as advisory committee should be reinforced. The more informal DGVT could develop into a forward-looking policy "think tank".

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• There is room for synergy gains by combining the ACVT Bureau and the Copenhagen WG.
• For better coordination at national level, the ACVT membership list and the contact lists for all VET groups should be sent to the committee.

6. COMMISSION COMMUNICATION ON RETHINKING EDUCATION


The Dutch government representative enquired about the relation between the Communication and the accompanying documents. The Chair clarified that the Rethinking Education Communication sets the key messages which were then further developed in the accompanying Staff Working Documents.

The French government representative asked whether the Staff Working Document on VET included good practice examples. He also highlighted the need to clearly distinguish between trainers in IVET (diploma in France) and CVET (no diploma required in France) whose pedagogical preparation is different. He also recommended a better use of the structural funds (ESF and ERDF) for education and training purposes.

The employers group representative welcomed the presentation and asked the Commission to clarify how the issue of engaging companies in CVET had been tackled.

Jan Varchola replied that best practices were included in the Staff Working Document. The full background report related to vocational excellence with detailed description of best practices would soon be published. On the issue of trainers’ qualifications, the document did not go into such detail. However, a specific thematic working group on VET trainers had been set up, where the issues related to trainers could be addressed.

Concerning the use of the structural funds, he explained that the Europe 2020 process with its country specific recommendations (CRSS) play a crucial role in mainstreaming VET into structural reforms of Member States. The CSRs have direct implications on the current negotiations of the structural funds for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) where VET would be a strong priority. Regarding the engagement of companies, the Staff Working Document included a chapter on the financing of CVET.

Conclusions by the Chair:

• Based on the content of the Staff Working Document on VET, follow-up measures should be organised, for example discussions on concrete good practice examples.

7a) WORK-BASED LEARNING IN INITIAL VET

Aline Jürges (DG EAC/B4) presented the Commission work on work-based learning in initial VET and the main messages related to it in the Rethinking Education Communication and the upcoming Youth Employment Communication due to be adopted on 5 December.

The Rethinking Education Communication and its Staff Working Document on VET acknowledge the value of WBL in increasing youth employment and economic competitiveness. Three options are mentioned on how Member States can invest in WBL: 1)
alternance schemes or apprenticeships; 2) on-the-job training periods in companies, and 3) WBL integrated in school-based programmes, such as workshops, practice firms, simulations or real business project assignments.

The future Youth Employment Communication will focus more on apprenticeships as an efficient instrument for transition and improving youth employment. Three success factors are mentioned in this regard: partnerships (cooperation between VET schools, business and social partners), high quality and a clear regulatory framework, which should set appropriate incentives for employers to engage in apprenticeships. The need for a strong engagement of employers to provide for quality apprenticeships is highlighted.

Concerning the vademecum on WBL which was agreed as one of the Bruges communiqué deliverables, work had progressed well and it is planned to publish a document on WBL in 2013.

7b) EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

Alison Crabb (DG EAC/B4) presented the plans mentioned in the Communication on Rethinking Education for the Commission to set-up an EU-level Alliance for Apprenticeships to support developments in work-based learning, including Member State efforts to develop apprenticeships or apprenticeship-type training, typically known in Austria and Germany as the "dual system".

The Alliance should bring together Member State authorities, business and social partners, in order to promote mutual learning and experience sharing. Alliance activities could include: - peer learning activities on specific issues (e.g. involving SMEs, incentives for employers, monitoring learning outcomes, methods and content for training the trainers, etc); - practice-based policy guidance on these issues; - better use of relevant project results (LLP-Leonardo); - improved recognition of apprenticeship training abroad (through EQF and ECVET).

Alliance activities will assist those Member States which have received a country-specific recommendation on VET to prepare and implement reforms. The alliance would not create another governance structure but rather find a way of federating efforts.

The Alliance initiative was fully in line with the current German Education Ministry initiative to work closely together with a number of Member States to support the development of high-quality VET with a strong focus on work-based learning and apprenticeships. A Memorandum on Cooperation in Vocational Training is expected to be signed on 11 December in Berlin.

The German government representative suggested organising a working group within the ACVT on the issue of how to involve SMEs better in apprenticeships/WBL. The idea was supported, notably by DIHK, UEAPME, the French government representative and ETUC.

Conclusions by the Chair:

- Agreed to a workshop on the involvement of SMEs in WBL and invited the ACVT to send their ideas. (The Commission has sent the workshop invitation in the meantime).
7c) WORK-BASED LEARNING- PRESENTATION BY SOCIAL PARTNERS

The social partners presented their role in developing work-based learning in Member States. Each presentation was made around three points indicated previously by the Commission: a) key features of the involvement of social partners in the presented case; b) main challenges in implementing WBL in their home country; c) conditions for having a successful model.

The trade unions representatives presented case studies from Lithuania and Spain and a survey ETUC had undertaken on the topic among their national federations.

The employers presented two case studies from Czech Republic and Poland.

8. UPDATE ON THE UPCOMING IRISH PRESIDENCY

Julie Anderson from the Permanent Representation of Ireland set out the education and training themes for the Irish Presidency.

Antonio Silva Mendes closed the meeting and thanked participants for their active contribution. He announced that next year’s ACVT meeting will take place in Leipzig on the occasion of the World Skills competition (planned dates: 2-3 July 2013).