

RIGA CONCLUSIONS 2015

ON A NEW SET OF MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES IN THE FIELD OF VET FOR THE PERIOD 2015-2020, AS A RESULT OF THE REVIEW OF SHORT-TERM DELIVERABLES DEFINED IN THE 2010 BRUGES COMMUNIQUÉ

PREAMBLE: Declaration of the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training – of EU Member States, Candidate Countries, European Economic Area Countries

We, the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training (VET) met in the Baltic city of Riga on 22 June 2015 to renew our efforts in raising the overall quality and status of VET in the context of the Copenhagen process, in order to meet the ET 2020 strategic objectives and to reaffirm our support for the wider European growth and jobs agenda.

We hereby recall the importance of investing in VET and skills' policies that, on one the hand, raise the employability of people, help to reduce current skills' mismatches and allow for smoother transitions into employment and, on the other hand, promote personal development of individuals and thus contribute to increasing quality of life. **We remain convinced** that all groups merit our full attention and commitment in this respect.

We will build on the achievements of our cooperation agreed in the Copenhagen declaration (2002) and reaffirmed in the Communiqués of Maastricht (2004), Helsinki (2006), Bordeaux (2008) and Bruges (2010). **We commit ourselves** to implement VET reforms in compliance with national, regional and local developments and demands. Where applicable, our actions in the period 2015-2020 will focus on **five medium-term deliverables** as defined in the **Riga Conclusions**. **We will reiterate** these five deliverables in the discussion on the future priorities of the ET 2020 Strategic Framework.

We highly value the existing dialogue and cooperation with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, such as chambers and various competent institutions. **We will continue contributing** to raised quality and attractiveness of accessible and inclusive VET at all education levels by encouraging further cooperation between social partners, VET providers, learners, parents, companies, public employment services, chambers, teachers and trainers, guidance personnel and other stakeholders.

We will step up efforts to better understand the skills needed in the labour market, including by closely monitoring sectoral and regional trends, and to exploit this understanding to improve education and training policies and underpin learning and career guidance and counselling.

We will commit ourselves to long-term policies through effective investment, enhanced strategic partnerships and increased cooperation to promote innovation and excellence in VET, as well as to strengthen permeable and flexible pathways for a competitive European VET.

We will combine our efforts to encourage the effective use of EU transparency tools, and in particular of the European Qualifications Framework, as a common reference for EU comparison and transparency to facilitate mobility of students and workers in Europe. In this respect we invite the European Commission to explore ways to make such tools more effective and easily accessible to individuals and relevant stakeholders.

We are determined to further contribute to the international competitiveness of the labour force developed by the European VET systems and to improved recognition of VET qualifications in Europe and global context.

We, the Ministers:

- **Firmly intend** to implement the commitments expressed in the Riga Conclusions and explore alternative ways of funding and partnerships to meet the five medium-term deliverables;
- **Invite the future EU Presidencies** to build on the discussions held in Riga on 22 June 2015 and the Riga Conclusions, when setting out future priorities for European cooperation in VET.
- **Invite the European Commission** to develop, in cooperation with Member States, social partners and stakeholders, a VET and skills agenda with a view to strengthening European cooperation in VET and to boosting employability and competitiveness.
- **Express our resolution** to continue our discussion on the current and future challenges for a competitive European VET in the light of the Copenhagen process in the period 2015 to 2020 and beyond.

The RIGA CONCLUSIONS:

Agreed by the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of countries participating in the Copenhagen process (hereafter: 'participating countries'):

- of the EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark¹, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom);
- of the EU Candidate Countries (Albania, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey);
- of the EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway).

Agreed by the European Social Partners (ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP).

Agreed by the European Commission, and

Supported by the European level VET providers' associations (EVTA, EFVET, EURASHE, EUCEN, EUproVET, EVBB) by issuing a joint Declaration in support of the Riga Conclusions

FROM COPENHAGEN TO BRUGES AND RIGA

The **Riga Conclusions**² present the role of vocational education and training (VET) in the context of the growth and jobs agenda and the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). It aims at reaching agreement among the participating countries, EU level social partners and the European Commission on a **new set of medium-term deliverables for the period 2015 – 2020** in the context of the Bruges Communiqué³ adopted in 2010 as part of the overall Copenhagen process launched in 2002⁴.

The new deliverables **reinforce the 2020 vision for VET**. They contribute to the key challenges and the progress to be made. Compared to the period 2011-2014, they are substantially streamlined and reduced in number. At the same time, the continuity with previous deliverables is maintained.

Due attention will be paid to transversal areas and principles which are crucial for achieving the deliverables and for modernising VET: strong **partnerships with social partners and other relevant stakeholders such as chambers and various competent institutions**; efficient **funding** and promotion of **excellence and innovation** in VET; consistent **use of the learning outcomes** approach and the commonly **developed tools and principles**. This includes: setting up comprehensive validation arrangements by 2018 as agreed in the 2012 Council Recommendation⁵. In addition, the European Commission and the Member States should also commit, in cooperation with all VET stakeholders, to targeted **communication** and appropriate **visibility of the achievements of European cooperation in VET (Copenhagen process)**.

¹ Subject to government endorsement.

² These Conclusions include Annex 1, Annex 2 and Annex 3 that form an integral part of the Riga Conclusions. The socio-economic and institutional background in Annex 1 gives an overview of the foundations of the new medium-term deliverables. The EU level activities, listed in Annex 2, will support the implementation and monitoring of the above mentioned deliverables in participating countries. Annex 3 provides a list of examples of policy options linked to the new deliverables

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf

⁵ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01))

THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SET OF MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES 2015-2020

With a view to developing high quality and labour market relevant vocational skills and qualifications, based on the learning outcomes approach:

1. Promote **work-based learning** in all its forms⁶, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.
2. Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the EQAVET recommendation⁷ and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous **information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes**.

For people's informed choice of pathways and long-term employability and adaptability to evolving skills needs:

3. Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all through** more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.
4. Further **strengthen key competences**⁸ in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.

In support of successful implementation of reforms and to raise the overall quality and efficiency of VET:

5. Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings**.

⁶ According to Cedefop, work-based learning refers to knowledge and skills acquired through carrying out – and reflecting on – tasks in a vocational context, either at the workplace [...] or in a VET institution. For IVET, according to the Commission report from 2013 (Work-based learning in Europe: Practices and Policy pointers), there are three forms of work-based learning: 1) alternance schemes or apprenticeships typically known as the "dual system", 2) work-based learning as school-based VET which includes on-the-job training periods in companies and 3) work-based learning integrated in a school-based programme, through on-site labs, workshops, kitchens, restaurants, junior or practice firms, simulations or real business/industry project assignments.

⁷ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1430316040997&uri=CELEX:52014DC0030>

⁸ As defined in the corresponding Recommendation from 2006, the 8 key competences consist of communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. The Recommendation also refers to fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT as essential foundation for learning. Learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative-taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression are considered 'transversal key competences' (Council conclusions 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative).

ANNEX 1

THE CONTEXT FOR DEFINING THE MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES

VET's role in the European growth and jobs agenda

As in 2010, Europe still faces enormous economic and social challenges with very high levels of youth unemployment in many Member States, an adult workforce of which one quarter lacks basic skills, a strong need for up-skilling of the workforce due to changes in labour market requirements, including increasing use of new technologies, an evident mismatch of skills supply and demand that hinders economic growth and job creation, and reduced public and private financial resources due to budgetary consolidation processes.

Given these challenges, a much more prominent role has been attributed to ***VET in the overall growth and jobs agenda***. The contribution of VET, particularly work-based learning and apprenticeships, to fight youth unemployment, to ensure better match between training and labour market needs and to ease transitions to employment is now more widely recognised. As an indication of the urgency of reforms in this sector, a considerable number of country specific recommendations adopted within the European Semester are related to VET. The Rethinking Education Communication (2012)⁹ stressed the need to invest in building world-class VET systems and increase participation in work-based learning. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships, Youth Guarantee as well as the Youth employment initiative – all launched in 2013 – confirmed the crucial role of VET in increasing the employability of young people. Learning in the workplace is also an effective way to re-train and up-skill adults. Ensuring learning opportunities for all, especially disadvantaged groups, remains a major challenge, as the renewed adult learning agenda underlined. The potential of continuing VET, which can respond flexibly to short-term needs and helps improve citizens' employability and enterprises' competitiveness, is not yet fully used.

The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker has identified growth and job creation as the first priority objective of the European Commission (2014-2019). Development of skills and competences of the European workforce is key to this objective, including promotion of quality VET and lifelong learning. Candidate Countries also share these aspirations.

From Copenhagen to Bruges and Riga

Work on modernising VET does not start from scratch. It has been subject of enhanced political cooperation between Member States, EEA and Candidate Countries, European level social partners and the European Commission for more than a decade – known as Copenhagen process. They committed themselves to supporting mobility for work and learning and making access to lifelong learning easier through: more transparency and easier recognition of qualifications and competences, improved quality of VET and better information and guidance. A series of Communiqués has guided this work on common priorities.

The Bruges Communiqué, adopted in 2010, combined a long-term vision with short-term actions. Building on the agreed principles and in line with the overall framework for education and training (ET 2020), it defines an ambitious agenda to contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Aiming to support employability and economic growth and help promote social cohesion and respond to broader societal challenges, it stresses the dual objective of VET: excellence and inclusion.

The Bruges Communiqué and, in particular, its set of short-term deliverables for the period 2011 - 2014, has helped EU and Candidate Countries focus and implement reforms, as Cedefop's and ETF's progress analyses show.¹⁰ The review points to a focus on overall system reforms, quality assurance,

⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1389776578033&uri=CELEX:52012DC0669>

¹⁰ The text in this section provides a summary of the main findings presented in Cedefop (2015): *Stronger VET for better lives – monitoring report on vocational education and training policies 2010-2014*. This report includes ETF's monitoring on achievements in the candidate countries. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3067>
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9096>

work-based learning and labour market relevance of VET, also apparent from the ET2020 National Reports.¹¹

The work on learning-outcomes based national qualifications frameworks has facilitated many of these reforms. Frameworks that cover all types and levels of national qualifications have helped clarify how those acquired in VET relate to those obtained in general/academic programmes. National qualification frameworks are increasingly being linked to validation of non-formal learning and support countries in putting comprehensive validation systems into place. To help people progress in learning, find, maintain and advance in work within and across countries, the next step should be to move from a 'tool by tool' to a more integrated approach focused on user needs, make them widely known and use them systematically.

While most national agendas have focused on making VET more inclusive to help reduce early leaving and promote further learning among those at risk, less attention has been paid to promoting VET excellence through creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship – which could aid enterprise performance and job creation. Information on labour market outcomes is not yet sufficiently used to guide VET provision and continuing professional development for VET teachers and trainers¹² has also been less visible in national policies. Social partners have increasingly been involved in developing and implementing VET policies. However, involvement of employers and trade unions in VET governance and management could be strengthened.

The new deliverables should support the work of the countries and social partners endorsing the Riga Conclusions in implementing VET reforms, and in the case of EU Member States the developments called for in the country-specific recommendations issued in the area of VET in the framework of the European Semester. They are also an integral part of the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework and its priorities with a proposed identical policy cycle up to 2020. The links between the Copenhagen process as the European cooperation platform for VET and the ET 2020 Strategic Framework are of particular importance in ensuring consistency between VET and other sectors of education and training.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm#stock

¹² Professional development of VET teachers and trainers was not a specific short-term deliverable in the period 2011-2014.

ANNEX 2

EU LEVEL SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES

The following EU level activities will support the implementation of the above mentioned **deliverables** in the participating countries, as well as **the country-specific recommendations** within the European Semester. They will be supported by funding opportunities under ESIF and Erasmus+.

- **Assist participating countries or clusters of participating countries to implement VET reforms** (depending on their particular needs) through country specific support, including with the assistance of Cedefop and the ETF for participating countries in the form of country reviews, targeted national activities, policy learning fora, mutual learning and exchanges of good practices notably through the ET 2020 Working Groups on VET and Adult Learning, DGVT Peer Reviews as well as through facilitation of bilateral or multilateral cooperation arrangements between countries. Produce EU level evidence (e.g. study on higher VET in the EU) and policy guidelines (e.g. Guidelines for SME involvement in WBL), and organise EU level events (e.g. European Business Forum on Vocational Training).
- **Monitor and analyse progress** in the area of VET by Cedefop and the ETF, through a streamlined monitoring system with a use of newly developed indicators (related to prevalence and quality of work-based learning and mobility in I-VET) and available VET specific statistical data (implementation of ISCED 2011 in Labour Force Survey and UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT data collection), adapted to the new medium-term deliverables; monitor impact of VET initiatives supported by ESIF at national level.
- **Intensify support to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EaFA)** to boost the quality, supply and attractiveness of apprenticeships across Europe.
- EU level support to ensure **transparency and recognition tools** (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass and validation of non-formal and informal learning) are further developed and implemented in a more coherent and integrated way.
- Support **transnational mobility of VET learners and staff** (Erasmus+, ESIF, EURES, Your first EURES job), facilitate the development of adult educators (EPALE), address common EU level sector specific skills challenges (Sector Skills Alliances) and support policy reforms in VET (strategic partnerships, forward-looking projects).
- In addition, the European Commission assisted by Cedefop will support Member States in **targeted communication and visibility of the achievements of European cooperation in VET (Copenhagen process)** through concrete activities (visibility events, campaigns, promotional activities).

ANNEX 3
EXAMPLES OF POLICY OPTIONS LINKED TO THE NEW
MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES 2015-2020

The new deliverables provide more flexibility in their implementation at national level which is crucial given the considerable differences in VET across participating countries. Some of the deliverables will be more pertinent than others depending on each country's specific situation and needs. Similarly, a specific medium-term deliverable can be implemented in a different way depending on national circumstances. To cater for these differences, the medium-term deliverables are further supported by a second level of policy options which present an indicative and not prescriptive list of possible relevant measures that could be pursued to address a specific deliverable.

1. Promote **work-based learning (WBL)** in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers as well as stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.

Concrete actions could, for example, include mobilising initiatives at national level to boost the share of WBL in VET programmes in school-based programmes and those combining learning in schools and enterprises, as appropriate; mobilising actions to strengthen, review or introduce apprenticeships in the context of the EAfA, and integration of apprenticeships provided under Youth Guarantees in national VET systems; creating a clear regulatory framework (for WBL) taking into account existing regulations, industrial relations and education practices; setting up institutionalised intermediary support structures with involvement of chamber, business and sector organisations to manage administration related to work-based learning in companies; assist VET providers in finding training places for trainees and VET teachers and trainers in enterprises, and support SMEs in providing apprenticeship places (including incentives), etc.

2. Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the EQAVET recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous **information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes.**

Concrete actions could, for example, include further developing quality assurance (including a specific focus on work-based learning and C-VET), introducing incentives to VET providers to upgrade technological equipment, use information on VET graduate employability and a combination of data on learning, labour market entry and career; establish coherent systems for data collection and analysis and mechanisms to feed back the results of the monitoring to adapt VET provision; develop capacities of local and regional authorities and VET providers to use the information for designing curricula, development of occupational profiles and the content of VET qualifications at all levels in response to new economic and technical requirements; ensure that the use of outcomes of VET is systematically used as part of quality assurance systems, including those in C-VET, use new opportunities for data collection and analysis such as big data, etc.

3. Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all** through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Concrete actions could, for example, include stepping up efforts to: set up systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning (agreement in the 2012 Council Recommendation to set such arrangements up by 2018); expansion of modularised offers of C-VET as a way to enable up-skilling of workers and a rapid response to emerging skills requirements; tackle the well-known barriers to accessing training for groups at risk, in particular low-skilled adults; expand training offers by using ICT tools, better integration of C-VET and active labour market policies; promote work-place learning and the creation of learning conducive work environments in companies for the working population; integrate guidance and counselling services provided by both education and employment sectors for both I-VET and C-VET, promote measures to foster inclusiveness of VET systems (including preventing

early leaving or second-chance-VET programmes leading to qualifications), continue work on implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks, linked to EQF, by embedding also qualifications obtained outside formal education and training systems; ensure greater institutional synergies between I-VET and C-VET providers (at regional, national and European levels), guidance and employment services and validation centres, etc.

4. Further **strengthen key competences** in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.

Concrete actions could, for example, include assessing the place of key competence in VET curricula, work on improving levels of basic skills of VET students as exemplified by PISA and PIAAC, strengthen provision of key competencies in VET, particularly in work-related training, promote innovative approaches to provide combined key competencies and work-specific skills, devote special attention to the development of entrepreneurial skills, etc.

5. Introduce systematic approaches and opportunities for **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings.**

Concrete actions for supporting initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers could, for example, include development and implementation of policies addressing VET teachers and trainers competence development underpinned by sustainable use and complementarity of national and EU funding (Erasmus +, ESIF, etc.); systematic approaches towards ensuring professional development of VET staff (including knowledge gathering, needs analyses, provision of learning opportunities, creating and expanding opportunities for validation and certification of trainers' prior learning and competences acquired at work as valid alternatives to formal training); effective partnerships of all relevant stakeholders (particularly companies) to support professional development of VET teacher and trainers (including arranging training placements for VET teachers directly in companies, incentives to support companies to invest in their trainers professional development);empowering and supporting bodies responsible for the professional development of VET teachers and trainers (including European and National networks of VET providers); promotional, information and awareness raising activities (through information services, sharing good practices, promotional events and awards for best training companies and VET trainers), etc.