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DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Skills

**Vocational training, apprenticeships and adult education**

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### **MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING 23-24 June 2016, BRUSSELS**

#### **MINUTES**

#### **1. OPENING AND WELCOME BY THE CHAIR**

The Chair, Mr Detlef Eckert (Director, DG EMPL, Directorate for Skills) welcomed the participants, in particular the representatives who were attending for the first time.

He gave an overview of the new Skills agenda for Europe, which was the underlying theme of most of the agenda items of the ACVT meeting, i.e. VET Skills week, higher VET, mobility etc. In this context, he recalled the 10 guiding principles<sup>1</sup> for a common policy on vocational training which had been adopted in 1963 and were - even today - very ambitious to reach. The BE Gov reminded that the legal context for European cooperation in the field of vocational training and education changed with the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) that introduced the subsidiarity principle for education (art.126) and for vocational training (art.127) having an impact on the 1963 Decision in particular on the harmonisation principle.

With reference to a strengthened coordination role for ACVT foreseen in the Skills agenda, he referred to the results of the on line survey carried out after the previous meeting and encouraged participants to be actively involved in the discussions.

#### **2. Skills agenda and Skills guarantee**

The Commission (Paul Holdsworth, DG EMPL E3, Vocational training, apprenticeships and adult education) presented the Skills guarantee proposal.

The Chair highlighted that the Skills agenda was a collective exercise in the Commission touching upon different policies. Other DGs, such as DG EAC, which was also represented at the meeting, had been involved.

Initial comments emphasised the strategic approach of the initiative but that this proposal needed first to be discussed by the Council and no decision should be taken that may pre-empt the results of the negotiations in the Council.

Governmental members requested that clearer links be made to the Riga medium term priorities agreed in 2015.

The employers group welcomed the mainstreaming of the digital skills aspects across the whole Skills Agenda and its related proposals. They welcomed the good data analysis to

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<sup>1</sup> Uploaded in circabc <https://circabc.europa.eu/w/browse/11ada6ce-aded-4908-9c73-e910f9c3c5c7>

support the Communication (also echoed by DE Gov) and the link made to the Semester process for implementation. In their opinion, basic skills would be more at level 2 or 3 of EQF than at level 4.

The Dutch representative, on behalf of the Governmental group, expressed doubts regarding the use of the term 'guarantee', in particular with regard to fears of raising expectations as to a legal right among potential beneficiaries (also echoed by other groups).

The governmental group questioned the proposals for streamlining governance and highlighted the need to involve Member States in proposals related to sectoral skills development.

The choice of EQF level 4 was questioned, as some countries and social partners indicated that already some EQF level 3 qualifications provide an appropriate level of skills (medium level). Some suggested using a more generic formulation 'relevant qualification for the labour market' while others indicated also that level 4 might create a further stigmatization of VET level 3 qualifications which would be counterproductive (BE Gov, FR Trade unions).

Some delegates also asked whether it would not be preferable to make a choice between the alternative options in the Skills guarantee i.e. provision of literacy, numeracy and digital skills or training towards a qualification.

The lack of additional funding supporting the proposal was regretted by many delegations (among others IT Gov, DE Gov, EU social partners), as ESF would not, in their view, allow funding to be redirected to these new priorities, and implementation would require considerable financing.

The Trade unions' spokesperson (ETUC) welcomed the reference to social partners in the Skills agenda, but noticed that in the Skills guarantee the national platforms and action plans did not mention social partners. According to them, social dialogue should be further strengthened (also echoed by UEAPME).

The FR trade union stated it was important to reach out to all potential learners to allow for upskilling, not only for short term employability, but also for the medium to longer term benefits. They mentioned a French certificate (CLEA) developed with social partners as a good example. They pointed also to the responsibility of employers to allow learning conducive working environments and jobs.

UEAPME welcomed the effort of the Skills agenda and the 3 steps approach of the Skills guarantee. How MS should reach out to the target groups was however not clear and might require considerable funds, so the emphasis should be on basic skills which is a concern for SMEs. On the EQF proposal, the approach taken for ensuring continuous updating of the referencing process was welcomed as well as the focus on transparency. The proposal to merge the EQF AG, considered to be functioning well, with other platforms and lack of reference to the international sectoral qualifications was regretted.

There was general agreement on the role of the ACVT in monitoring the Skills guarantee, subject to outcomes of the negotiations in the Council, and this would also allow social partners to be strongly involved. The German Gov delegate warned not to overload the ACVT with too many responsibilities.

The BE trade union invited to carefully think about indicators in the context of the assessment, especially about those allowing to avoid windfall effects.

The IT Gov called for ensuring synergy between the proposal for the Skills Guarantee and the Pillar of Social Rights. Member States called for a stronger coordination among the Commission services. In particular, the timing for the adoption of the action plans for the implementation of the Skills Guarantee was questioned (BE Gov, Trade unions), given that

the revision of the 2006 Key Competences Recommendation may not be finalised by then. Several Trade unions proposed to discuss the revision of the Key competences recommendation also in the ACVT.

The BE Gov representative requested clarifications on the role of PES.

The Chair explained that indeed no funding was available for the moment but reminded that the upcoming MFF negotiations might bring a bigger focus on skills in the future. He highlighted that, for the moment, it may be possible to re-direct and optimize the funds available, some of which were still not allocated. While acknowledging the role of PES as important, he stated that the Skills agenda did not concern only unemployed people.

He recalled that at the launch event for the Skills agenda, which took place a few days earlier, cooperation was the key word to make the Skills agenda a success, as well as better governance. He pointed out that the Skills agenda delivers on the priorities of Riga and it is fully coherent with them.

The Commission (Dana Bachmann, Head of Unit, DG EMPL E3) clarified the logic behind the double possibility of improving skills and getting a qualification in order to have a more inclusive and comprehensive approach. The concerns expressed by the participants were well noted.

The Commission (Koen Nomden, Team Leader, DG EMPL E2, Skills and qualifications) highlighted that the broader governance of the tools will have to be seen in conjunction with the revision of the Europass Decision that is being prepared.

The IT Gov Delegation informed the meeting that they will start using the online assessment tool developed by OECD for PIAAC, which had been mentioned during the meeting as a possible reference framework for assessing basic skills.

The learners' representative (Obessu) welcomed the agenda and guarantee and the role of vocational training therein; they stressed the importance of a personalized approach taking the needs of the learners into account in the implementation.

### **3. European Alliance for Apprenticeships**

The Commission (Mr Nöber Schöbel, Team leader, DG EMPL, E3) presented the work done in the recent months, the EAfA action plan for 2016 including upcoming events as well as a new Erasmus+ Call for Proposals (Key action 3) on VET-business partnerships with a strong link to regional strategies (Autumn 2016).

He commented that social partners would be in quantitative terms the second biggest stakeholder group after businesses, but that there would be potential for more pledges coming from sectoral European social partners joining the EAfA.

Employers gave an overview of their project on cost effectiveness of apprenticeships, highlighting the need for reforms making VET systems more responsive to the labour market and to ensuring cooperation among MS, social partners and VET providers. ETUC presented the final results of their project on a proposal for a European quality framework for apprenticeships, including 20 quality standards and a series of quality criteria for apprenticeships. .

Together, social partners explained their Joint Statement "Towards a Shared Vision of Apprenticeships" in which they call for a wider debate, particularly with the ACVT and which should pave the way for a tripartite opinion of employers, trade unions and Member states with the aim to foster quality and effective apprenticeships in Europe.

The Chair recalled the Skills Agenda where the Commission announced to help social partners to take forward the results of their joint projects.

The Dutch Presidency on behalf of the governmental group underlined the responsibility of national governments and the work some of them undertook to create national alliances. On the proposed benchmark to improve apprenticeships across Europe, Member States expressed some reservations.

The DE Gov member welcomed a strengthened work on apprenticeships and highlighted the need for social partners to have a proactive approach including clearly stating their needs (demand driven system) and their commitment (cost sharing, training of trainers and offer of positions).

The AT employers representative underlined that the cost effectiveness project was not meant to answer all issues for all types of apprenticeships, but to stress the need for a change of mind-set so that companies become co-owners see the return on investment in the long-term. He added that increased capacity building would be necessary for most of the social partners.

The BE Gov member proposed that the recommendations of the two projects would be reflected in the monitoring of the Riga objectives.

Acknowledging national differences in apprenticeship/work based learning systems some participants (CY trade union, DE Gov, DK Gov, AT empl, FR trade union) highlighted the need for a solid common basis of understanding as a condition for further discussions.

The ACVT agreed with the proposal of social partners to present a draft tripartite opinion at the next meeting of November.

The Chair concluded that the 21 September Bureau would prepare the work for the tripartite opinion and that a draft would be shared among all ACVT members in due time before the November meeting. He invited the members of the Bureau to keep their respective interest groups informed throughout the process.

#### **4. European Vocational Skills Week**

The Commission (Mr Joao Santos, Deputy Head of Unit, DG EMPL E3) provided an update on the ongoing preparations and latest planning of this event, which was announced in the Skills agenda and contributes to the proposals in the Riga Conclusions. Participants welcomed the initiative and were willing to contribute to the event (EU employers, trade unions).

Some suggestions were made to expand the wording in the visual identity for the event, but most participants agreed with the proposed logo and the visual identity.

Several examples were described (Business Europe), which could be linked to the Vocational Skills Week and a strong plea was made to ensure synergies between the national and European events, as well as to build on already existing good practices across Member States. The DE Employers suggested to link the week to a National event in Berlin on 5 December which will see high level participation.

ETUC called for building contacts between schools/ providers and social partners and they underlined the target groups should be the citizens.

Trade unions requested to discuss in the ACVT the results of the week afterwards. The role of Trade unions as VET providers was also underlined.

The IT Trade unions suggested to add to the events at national but also regional and local level, some good practices from other countries in order to highlight the European added value.

The Students' representative (Obessu) requested that young people are involved in the preparation of the Week.

Furthermore, the contribution of the young generation to the economic and societal development – thanks to participation in VET - should be better communicated (CH Trade unions).

The DK Gov representative welcomed the initiative but needed to discuss at country level with social partners before presenting concrete ideas. They called for a role for ACVT during the week.

The Chair agreed that this will be stressed in several communication campaigns.

Some participants explained that the proposed timing for the 2016 Week was not in line with their activities and was too short; for the future the spring period and a longer planning time would be better.

Several groups' representatives asked for a swift official communication on the Week to inform all stakeholders.

It was suggested that national events taking place shortly before or after the week of 5 to 9 December 2016, could also be communicated under the Vocational Skills week.

CEDEFOP and ETF expressed strong support for this initiative.

The Chair stated that DG EMPL will share with ACVT members information on how to submit proposals for events (link to webpage, e-form, and event mapping) when available. The Commission will send the official announcement on the organisation of the Vocational Skills Week by Commissioner Thyssen as well as a communication material that could be used by stakeholders for events linked to the European Vocational Skills Week.

## **5. Mobility in VET**

The Commission (Mr Felix Rohn, DG EMPL E3) presented an update on VET mobility statistics.

Cedefop provided an overview of the Mobility scoreboard prototype recently developed to identify and monitor the conditions for supporting IVET learner mobility in Europe and provide an evidence base for policy making in view of achieving the IVET mobility benchmark of 6%.

An event for the HE and IVET scoreboard is planned during the EU VET week on 8 December. The thematic coverage of the IVET scoreboard will be gradually increased to cover all the areas of the 'Youth on the move' Council recommendation by 2017.

## **6. Monitoring of Riga medium-term deliverables**

Cedefop and ETF gave a preliminary overview of the priorities identified by Member States and the Candidate countries regarding the medium-term deliverables up to 2020 and the monitoring process. Some DGVTs had not yet replied to the questionnaire and for some others clarifications had been requested.

For Candidate Countries, the follow-up of the MTDs needed to be in line with their Economic Reform Programmes and therefore, an impact assessment was also part of the MTD implementation process. The questionnaire was anyway the same as for Member States.

The highest priorities chosen by participating countries were work-based learning and apprenticeships (MTD 1) and access to VET and qualifications (MTD 3). For MTD5 on teachers and trainers, activities suggested by countries concerned mostly teachers.

The work to be undertaken under the priorities focused mostly on reforms and, to some extent, on additional funding.

Italy and Denmark showcased their recent reforms in VET and apprenticeships and how these were linked to the choice of their priorities.

The Chair invited the countries who had not yet submitted their choice of priorities to do so swiftly and highlighted that a more elaborated analysis of the measures taken by countries to address the deliverables, based on input by Cedefop's ReferNet, will be presented at the DGVT meeting in October 2016.

## **7. Higher VET**

The Commission (Ms Maria Todorova, DG EMPL E3) presented the findings of the recently published study on higher VET which was considered to become an emerging topic for the EU debate with a direct link to the Skills agenda.

Participants welcomed the presentation explaining the complexity of the topic and the diversity of approaches across the EU.

The governmental group expressed its doubts regarding the branding of HVET and did not see an added value in/would refrain from starting a new process. The DK Gov member suggested focusing future EU activities on promoting exchange and mutual learning.

Some participants regretted a lack of visibility of and recognition for HVET.

The French trade unions favoured more provision of HVET, in close cooperation with social partners, allowing also more permeability.

Employers (BusinessEurope, AT, UEAPME) indicated that they would envisage to foster HVET which closely responds to the requirements of the labour market, contributes to life-long learning and allows better permeability with higher education. In some countries, 'branding' would be necessary, without starting a new process. They welcomed further discussions on the topic.

BusinessEurope proposed to invite the Swiss representatives in one of the next meetings to provide a more in-depth presentation of their HVET system.

The Chair considered HVET as an opportunity to better respond to the transformation of the economy. He proposed continuing the discussions, by engaging further with national social partners.

## **8. EU Semester**

Due to time constraints and the strike of public transport, the item was not discussed but participants could send **comments or questions in writing by 11 July**. At the time of writing these minutes, no reactions had been received. The foreseen presentation by colleagues of DG EMPL A1 has been uploaded in circabc. A presentation, linked to the adoption in the autumn of the Annual Growth survey, could be provided at the next ACVT meeting.

## **9. Information note on latest E&T developments**

The discussion was limited to the results of an evaluation survey on the ACVT, due to time constraints and a strike of public transport. Participants could nevertheless **send comments or**

**questions for clarification** on the other topics dealt with in the information note, **by 11 July**. At the time of writing these minutes, no reactions had been received

Regarding the proposals on the ACVT, the trade unions and employers expressed the wish not to change the current seating arrangements in the meeting room. For the next survey on the ACVT meeting, ETUC suggested including a question to collect ideas for future agenda items as well as ideas on the format of the meeting. This suggestion was taken on board.

ETUC also asked for the results of the next survey to be further discussed at the next ACVT Bureau meeting.

Employers welcomed the suggestion of short exchanges taking place in small groups during the plenary and the possibility of informal thematic tables at the margins of the meeting. They welcomed the efforts to stimulate active exchanges in the ACVT.

## **10. Update by the upcoming Slovak Presidency**

The upcoming Slovak Presidency informed that the Directors General for Vocational Education and Training will meet in Bratislava on 19-20 October to discuss VET policies, in particular the Skills guarantee and the role of VET in the integration of migrants (based on a background paper being prepared by the AT Gov) as well as participate in a peer review on national reforms/policies in apprenticeships linked to commitments endorsed by countries under the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

A limited number of stakeholders from the European Alliance for Apprenticeships would also participate in the peer review.

The Slovak Presidency informed that a Lifelong learning week would take place at the same time,

## **11.AOB and Closing of the meeting**

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for **17-18 November 2016**. An "evaluation survey" concerning the meetings of the ACVT will be repeated (the link has been sent to the ACVT) [https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/ACVT\\_evaluation\\_2016](https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/ACVT_evaluation_2016).

From now on, the powerpoint presentations will be uploaded in circabc prior to the meetings, if possible, as requested during the previous evaluation survey - <https://circabc.europa.eu> .