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MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING

20-21 April 2017, BRUSSELS

Draft MINUTES

1. OPENING AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

The Chair welcomed the participants, in particular the new members attending for the first time, following the new round of nomination which took place at the beginning of the year. He introduced the agenda and announced a slight change in the order of the items, requested by ETUC. The meeting also took farewell from the Finnish governmental member, who was retiring, and wished her all the best.

2. NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE

A state of play was provided by the Chair on the implementation of the **Skills Agenda**: a Recommendation on Graduate tracking foreseen for adoption on 24 May; Digital Skills and Jobs Coalitions launched in December 2016; the topic of brain drain addressed by a study to be launched; a call under Erasmus+ for Blueprints ongoing. He underlined that the Skills profile tool and VET modernization would be tackled in the meeting the following day.

Ms Sonia Peressini, Deputy Head of Unit, DG EMPL/E2, Skills and Qualifications, informed the meeting that the EQF Recommendation was advancing and might be adopted by the Council before the summer. For Europass, the work will continue under the Estonian Presidency aiming at a 'trialogue' with the other Institutions starting in the autumn.

Mr Michael Teutsch, Head of Unit DG EAC/B2 School and Multilingualism, gave an overview of the ongoing reflection concerning the review of the Key Competences framework, for which an open public consultation was ongoing until 19 May.

Cedefop and ETF had provided a background paper and briefly reported on the uptake of key competences in VET in both EU Member States and candidate countries.

The Chair invited participants to review the Digital and Entrepreneurial competences frameworks developed by the Commission. Subsequently the links were sent and comments requested by 31 May¹.

In the discussion on the review of the Key Competences framework, the MT Presidency, on behalf of the governmental members, called for not being too prescriptive and detailed (particularly to the level of assessment criteria). They also regretted inclusion of social competences under learning to learn, as it might reduce its importance in general.

The AT Government warned about creating a burden on E&T institutions by adding on new competences to be acquired without linking them to the bigger perspective. They suggested considering the topic of key competences in the wider framework of the future of VET.

Employers' representatives asked to keep a focus in the framework and make it useful and used. In their view,

¹ DigComp <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1315&langId=en>
EntrComp <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1317&langId=en>

basic skills were very important; to be distinguished from more advanced skills. They called for a practical component of skills and considered that STEM, entrepreneurship and digital skills were crucial. They asked not to be too prescriptive.

Trade unions wished to consider a broader development of skills not only for short-term employability. Dissemination at national level on what the framework is and how it can be implemented is necessary. They noticed that key competences in VET were less addressed than in general education and asked to continue discussions on this topic in one of the next meetings.

The Belgian trade unions member underlined that a holistic approach to competences was necessary, not only for short-term employability but also for understanding the world and the world of work. Sufficient resources should be made available for its implementation

The BE governmental member stressed the importance of cultural awareness, even if not easy to be assessed. Mr Teutsch outlined the need for good balance between being specific to ensure usefulness and added value of the framework and being general enough to respect different countries' approaches/situations. He stressed that the framework is voluntary but was not made to prioritise certain competences compared to others, as they were all considered important. Employability had to be seen in parallel to developing skills for life.

Mr Teutsch responded to the remark raised by trade unions on key competences being less addressed in VET than in general education. He pointed out that this observation originates from a report done several years ago and the purpose of the discussion with ACVT (and the public consultation) was to find out if this is the case. He also referred to the information on key competences in VET in the joint ETF/Cedefop paper.

Mr Paul Holdsworth, EMPL/E3, team leader for Skills for Adults, presented the results of the on-line consultation of ACVT members concerning the role of ACVT in the implementation and monitoring of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.

Among governmental members, there were concerns about their impression that the Committee might be asked to 'report' on Member States' actions, or even to 'drive' the implementation of the initiative. There was general agreement, however, that the Committee is a suitable platform for providing advice to the Commission, and for mutual learning and exchanges of information between Member States and parties related to the implementation of the Recommendation.

The AT governmental member underlined that adult learning is often the responsibility of other bodies not involved in the ACVT.

The SE governmental member suggested that the ET2020 WG on AL would be an appropriate body to follow the implementation of the Recommendation, also in terms of timing for reporting in 2018.

The DE governmental member echoed AT and SE and recalled that the Recommendation stated that it was up to MS to ensure implementation and that evaluation would be within existing national frameworks; the Commission would only follow up, with the support of the ACVT. Therefore the exchanges in ACVT could focus mainly on the actions by social partners and what they can do.

OECD stressed that at international level efforts were ongoing to bring all governance for skills into one single place in each country, but this was a long process.

ETUC welcomed the role attributed by the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation to the ACVT, rather than for example an ET2020 WG, especially in the light of the tripartite nature of the Committee. They regretted that in some countries, social partners are not involved in the implementation of this kind of Recommendation and noted that some National Coordinators for Adult Learning are not sufficiently in touch with social partners in their countries. ETUC preferred peer learning and exchanges to be held in plenary, although acknowledging that time in the ACVT meetings was limited. The interest group meetings should have more informed discussions and allow for more time. They suggested increasing the impact at national level by proposing the idea of a specific ACVT Opinion once the implementation plans of Member States are known.

Employers agreed that several aspects will benefit from further discussion (e.g. target groups, partnerships approach) and it could be useful to organise small groups of ACVT members (e.g. clusters of countries) for mutual learning. UEAPME highlighted that the provision of basic skills was a responsibility of public authorities, but welcomed the possibility of having tripartite presentations in the ACVT.

The BE governmental member referred to forthcoming discussions on the post-2020 MFF Review as an opportunity to address the issue, Member States had expressed in the Council, regarding the lack of dedicated EU funding for the implementation of the Recommendation.

The Chair recalled that each Member State needs to identify the priority target group(s) of the Recommendation, and the approach to its implementation, according to its own circumstances. He concluded that Committee role would not entail either steering the policy implementation or formally reporting on it, but supporting its implementation and follow up through the exchange of information and mutual learning about good practices,

also benefiting from the contribution of social partners. Discussions on the next MFF will no doubt consider the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation as well.

Mr Holdsworth thanked the participants for the useful comments and informed the meeting that the Commission will explore how to organise effective mutual learning, taking into account all the views expressed. The ACVT Bureau will steer the preparation of the item on each Committee agenda, starting from the next meeting.

3. UPDATE ON THE EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND ACVT OPINION

Mr Norbert Schöbel, DG EMPL/E3, Team leader for the skills for the young, provided an overview of the action plan 2017-18 for the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), reported on the upcoming Presidency event marking 4 years of the EAfA, which comprised the launch of a new European network of apprentices. He also reported on the state of play regarding the upcoming proposals for a Council Recommendation on a European framework on quality and effective apprenticeships which was the basis for discussion.

Social partners asked that the proposal follows very closely the ACVT Opinion on a "Shared Vision on Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning" from 2 December 2016, and, ETUC in particular, referred to the Annex on "Elements on apprenticeships and the partnership approach".

The MT Presidency, on behalf of the governmental members, was concerned about the wide scope of the quality criteria and governance issues outlined. While some governmental members stressed that the proposal should include responsibilities of employers and apprentices in the framework, others were worried about the potential additional burden for companies, in particular SMEs.

DE governmental member mentioned that Member States are already engaged in the issue of quality through i.e. the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, EQAVET and EURES. Concerns were raised regarding a possible reference to the European Semester and in turning the ACVT Opinion into a legal instrument

Several governmental members (BE, SE, FI, EE) argued that the proposal should take an inclusive approach, encompassing also other forms of work-based learning and not just apprenticeships.

Some trade unions' members argued that the framework should focus on apprenticeships in the strict sense following the annex of the ACVT Opinion.

PL employers' member underlined that apprenticeships systems are one of the most effective ways to fight youth unemployment.

MT employers' member stressed the benefit for young people to be in contact with the world of work, which is offered by work-based learning.

DE trade unions' member reminded that the idea of developing a quality framework had been ongoing since few years, particularly in the framework of an ETUC project. Effectiveness and quality should be at the core of apprenticeships.

AT governmental member highlighted that the process of developing apprenticeships takes time and is influenced by historical and political factors. The initiative should not be prescriptive but rather a European model to be adapted in each country.

The BE governmental member asked if the framework as to be linked to the EURES Regulation and if exemptions like foreseen for EURES would be also valid also under the framework. The ACVT opinion should be more disseminated and better implemented at national level.

AT employers member underlined that the crucial point is how to make apprenticeships attractive for individuals and for companies, e.g. by providing building blocks as a checklist to be addressed at national level and implemented in a flexible way.

Eurochambres underlined that the framework should stress the effectiveness of apprenticeships, and it was proposed to add 'effectiveness' to the title of the proposal.

The Lithuanian trade union member proposed that the title of the proposal be "European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships". Several participants agreed to that line.

On the issue of mobility, the trade unions said that this should become a quality criterion for apprenticeships. On the other hand, the employers said that mobility can be a quality element but it is not a prerequisite for quality apprenticeships.

OECD stressed that an important element of quality apprenticeships was that it leads to qualification with clear indication of competences acquired.

About the scope, the Chair reminded that the proposal for a quality framework on apprenticeships builds on the thorough work of the social partners and on the ACVT Opinion; nevertheless as the Recommendation will be addressed to Member States, they will not be bound by the ACVT Opinion when discussions take place in the Council. The proposal is also built on the 20 guiding principles for apprenticeships developed by the ET2020 working group on VET where Member States participated.

Mr Schoebel highlighted the key to the quality framework will be to have provisions that really make it relevant, and where stakeholders find that there is something in it for them.

Participants could provide comments in writing until 28 April 2017. For governmental members, this could be done in cooperation with the DGVT members, who had also received a copy of the note. Two contributions were received by the deadline.

4. LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE OF VET

The Commission, Mr Carlo Scatoli, DG EMPL/E3, Team leader for Strategic frameworks and instruments, introduced the steps being undertaken for VET modernization, in the context of the Skills Agenda. The different sources of information to be collected in the next months and to be used to inform the discussion on the future of VET were overviewed.

Cedefop, Mr Jens Bjornavold and Ms Mara Brugia, provided input from the ongoing research project on the changing role and nature of VET in Europe. Based on an analysis of developments the last two decades, the project seeks to understand how external factors (demography, technology and labour markets) influence the sector, how VET interacts with other education and training sectors and how vocationally oriented education and training is expanding at EQF levels 5-8 and in relation to lifelong learning. This presentation was followed by an overview of the preliminary results of Cedefop's Opinion Survey on VET attractiveness in the EU, which focused on upper secondary education and training. Initial findings pointed to lacking information about VET opportunities and some misconception, in particular in terms of progression to higher education (in most countries no dead ends existed, but people seemed not to be aware) and key competences that VET helps develop. Esteem and value of VET are closely linked to people's conceptions of VET and developments over time.

The Chair underlined that the study will also be a contribution to the current reflection on VET modernisation.

The AT and BE governmental members asked to deepen the study to the causes, historical and political developments and refine the typologies of countries and drivers of change. The FR governmental member asked to refine the findings according to different target publics.

The FI governmental member asked if in the framework of the Copenhagen process a future possible Communiqué was planned.

Employers asked to be involved in all the elements of the reflection process (ECVET, EQAVET, post-2020, possible future quantitative targets) and queried about a comprehensive approach to the different elements of governance. BusinessEurope asked to have a discussion in the DGVT meeting in autumn 2017.

ETUC referred to the benchmarking reflection started in the Council and wished to associate the ACVT and social partners to this process which needed to be strongly linked to the reflection on the future of VET, in particular by assessing the development of work environment, social dialogue and political context.

Several trade unions members underlined important aspects which were not covered by the presentation yet: the political context, pedagogical approach of learning by doing, equality of VET and general education (BE), attractiveness by sectors (DE), focusing on target groups needing reskilling, in particular for people in low paid services (IE), partnerships between VET and research as well as continuing professional development of teachers and trainers (LT).

Cedefop highlighted that the study still is 'work in progress' and that results will be published on a regular basis in the next two years. They thanked for the useful feedback which would be integrated in the future steps of the study and confirmed their readiness to continue the discussion in the future, in the ACVT/DGVT and also in other fora. Further information will be regularly published on <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/changing-nature-and-role-vet-europe>

Cedefop and ETF also informed the meeting about the monitoring process of the Riga deliverables, which will also inform the reflection on the future of VET. Replies to questionnaires have been received from most countries. A draft interim report will be available for the DGVT meeting in Estonia and a final interim report - for discussion at the next ACVT meeting in December 2017. The report will have two main parts: a synthesis and country chapters.

The Chair explained that these reflections would feed in a broader consultation to be launched in a second phase, also linked to MFF and ET 2030 reflections. A roadmap may be prepared for further information of ACVT.

During the coffee break two thematic tables took place. These offered the opportunity to discuss in more informal way with Commission colleagues some topics (as suggested by the ACVT Bureau). The topics were Erasmus+ and the Vocational Skills week. Participants could ask information on rules and Calls under Erasmus+ as well as information for the organization of events at country level, in the frame of the Vocational Skills week.

5. ERASMUS+ : SETTING UP ERASMUSPRO AND UPCOMING CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

Mr Joao Santos, Deputy HoU, EMPL/E3 presented the proposal for the ErasmusPRO and briefed members about the discussions that took place during the Erasmus+ Committee of 3 April 2017. The next meeting of the Erasmus+ Committee will take place on 27 and 28 June 2017, when a decision on ErasmusPro is expected.

The AT governmental member asked confirmation about the funding sources.

Some governmental members (FI, NL) highlighted their concerns about long-duration mobility, as not feasible due to existing legal frameworks in some countries.

Employers stressed the obstacles for SMEs and micro-companies to get involved in (long-duration) VET mobility. UEAPME mentioned that more should be done to understand the barriers faced by companies.

BusinessEurope suggested taking advantage of the Vocational Skills week to promote long-duration mobility.

Participants' interventions focused on 3 main elements: i) a flexible system to allow for re-allocation of unused funds from ErasmusPRO to short-duration mobility ii) the need to cover work placements in a broad sense and not only apprenticeships, and iii) the need to reduce the minimum duration from 6 to 3 months, to take account of some regulatory barriers in some countries.

Trade unions called for inclusive mobility approaches which would provide opportunities also to learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and avoid that long-duration mobility becomes cheap labour. They asked for specific incentives.

Eurochambers referred to their experience with Erasmus for Entrepreneurs and invited the Commission to be aware of the practical and regulatory obstacles that exist for long-duration mobility.

The Chair took note of the comments and reiterated the importance of long-duration mobility in increasing the impact on learners' skills acquisition; he reminded that studies proved that mobility beyond 6 months increases benefits for companies. He explained the sources used for funding of ErasmusPro, the envisaged flexibility for unused funds and incentives and confirmed that it would also allow for work placements which include part of the training in VET centres. He stressed the need to mobilize VET providers and companies after the proposal would be approved by the Erasmus+ Committee, using also the VET week as a communication channel.

The Commission also informed that the proposal for the quality framework for apprenticeships is closely linked to this proposal because it would be a form of building trust between sending and hosting organisations through quality apprenticeships.

6. VET AND INTEGRATION OF THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS

The Commission, Ms Chiara Monti DG EMPL/C1, Social investment strategy, introduced the work being undertaken in the DG (projects, mutual learning, funds, collection of good practices, etc.) within the Action plan for integration of third country nationals.

Ms Karin Van der Sanden, DG EMPL/E2, Skills and Qualifications, presented an update on the development of the Skills Profile Tool for third country nationals (announced under the Skills Agenda), including the ongoing changes following the public consultation. She mentioned comments were received on format, questions and issues related to data protection. She assured that the necessary process related to data protection rules will be followed with the appropriate services in the Commission. She announced the launch event of the tool to take place on 20 June 2017, coinciding with World Refugee Day. She explained that at that time it would not yet be available in all languages. Further development will continue during Q3 and 4.

AT governmental member gave an overview of the comprehensive approach for migrants' inclusion via education and training and VET in particular. They underlined the need for accompanying tailored measures, individual counselling and psychological support.

Social partners welcomed the presentations and the possibility to comment the Skills Profile Tool; they called for

a flexible tool, compatible with existing practices or to be adapted to the local situation.

Employers called for more studies by the Commission on results of migrants' integration in the labour market.

Trade unions asked to have further discussions on the topic in the future ACVT meetings, in particular about the role of social partners in support of migrants' integration and what support would be necessary from the Commission. ETUC indicated that they were working together with employers and international organizations at a project on migrants and would like to create synergies with the work of the Commission.

The Chair announced that a public consultation on Legal migration would be launched by DG HOME and the Committee would be kept informed about it.

7. INFORMATION ON LATEST E&T DEVELOPMENTS

Under this agenda item, participants could ask questions on different topics mentioned in an information note sent ahead of the meeting.

UEAPME asked about the benchmarking linked to the European Semester and would like to know how they could contribute. They referred also to a benchmark on work-based learning. On ESCO, they asked about the launching event.

ETUC requested clarifications about the expected outcomes of ET2020 WGs. On the mandate of the expert group of VET providers, they wondered if the ACVT had been involved in setting up the group and what was the type of contribution expected from this body. They asked for details on the VET4EU2 Declaration.

On ESCO, the Commission informed that the first full version of the European classification (ESCO version 1) comprising its three pillars (Occupations, Skills and Qualification - the latter only to a certain extent) would be available on-line in all EU official languages before the summer. The Commission is currently planning the regular updating of the classification. A dissemination event will take place in October 2017.

In reply to ETUC, it was explained that the ET2020 WG on teachers and training in work-based learning will produce a final report supported by a study on mapping practices. On the AL WG, a policy guidance paper on work-place learning, based on several peer-learning activities, will be published and disseminated in 2018. Concerning the expert group of VET providers, the Commission explained that this group had been created at the initiative of the Commission, like it was a common practice, in order to have a forum for exchanges with VET providers, to link up with the grass-root level stakeholders. The group was composed of six European organizations, working in cooperation under VET4EU2, and they had issued in 2015 a Declaration in support to the Riga conclusions.²

8. INFORMATION FROM THE UPCOMING ESTONIAN PRESIDENCY AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The future Estonian Presidency announced that the Directors General for Vocational Education and Training will meet in Tallinn on **9-10 October 2017**, on the theme of teachers and trainers in work-based learning. A conference on all sectors of education and training will take place on 19-20 September 2017. A high level conference „Future of work: making it e-easy“ taking place on 13-14 September 2017 in Tallinn could also be very interesting for the ACVT.

The Chair thanked the participants and reminded that the minutes of the ACVT and DGVT meetings are shared among the two bodies in order to strengthen coordination. An evaluation survey form had been distributed during the meeting and sent as well in electronic format to participants. Results and suggestions will be discussed with the ACVT Bureau.

The PowerPoint presentations have been uploaded in circabc (already prior to the meeting, when available), - <https://circabc.europa.eu> .

² http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-declaration_en.pdf