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## Raising the status of vocational education and training

### Report<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

Rapporteur: Mr Piotr WACH, Poland, Group of the European People's Party

### Summary

As technology evolves ever faster, Europe needs workers who are able to train and re-train in order to keep their knowledge at the cutting edge, thus maintaining Europe's competitiveness in international markets. Yet, despite this urgent need, training is often regarded as a "poor cousin" compared to other forms of education, with poorer quality standards and lower social recognition.

It is time for a strategic vision to restore vocational training to its rightful place, including urgent measures to improve its quality, increase its attractiveness and bring it into line with employers' needs. States should begin by making the right to vocational training a binding obligation – by signing up to the relevant parts of the revised European Social Charter.

National strategies to boost the learning of technical and practical skills should be rolled out, including in new areas of expertise which are often missing from existing vocational training programmes – such as entrepreneurship, foreign language skills or information technology knowledge. Finally, public authorities should make the necessary resources available, for instance by giving grants and scholarships to students and employers who carry out this kind of training, especially in new or innovative ways.

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1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 13005](#), Reference 3905 of 1 October 2012.



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## A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>

1. The Parliamentary Assembly regrets that, despite the benefits for individuals, enterprises and the economy as a whole, vocational education and training (VET) is faced with many challenges regarding lack of quality, social recognition, esteem and attractiveness when compared to other education pathways, in particular upper secondary and higher education.
2. VET can play a significant role in addressing the shortage of technical skills as well as in raising employability and, especially, young people's access to employment. To this end, urgent measures are necessary to improve the quality of VET and create programmes of studies that are adequate to meet the needs of the labour market.
3. The Assembly values the significant work undertaken on quality assurance of VET, involving governments, social partners and European Union institutions. It fully supports the proposal to establish a European Area for Skills and Qualifications (EASQ), which will increase VET visibility and importance, and provide an opportunity to set an agenda for reform based on high-quality VET provision.
4. The Assembly considers that European-level guidelines and overall strategies like the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (EDVET) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) following the European Union's Europe 2020 Strategy are the right tracks to be pursued also by Council of Europe member States outside the European Union. Initiatives and incentives encouraging transnational exchange and co-operation in VET should be strengthened at European and national levels.
5. To achieve sustainable results, it is necessary for Council of Europe member States to take specific measures to raise the status of VET. However, this would not be sufficient without strong involvement of all VET stakeholders and enhanced collaboration between them and the competent public authorities.
6. The Assembly therefore recommends that member States:
  - 6.1. ratify the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) and accept the provisions of its Articles 9 (the right to vocational guidance) and 10 (the right to vocational training) as binding provisions;
  - 6.2. create national and local strategies and policies for VET according to national contexts as regards education and employment, while considering good practices from other countries;
  - 6.3. involve social partners, local and regional authorities, employers' federations and associations, and civil society in general, in the formulation and implementation of VET strategies;
  - 6.4. ensure equal access to education, including VET, for all, including people with a disadvantaged social background, migrants, the unemployed, young people and people with disabilities;
  - 6.5. improve the permeability of educational pathways and facilitate access to other education and training opportunities, including access based on merit to higher education for VET graduates;
  - 6.6. provide financial incentives, such as grants and scholarships for VET students and apprentices and for employers who act as trainers in VET programmes;
  - 6.7. encourage, in particular, the acquisition of entrepreneurial competences in addition to the specific professional competences in each profession;
  - 6.8. initiate public awareness-raising campaigns aimed at raising public awareness of the role and benefits of VET in terms of employability;
  - 6.9. provide incentives for, and create partnerships with, industry to support the continuous professional development of trainers in VET;
  - 6.10. develop strong and transparent national quality assurance frameworks in VET;
  - 6.11. promote mutual recognition of VET in Europe and ensure proper implementation of the European Credit Transfer System for VET, the European Qualifications Framework and the European Area for Skills and Qualifications;
  - 6.12. develop cross-border networks and encourage co-operation and exchange of best practices with European networks such as the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) network.

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 23 June 2013.

7. The Assembly calls on public and private VET institutions to:
  - 7.1. provide programmes that focus on the learner, taking into consideration new developments and trends in the subjects studied, and encourage learning that supports personal and professional growth based on merit and talent;
  - 7.2. seek to enhance the quality of VET by attracting better qualified teachers and staff members, by using interactive methods of teaching and by providing adequate equipment for practical education;
  - 7.3. improve the communication with the students, providing young people and their families with transparent, exhaustive and relevant information about the importance of VET education, its benefits and the possibilities that it offers.
8. The Assembly urges the private sector to strengthen co-operation with the educational centres and VET providers in order to:
  - 8.1. take an active part in the setting up of VET programmes, seeking to ensure their consistency with the changing needs of the labour market in terms of skills and competences;
  - 8.2. offer VET students more opportunities for practical experience, also with the aim of increasing employment opportunities for VET graduates;
  - 8.3. include in continuous VET specific modules allowing the acquisition of information and communications technology competences and proficiency in foreign languages, in order to foster mobility.
9. Finally, the Assembly calls on the European Committee of Social Rights to follow up and evaluate the implementation of established VET standards through the reporting system established under the European Social Charter (revised).

## B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Wach, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. Vocational education and training (VET), including technical vocational training, is a key step in access to employment. Today, however, the low social recognition of vocational training in many countries stops young people from choosing this kind of education. Moreover, low quality vocational training has serious repercussions on the students' capacity to find and retain a job and on preventing future unemployment. Because vocational education and training is often not meeting the needs of the job market, competitiveness of national (and European) economies is hampered and this contributes to increasing unemployment while certain sectors of the employment market have serious difficulties in recruiting qualified people. This calls for an in-depth review of current national policies in this area and for better use of resources invested in the area of vocational education and training as part of country strategies to strengthen their workforces for the 21st century.

2. For this reason, on 6 July 2012, I tabled a motion for a recommendation to "Raise the status of technical vocational training" together with 20 other members of the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 13005). I highlighted the need to consider measures to improve the current situation. On 24 April 2013 in Strasbourg, the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media decided to change the title of the report to "Raising the status of vocational education and training".

3. In the preparation of this report, I took into account the background report prepared by Mr Reiner Siebert, Head of Department, Bfz-Essen GmbH (Germany). I would also like to thank the experts who contributed to the work of our committee by taking part in the exchange of views held on 24 April 2013.<sup>3</sup> I also attended, on 26 and 27 March 2014 in Athens, the Conference on "Addressing skills mismatches through work-based learning and Vocational Education and Training", held under the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union,<sup>4</sup> and the 5th Annual Forum on the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), where I had the opportunity to discuss the matters raised in this report with a large panel of experts.<sup>5</sup>

4. As an instrument of public policy, VET's market and non-market benefits are acknowledged. VET is seen as a way of integrating young and disadvantaged people into the labour market, a way of promoting social inclusion generally by improving employment prospects of individuals. In the context of globalisation, "Europe's competitive advantage depends not only on the skills of its workforce, but also on their effective use". VET has a crucial role to play in both. Consequently, VET should be seen as an instrument for excellence and an essential strategic investment in people, skills and the working environment that can deliver efficiency, quality goods and services.<sup>6</sup>

### 2. What is "vocational education and training" about?

5. When discussing vocational education and training (VET) it is important to bear in mind that there is nothing new about learning for work. In fact, the process of preparing for a task is as old as when mankind developed skills to secure survival and improve living conditions and when skills and expertise were improved and transferred from generation to generation. Long before the development of industrial societies, highly

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3. On 24 April 2013 in Strasbourg, the committee held an exchange of views with Mr Antonio Ranieri, Senior Expert, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Thessaloniki (Greece), and Ms Monika Schlachter-Voll, Vice-President of the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR).

4. At this meeting I had the opportunity to discuss measures to raise the status of vocational education and training (VET) with Mr Joachim James Calleia, Director of CEDEFOP, Mr João Santos, Deputy Head of Unit on Vocational Training and Adult Education (European Commission), Mr Reinhold Weiss, Deputy President and Research Director of the Federal Institute for VET (BIBB) (Germany), Mr Shyam Sunder Pariar, Project co-ordinator, "Sector Skills Alliance" (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, United Kingdom), Mr Michel Van Smoorenburg, Senior Adviser at UWV (Public employment service in the Netherlands), and Mr Max Hogeforster, Chairman of the Hanse-Parliament in Germany.

5. I had the opportunity to address the network of service providers in vocational education and training and discuss quality assurance in VET with Mr Sean Feerick, Director of the EQAVET Secretariat, and with EQAVET Network members, including partners from the relevant international organisations: Ms Tina Bertzeletou, Senior Expert, and Mr George Kostakis, Expert (CEDEFOP), and Ms Elizabeth Watters, Senior Specialist in VET policy and system development (European Training Foundation).

6. Benefits of vocational education and training in Europe for people, organisations and countries; CEDFOP, 2013, p. 42.

specialised crafts were needed for the production of tools, arms or the exploitation of natural resources through agriculture or mining. Each of these “occupations” required a good deal of knowledge as well as skills to be able to produce or supply to a high standard.

### **2.1. Definition**

6. VET can be defined as the process of preparing for a certain professional “occupation”, role or task in the production or supply of goods or the provision of services for economic purposes. If this process is taken up for the first time (in the respective field) we talk about Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) which is usually the education and/or the training provided to school-leavers upon completion of compulsory schooling, in most countries at the end of the lower secondary level, that is at the age of 15 or 16.

7. With the growing importance of educational measures in relation to labour market developments, particularly in the combat against structural unemployment, initial and continuous vocational education and training measures are not limited to under 25-year-olds but have become increasingly significant in adult education.

8. In contrast to IVET, continuous or further vocational training describes the learning process at a later stage of the professional career, which is intended for the acquisition or improvement of specific work related skills or knowledge, or it can be part of developing proficiency, namely building upon the initial training (often) including additional credits or diplomas.

### **2.2. Importance of vocational education and training**

9. Industrial and (more so) post-industrial societies, and their economies within globalised inter-dependencies, rely not only on their ability to promote and use technological development but increasingly depend on complex global information and communication procedures and systems. Understanding and using these systems on a professional level requires highly developed skills and knowledge adaptable to different work environments and tasks. Thus, the requirements of globalised and ICT-based economies have caused an increase in the knowledge and skills needed to perform vocational activities of almost any kind, even within a local context or in jobs still widely manual.

10. General education is neither intended nor able to provide knowledge for a future hairdresser, for instance, who needs to handle credit card payments, make online orders or use hair styling simulators (never mind the skills to use a pair of scissors); this is just one example of a vocational occupation still largely unaffected by international competition. Looking at bank clerks, car mechanics (now also called mechatronics) or network administrators, it is obvious that understanding and processing information on stock exchange rates and indices, fuel cell performance rates or encryption standards requires a great deal more than just applying a skill or general knowledge.

11. Still, this does not sufficiently explain the need for an overall VET structure to be part of the wider education system. Promoting competitiveness through human resource management could also be seen as an exclusive task and a goal of private enterprise rather than State intervention.

12. However, leaving VET to the private sector could result in (further) weakening small and medium-sized enterprises whose ability and capacity to develop human resources are limited. Big companies and multinationals, on the other hand, usually have internal facilities and infrastructure for tailor-made human resource development strategies, which focus VET on their particular needs.

13. As important as energy, transport and communication, a VET system is part of the infrastructure needed to ensure that society can develop and prosper within a rapidly changing global environment based on knowledge and information. VET provides the qualified workforce needed. This becomes particularly important when rapid or substantial changes like demographic developments or technological progress lead to labour and skills shortages which require policy responses to secure the economic basis. Yet, the key factor of VET importance as a component of a wider education system in a democratic society is the achievement of equal opportunities for all those who are in a transfer process towards (new or different) work.

14. Accordingly, access to and standards of VET affect school-leavers, (unemployed) job-seekers or migrants in a similar way (although the degree of disadvantage might vary substantially amongst those groups). While a well-established access to IVET (as an attractive alternative to higher education) can prevent or reduce youth unemployment considerably, a profound and recognised credit system for VET will promote migrants' and job-seekers' access to the labour market.

15. Finally, and maybe most importantly, a VET system must ensure mobility in all respects; introducing proficiency levels similar to higher education allows upward mobility through education. Providing curricula and vocational qualification standards independent from individual company needs enables geographical, cross-company and inter-sectoral mobility.

16. To sum up, VET holds the potential to largely contribute to meeting some of the biggest challenges to Europe's societies by:

- securing economic development and well-being through the provision of a qualified workforce and the prevention of skills shortages;
- reducing youth and adult unemployment;
- inclusion and integration of disadvantaged minority groups;
- advancing equal opportunities and mobility on the labour markets;
- building up confidence and self-esteem amongst low-level school-leavers;
- allowing equal participation in society.

### **2.3. Actors**

17. VET is a bridge between the worlds of general education and work. Therefore, a VET system involves more actors than education on one hand and work on the other. The VET system's emphasis being put on school or work or both leads to varying obligations and responsibilities on either side. On the national/State level, VET usually involves the departments/ministries and subsidiary bodies (or levels in federal systems) responsible for education, employment and the economy. Additionally, social partners (for example trade unions, employers' federations or associations) are usually given at least advisory status in the administrative VET process.

18. In some countries, semi-public institutions like Chambers of Trade and Industry play a crucial role in the implementation of VET. On the local level, corporate stakeholders within VET may be: schools and technical colleges; employers; trade unions; chambers of trade and industry; employment services; local authorities; and students' and parents' representatives.

19. Vocational education and training boards on a local level, equipped with operative powers within a national or federal VET framework, which define curricula and standards comparable to the systems of general or higher education, might be helpful to implement and adapt VET to local needs. These boards should include at least representatives of schools/colleges (general and vocational), social partners, chambers of trade and industry, employment services and local authorities as stakeholders.

### **2.4. Structures and systems**

20. When discussing VET structures and systems on a supranational level, it is necessary to take into account the fact that European countries have developed multi-faceted systems of general and vocational education based on their respective political systems as well as their history, traditions and institutions. In order to understand the differences, it is helpful to be aware of what European countries have in common. Globalisation, technological development and demographic changes are amongst the most common challenges throughout Europe. There is a strong consensus that VET needs to be strengthened, and although up to now the "implementation of European standards and definitions has been variable ... all countries are moving in a common direction".<sup>7</sup>

21. IVET is implemented over a wide range from lower secondary (12+) to tertiary levels (18+) of education, but it is predominantly provided at the upper secondary level of education (15/16+). The vocational route is one of two pathways, the other one being the general academic route.<sup>8</sup> Throughout Europe, both are more or less dominated by school-based education with strong, weak or no practical elements. The degree to which the national frameworks have adapted IVET to work-based, practice-oriented and demand-driven learning has in recent analyses often been regarded as crucial to the solution to fundamental challenges like participation rates in post-compulsory education, youth unemployment or equal opportunities.

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7. Initial vocational education and training (IVET) in Europe, Review, CEDEFOP, 2008.

8. Initial vocational education and training (IVET) in Europe, comparative analysis, CEDEFOP, 2008.

22. “Young people in countries with strong VET systems, with a close connection between school and work-based components, are much more likely to be employed than their general education counterparts and to benefit from a faster transition to the labour market. Conversely, young adults in countries where the work-based component of VET is less developed experience a lower, yet generally present, VET employment premium and experience greater difficulties in labour market integration.”<sup>9</sup> However, the mere copying of good practice leads to contradictory effects, as the adaption of tools and methods must fit the system. In other words, good practice in one system is not necessarily helpful in another.

23. “In countries where it is possible to draw such distinctions [Estonia, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal and the Slovak Republic did not report the distinction between different VET types], VET is divided into:

- mainly school-based VET: where at least 75% of the vocational education/training hours are spent in a school, college or training centre, and the remainder in a work environment (enterprise or other);
- mainly workplace-based VET: where at least 75% of the vocational education/training hours are spent in a working environment (enterprise or other), and the remainder in a school, college or training centre;
- combination of school- and workplace-based VET (e.g. dual system, alternate programmes): where less than 75% of the vocational education/training hours are spent in a school, college or a training centre with the rest carried out in a work environment (enterprise or other).<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Key policy issues at stake

24. Vocational education and training involves the three key policy areas – education, economy and employment – with direct or indirect effects on other important fields like social policy and finance. These inter-dependencies imply interdisciplinary approaches, in many cases, and opportunity as well as a challenge, but there are simultaneously policy issues at local, regional, national and international levels. These horizontal and vertical inter-relations of policies, frameworks and their implementation do not seldom cause great difficulty in finding the right answers to identified problems and translating them into action.

25. Yet, the continental and global perspective requires an overall strategy, which has already been shaped by the European Union. It is constantly being developed and adapted at the European level and pursued (though at different speeds and intensity) by all European countries. The European strategy therefore remains vital to all national and local initiatives and policies.

#### 3.1. Matching job market demands

26. Matching demands with offers is one of the key problems dynamic societies and markets face when demand and offer diverge in time and space. Training providers, that is schools/colleges or employers, need to forecast future job demands. The longer education and training last, the more difficult it is to predict whether offer and demand match in place and time.

27. Additionally, with increasing school-based VET provision the training providers have to play a stronger part in forecasting future demands of companies. In most VET systems, schools are not able, or prepared, to cope whereas workplace-based training is more closely tied to business development which enables demand to be better anticipated.

28. Lastly, mobility and flexibility demands on individuals and enterprises lead to growing regional disparities. Skill shortages occur in some places, whereas skill supply exists elsewhere, inside and across borders. Even in economically sound countries like Germany, a significant gap between northern and southern *Länder* cannot be bridged through the well-established VET system.

29. The current high unemployment amongst highly skilled, well-qualified youth in southern Europe shows that not even national or European labour market projections are accurate enough to take preventive action inside the educational systems. It is not enough to analyse the indicators received from the market *post factum*: new tools are required to anticipate the needs of the market.

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9. Labour market outcomes of vocational education in Europe, Evidence from the European labour force survey, CEDEFOP, 2013.

10. Ibid.

### **3.2. Matching occupational standards with educational outcome standards**

30. Companies complaining about ill-prepared school-leavers or university graduates seem to be a common feature whenever it comes to matching occupational requirements with educational standards. The truth is to be found somewhere between the poles of specific workplace requirements and rather generalised educational standards, even in vocational training.

31. A VET system cannot and should not provide tailor-made skills for workplaces but allow mobility within and across a wider occupational and sectorial context. On the other hand, it must be attractive enough for students as well as companies preparing for work practice as well as creating recognised standards. It must guarantee stability while allowing adaptability. This can only be achieved by a system based on continuous evaluation and negotiation amongst the key stakeholders, social partners and State.

### **3.3. Ensuring equal opportunities of access to the vocational education and training system**

32. While workplace-oriented VET like apprenticeships promise better matching of supply and demand, those (more or less) market-driven systems bear the risk of preventing equal opportunities. School-based systems, on the other hand, with clear educational and permeability standards are more easily manageable in terms of allowing women, for instance, to enter male-dominated occupations or ethnic minorities to enter high status occupations. The introduction of gender quotas, for example, contradicts the employers' freedom of action, according to which they can hardly be forced to take on men or women, indigenous or migrant applicants as apprentices.

33. The OECD's PISA surveys on school performance show that even school-based State-controlled educational systems can be highly selective. Education systems, vocational or general, must therefore be continuously monitored, evaluated and benchmarked on permeability and equal opportunities; incentives should be introduced wherever considered applicable or needed.

### **3.4. Bridging the gap between vocational education and training and higher education**

34. The attractiveness of VET greatly depends on the options students have at any given moment. VET must provide standards and credits which can be used for alternative routes.

35. Since the emergence of mass unemployment, the expectations of generations of school leavers to follow an educational route preparing them for a lifelong occupation have gradually eroded throughout post-industrial societies. This is particularly important for traditionally strong VET systems which relied on the notion of vocational occupation being constant for a whole working life. A reliable and promising VET system must therefore provide attractive options which are visible at the entrance to the vocational path. This applies to proficiency levels, credits for vocational qualifications as well as to work experience.

### **3.5. Ensuring social recognition both for teachers and students in the vocational education and training system**

36. Social recognition is based on perception in society. VET students will enjoy social recognition as much as their education not only promises but indeed delivers recognisable results such as graduation, degrees, diplomas, etc. and opportunities to reach paid employment or self-employment which meet expectations in working conditions and income. For this, the quality of teaching is essential.

37. School-based VET teachers and trainers should enjoy the same social recognition as teachers in general education. This would imply similar status, working conditions and remuneration as other teachers.

### **3.6. Ensuring proper financing and encouraging private initiatives**

38. In many countries, financing VET follows the pattern of financing education in general. In fact, there are political opinions in all European countries that financing schools and colleges basically does not differ from building and maintaining other infrastructural means like motorways or energy supply. These views have led to a wide range of financial structures and frameworks in education, ranging from complete State provision to largely allowing or even expecting private funding.

39. However, there is no system where education is completely privatised. The degree of private initiative, financially as well as structurally, rises the higher we climb the educational ladder. VET is no exception to that, knowing that proximity to the workplace suggests strong private participation. Consequently, VET systems which focus more on the workplace and less on (State) education and training tend to be built on much higher

private initiative and investment concerning the costs for education and training as well as trainees' subsistence. Apprenticeships, for instance, as strong work-based training usually relying on contracts between employer and trainee are often subject to collective bargaining agreements.

40. Private initiative and entrepreneurial spirit are often needed or even fundamental to progress and encourage innovation, which is also required in the adaptation process in VET to the challenges of the modern world. Thus, private initiative and investment should be encouraged within the existing VET system provided that the VET system as a whole guarantees:

- continuous balance of interests between private and public stakeholders;
- equal opportunities concerning access to and promotion within education and training;
- compliance with educational standards set on a national or supra-national level.

### **3.7. Mutual recognition of VET within Europe**

41. "The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) is one of the European instruments designed to make VET systems more transparent. It aims to make it easier for vocational students to move between learning institutions, whether in the same country or abroad. ECVET, which concerns qualifications at all levels of the European qualifications framework (EQF) allows transfer of units of learning outcomes; operates through partnerships between institutions; and eliminates the need for a second assessment of students moving between these institutions."<sup>11</sup>

42. As already described in the previous chapters, global markets and communication across borders require supra-national efforts to ensure equal opportunities and mobility for individuals and to prevent skills shortages and high exclusion rates for societies. The European Union has taken strong steps to prepare and provide transnational standards and frameworks to achieve the set goals. The Council of Europe is well advised to recommend that its non-European Union members participate in this process.

## **4. Policy responses to the challenges**

### **4.1. Initiatives to support VET at European level**

#### **4.1.1. Council of Europe**

43. The Council of Europe has a major role to play in ensuring that vocational education policies and practice are in line with member States' commitments under the European Social Charter, in particular under Articles 9 and 10 of the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163).<sup>12</sup>

44. Article 9 requires the Parties "to provide or promote, as necessary, a service which will assist all persons ... to solve problems related to occupational choice and progress" and insists that "this assistance should be available free of charge, both to young persons, including schoolchildren, and to adults".

45. The right to vocational guidance is understood as a key instrument for national policies to combat unemployment and enhance competitiveness and economic performance. It must be guaranteed both within the school system (information on training and access to training) and within the labour market (information on vocational training and retraining, career planning). Vocational guidance should address in particular school-leavers, job-seekers and the unemployed. People need to make informed choices and the public authorities should therefore ensure that services are in place to direct and help them make these choices.

46. Article 10.1 requires Parties "to provide or promote, as necessary, the technical and vocational training of all persons ... and to grant facilities for access to higher technical and university education"; more specific requirements in the following paragraphs include to provide or promote "a system of apprenticeship ...; adequate and readily available training facilities for adult workers; special facilities for the retraining of adult workers needed as a result of technological development or new trends in employment; and ... special measures for the retraining and reintegration of the long-term unemployed".

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11. [Opportunities and challenges for ECVET, CEDEFOP briefing note, July 2013.](#)

12. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=163&CL=ENG>.

47. Thus, Article 10 covers initial training (general and vocational secondary education) university and non-university higher education and vocational training organised by other public or private actors, including “continuing” training. Vocational training is considered here to be essential not only in order to integrate young people into working life, but also to further personal development and social integration. The right to vocational training must be guaranteed to everyone according to their abilities without discrimination. Equal treatment with respect to access to vocational training must be guaranteed to non-nationals. As regards retraining and reintegration of the long-term unemployed, attention should be paid to training and reintegration measures for groups most seriously affected by a worsening employment situation (young people, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities).

48. The Assembly should therefore call on member States to ratify the Charter, accepting the provisions of Articles 9 and 10 as binding provisions and enabling country reporting on the implementation of these articles, and to also ratify the Additional Protocol Providing for a System of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158).<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.1.2. European Union

49. The 2002 Copenhagen Declaration<sup>14</sup> set up a process of co-operation in vocational education and training (VET) in Europe, involving governments, social partners and European Union institutions, in which European Union Member States, Norway and candidate countries participate. Since 2004, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) reports on how countries are progressing towards achieving commonly agreed VET policy goals. Whereas previous communiqués focused on general short-term objectives for VET (Maastricht,<sup>15</sup> Helsinki,<sup>16</sup> Bordeaux<sup>17</sup> communiqués), in 2010 a long-term vision for VET in 2020 was agreed with a commitment to implement a series of actions by 2014.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.2. Initiatives to support VET at national level

50. The political process in the promotion of VET at different levels (local, regional, national, European) should be seen as a way of adaptation to overall challenges and strategies. Undoubtedly, the challenges of globalisation do not allow local, or even national policy responses, which need to be embedded into an overall strategy, which, in turn, is the key response at the supranational level.

51. On the national and subsidiary levels, policy responses should lead to an interpretation and adaptation of traditions, frameworks and systems to the European strategy rather than picking one or the other good practice and copying it into a legal and operative environment where it does not necessarily fit.

52. In many countries, in and outside Europe, well-established and functioning systems like the German Dual System of Vocational Training (or just elements of it) are considered as a blueprint for the introduction or reform of VET.<sup>19</sup> It is nonetheless necessary to at least adapt, if not modify, good practice to local, regional or national systems.

53. The introduction of apprenticeships, for example, will not work in a top-down process or policy intervention if there is no tradition of employer involvement (financial or structural) in the educational process. Accordingly, the examples being referred to below as good practice should be seen as suggestions rather than policy proposals.

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13. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=158&CM=8&DF=08/04/2013&CL=ENG>.

14. Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European co-operation in vocational education and training, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125_en.pdf).

15. The Maastricht Communiqué on Future Priorities of Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, 14 December 2004.

16. The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, 5 December 2006.

17. The Bordeaux Communiqué on Strengthening Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, 26 November 2008.

18. Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, [www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/bruges\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/bruges_en.pdf).

19. The Dual System of Vocational Training in Germany has repeatedly been named as a best practice example. Although many other countries have similar approaches, Germany probably has the most extensive and comprehensive system in terms of national qualifications, curricula, funding, workplace orientation and involvement of many stakeholders. For further information and details, refer to the [Federal Institute of Vocational Education \(Bundesinstitut für berufliche Bildung, BIBB\)](http://www.bibb.de).

54. A VET system and legislation should (at minimum) include/provide:
- an information system on skill needs;<sup>20</sup>
  - a framework of occupations, courses and educational standards, including entry requirements, examination standards, a curricula and qualifications framework and rosters of specialisations;
  - orientation strategies and communication policies on VET opportunities;<sup>21</sup>
  - teacher training;<sup>22</sup>
  - elements and a mix of school-based and work-based learning (peer learning; apprenticeships);
  - a framework of obligations, responsibilities and rights of individual and corporate participants and stakeholders in VET at national, regional and local levels;
  - a funding system, which determines financing of training costs (staff and equipment), institutions (colleges, examination boards, etc.) as well as subsistence of trainees;<sup>23</sup>
  - definition and provision of subsequent admission, transfer to and from VET for adults (unemployed, migrants, unskilled workers, etc.);
  - a system of monitoring and evaluation of educational standards and equal opportunities.

55. Each of the above-listed VET elements require “policy responses” in cases where they are not available or functioning the way they should at the respective levels.

56. Optionally, training for entrepreneurship, public-public and public-private partnerships, incentives for continuous and lifelong learning, mentoring schemes, distance/blended learning methods and so on have in various countries, projects and initiatives turned out to be supportive and innovative for existing VET systems. However, policy response should rather focus on creating incentives and supporting exchange and co-operation between stakeholders on transregional and transnational levels for sustainable innovation and development in VET.

57. As already presented, the initiatives, goals and objectives towards a European framework on VET developed and undertaken by the European Union and its members should be extended to the wider Council of Europe framework in order to share and strengthen the established standards.

58. A number of initiatives and projects inside and beyond the European Union have already developed cross-border and transnational co-operation, the results of which have contributed considerably not only to advancing vocational education and training. They have also helped to encourage and increase co-operation and understanding at the operative levels.<sup>24</sup> Network-based initiatives and projects should be continuously funded and extended, even though allowing fewer non-governmental initiatives to deepen their co-operation and ties would help sustainable results and links.

## 5. Measures to raise the status and attractiveness of the VET

59. The concept of attractiveness is complex and difficult to define. Some scholars take the view that attractiveness means that VET is of interest to people: they are aware of it, see it as part of the education landscape and have a good opinion of it and of those who graduate. In a more general sense, it is the tendency for people to see the vocational path as a way to reach their personal goals or, for employers, as a source of recruits.<sup>25</sup>

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20. The [German Federal Agency of Employment \(Bundesagentur für Arbeit\)](#) for example operates its own [research institute \(IAB\)](#), which in co-operation with the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) provides forecasts for regional and national skills demands on the basis of statistical analyses of registered job offers, business and demographic developments oriented at the “classification of vocational occupations”, a catalogue of all vocational occupations and positions.

21. A good example of orientation and communication is the [UK National Careers Service](#).

22. See [Competence Framework for VET Professions](#), transnational handbook by the Finnish National Board of Education, 2009.

23. An interesting example of funding as well as of private initiative (which could be considered as good practice) are [sectoral training funds \(for example the Netherlands and France\)](#).

24. EU-Jobrotation was a transnational network comprising more than 50 partner organisations, which, between 1995 and 2006, developed, implemented, tested and evaluated the VET/employment method [Job Rotation](#). Although EU-funding ended in 2006, the method is still being used in some member states and a number of network partners still co-operate transnationally.

60. For others, attractiveness depends on stakeholder opinions. The concept of attractiveness implies that opinions and priorities of various stakeholders have been heard and incorporated into VET policy and programme design. Improving the quality, transparency and accessibility of the education and training on offer will raise its attractiveness, provided such measures are responsive to stakeholder needs. This definition combines the subjective element of attractiveness with factors or measures that increase attractiveness.<sup>26</sup>

61. The CEDEFOP, in its recent study on the attractiveness of the VET<sup>27</sup> – focusing in particular on initial vocational education and training (IVET) – highlights that the viewpoints and perceptions around VET are likely to influence attractiveness. Such viewpoints extend beyond young people: the analysis suggests that families, teachers, people from the world of work and the internet/social media are all important influences on student decision-making and so their perceptions are important.

62. The analysis demonstrates the importance of setting IVET in the context of other available education pathways, notably general upper secondary education, when considering how it is perceived. Both quality and labour market relevance are highly rated in the Eurobarometer survey when considered in a non-comparative context. However, there is some suggestion that this may not hold in terms of the quality of IVET when compared to general upper secondary education, even though labour market relevance appears to be strong also in comparison to general upper secondary education.

63. The CEDEFOP study also suggests that perceptions around the likelihood of finding employment after IVET are correlated with relative esteem. The conclusion that, alongside personal interest, future employment prospects are crucial to students considering different education pathways is supported by evidence, from both the project survey and the Eurobarometer survey on vocational education (2011).

64. The CEDEFOP study points to a series of policy initiatives which could help make VET more attractive and raise the overall status of VET, including the following.

*– Improving the permeability of educational pathways and facilitating access to other education and training opportunities*

65. Permeability measures help respond to individual needs; they can serve to attract the most qualified, by creating pathways from VET to higher education, or to accommodate better disadvantaged or less qualified entrants, for example by creating smaller, cumulative units of learning through modularisation.

66. Concrete measures to increase permeability include: double-qualifying pathways; opening examination systems to all secondary students; providing additional preparatory courses or exams for VET students (bridging programmes); acknowledging equivalent vocational qualifications for academic study courses (credit transfer arrangements); introducing specialised vocational-oriented courses at tertiary level. It is crucial for the best VET students to be given the concrete possibility to reach the tertiary education institutions (such as the *Fachhochschulen* in Germany) after fulfilling the higher education entrance requirements.

*– Increasing opportunities and reducing barriers*

67. Actions intended to increase opportunities and remove barriers not only enhance VET attractiveness, but also reinforce its role in promoting social inclusion and full participation in society. National authorities should promote work-based learning to attract students who prefer a more practical path or the possibility of learning on the job while working. They should also improve access for special groups, including low-skilled, disabled and socially and economically less advantaged young people, older non-traditional students, ethnic minorities and migrants to help ensure their employability. Programmes for special groups may be less demanding (for example set at ISCED 2 level).

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25. Tchibozo (2009), "Improving attractiveness of initial vocational education and training: some observations on the EU experience", Paper delivered at the conference "Lifelong learning revisited: what next?" University of Stirling, 23-26 June 2009.

26. Leney et al. (2004), "Achieving the Lisbon goal: the contribution of VET: final report to the European Commission". London: QCA – Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

27. "Attractiveness of initial vocational education and training: identifying what matters", Research paper No. 39, CEDEFOP, 2014, [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5539\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5539_en.pdf). CEDEFOP analysed the situation in six countries with relevant data and case study initiatives: Germany, Finland, Ireland, Czech Republic, Denmark and Spain. All have fairly positive images of VET overall and, apart from Spain, meet or exceed the Eurobarometer EU average of 71% thinking that VET has a positive image.

68. Along the same lines, recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning, by the assessment of knowledge, skills and competences acquired, can contribute to the accessibility of new or higher level qualifications and open up new formal learning opportunities for individuals who would not otherwise be admitted to a particular programme.

*– Improving the quality of VET*

69. In this respect, national authorities should develop and implement national quality assurance frameworks and procedures for quality assurance assessment, involving stakeholders in the process.

70. A specific difficulty is that VET teachers and trainers need to combine pedagogical skills and knowledge with technical knowledge and practical experience (know-how). To get the latter, often, industry representatives are invited to provide the training, but they may be insufficiently equipped as regards methods of teaching and evaluation. For that, they should be offered appropriate training to improve the transmission of knowledge. On the other hand, for those VET teachers who lack or have lost contact with industry, placement in modern companies and visits to factories that use advanced technologies should be recommended to update their knowledge.

71. Increasing the transparency of qualifications and programmes, through such measures as developing national qualification frameworks (NQF) and adopting European frameworks such as the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) will substantially contribute to the improvement of VET quality.

*– Providing financial incentives*

72. Financial incentives are increasingly needed to promote engagement in VET during times of crisis. Financial incentives may be directed at an entire programme, at employers or at students. England has increased the overall budget for apprenticeship programmes – raising participation – and offered a stipend to small businesses who recruited apprentices between February 2012 and March 2013. Other examples of financial incentives are:

- the provision of scholarships in training fields which are normally in low demand (a strategy implemented in the Czech Republic by some regional authorities, which has reportedly been successful);
- the allocation of grants to companies subject to the condition that they only hire VET-qualified students who have completed their upper secondary education (a strategy implemented in Iceland, which was aimed to encourage students to complete their upper secondary education studies).

73. Among other initiatives to enhance the visibility and profile of VET, national authorities could:

- raise VET awareness through media campaigns on VET programmes and labour market prospects using Internet, television or other media;
- improve guidance and counselling systems so that students have adequate, reliable and up-to-date information before making choices between general education and VET programmes and among the latter;
- emphasise skill development in VET through such means as skills competitions and award ceremonies; National or international skills competitions also serve to promote IVET internationality and mobility.

## **6. Conclusions**

74. VET could help improve economic growth and social inclusion. Its potential, however, is not sufficiently exploited.<sup>28</sup>

75. This report underscores that providing a qualified workforce, preventing skills shortage, reducing youth and adult unemployment, promoting inclusion and integration of disadvantaged minority groups, advancing equal opportunities and mobility on the labour markets, building up confidence and self-esteem amongst low-level school-leavers are central objectives and policy issues with regard to VET.

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28. In the European Union, lifelong learning (which VET is part of) is under 10%, while the target is 15% of the overall participation in education.

76. Providing a qualified workforce and preventing skills shortage require reliable forecasts of future demands but also stronger commitment by stakeholders, particularly employers and trade unions, to take preventive action in the investment of human resource development. Similarly, investment in continuous education and training efforts and securing experience and expertise of senior members of the work force (50+) must be considered as important tasks towards future business needs, which, in turn, require medium- and long-term strategies rather than looking at quarterly shareholder values.

77. Reducing youth and adult unemployment, inclusion and integration of disadvantaged minority groups, advancing equal opportunities and mobility on the labour markets moreover pose new issues and challenges to VET. Rising investment in and emphasis on VET in adult education are needed to prevent lifelong exclusion from labour markets and equal participation in society. For example, adult jobseekers with failures or gaps in their general or vocational education careers because of learning difficulties, social or health problems, migration or structural changes need to have the opportunity to get back on the track towards skilled work. Permeability, access to higher and/or vocational education and credits for work experience for adults are as necessary as they are for young people in order to prevent lifelong dependency on State-funded support systems. The populations of countries with high structural unemployment, rapid structural changes or high immigration rates are particularly vulnerable, their workforce in particular being underqualified and ill-equipped for current and future skills demands.

78. Europe's competitive advantage depends not only on its workforce's skills, but also on their effective use, which in globalised knowledge- and ICT-based societies requires intensified lifelong education and training for a rising share of the population. Workforces need to be adaptable and mobile, which, in Europe, involves supra-national responses and strategies.

79. At the European level, guidelines and overall strategies like the VET credit system (ECVET) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) following the European Union's Europe 2020 strategy<sup>29</sup> are the right tracks to be pursued also by Council of Europe members outside the European Union. Initiatives and incentives supporting the overall strategy and encouraging transnational exchange and co-operation in VET should be strengthened at the European and national levels. The ratification of the European Social Charter will reinforce the protection of rights enshrined in the Charter with regard to VET.

80. Nationally, policies should lead VET systems based on countries' culture, tradition and history to be gradually adapted to the European framework. They should be based on well-balanced and locally rooted mixtures of work-based and school-based education and be supported by coherent national policies and measures aimed at improving the attractiveness of VET and at dealing with structural problems which make VET underutilised, such as market fragmentation and the barriers to mobility in both education and labour markets.

81. In the design and implementation of VET policies, it is essential to get employers and social partners involved, both to better assess – and possibly anticipate – market needs and to provide, in partnership with them, relevant, work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeships.

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29. [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm).