



COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND MEDIA

Raising the status of vocational education and training

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

Report

A. Draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe regrets that, despite the benefits to individuals, to enterprises and the economy as a whole, Vocational Educational 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 the upper secondary and higher education.
2. VET can have 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 aim, urgent measures are necessary to improve the quality of VET and create programmes of studies that are in adequacy with the needs of the labour market.
3. The Assembly values the significant work undertaken on quality assurance of VET, involving governments, social partners and EU institutions. It fully supports the proposal of establishing the 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 VET credit transfer system (ECVET) and the European qualification framework (EQF) following the EU's Europe 2020 Strategy are the right tracks to be pursued also by Council of Europe member States outside the EU. 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 that Council of Europe member States take specific measures raising the status of VET. However, this would not be sufficient if there were no strong involvement of all VET stakeholders and enhanced collaboration between them and competent public authorities.
6. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that Council of Europe member States:
 - 6.1. ratify the European Social Charter (revised) (CETS No 163) and to accept the provisions of its articles 9 (right to vocational guidance) and 10 (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, unemployed, youth 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 directed to VET students, apprentices and employers that 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 VET benefits and role in term of employability;

6.9. provide incentives and create partnerships with industry to support 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 (ECVET), the European qualification framework (EQF) and the European Area for Skills and Qualifications (EASQ);

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;

7. The Assembly calls upon public and private VET institutions to:

7.1. provide programmes that take into consideration new developments and trends in the studied subjects, focus on the learner and encourage learning that supports personal and professional growth based on merit and talent;

7.2. seek to enhance VET quality 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 transparent, exhaustive and relevant information to the youth and their families about the importance of VET education, its benefits, possibilities that it offers.

8. The Assembly urges the private sector to strengthen co-operation with the educational centres and VET providers 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 more opportunities of practical experience for the VET students, also intended to increase employment opportunities for VET graduates;

8.3. include in Continuous VET specific modules allowing to acquire ICT competences and to increase proficiency in foreign languages to foster mobility.

9. Finally, the Assembly, calls upon 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 Piotr Wach, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Vocational education and training (VET) 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 of vocational training has serious repercussions on the students' capacity to find and retain a job and to prevent future unemployment. Because vocational education and training often is 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 considered an outline report and decided to change its title to "Raise 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 2013.¹ On 4 December 2013 the Committee considered a memorandum. Further to that, I 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 European Union,² 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.³

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 people and those at a disadvantage 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 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.⁴

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

5. When discussing the status of 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 specialized crafts were needed for the production of tools, arms or the exploitation of national 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 in good quality.

¹ 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).

² At this meeting I had the opportunity to discuss the 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" (GRWP Llandrillo Menai UK), Michel Van Smoorenburg, Senior Adviser at UWV (Public employment service in the Netherlands), and Mr Max Hogeforster, Chairman of Hanse-Parliament in Germany.

³ 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 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); Ms Elizabeth Watters, Senior Specialist in VET policy and system development (European Training Foundation).

⁴ Benefits of vocational education and training in Europe for people, organisations and countries; CEDFOP 2013, p. 42.

2.1. Definition

6. VET can be defined as the process of preparing for a certain professional “occupation”, role or task in production or supply of goods or 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, i.e. at the age of 15/16.

7. With 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, i.e. 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 globalized 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 operate a pair of scissors), just to give an 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 require a great deal more than just applying a skill or general knowledge.

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

12. However, leaving VET to individual firms could result in weakening small and medium-sized enterprises (even more) 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 company 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 recognized 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 enable geographical,

cross-company and inter-sectoral mobility.

16. Summing 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 shortage;
- 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 economy. Additionally, social partners (e.g. 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 colleges, employers, trade unions; chambers of trade and industry; labour offices; 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 defines 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, employment services and local authorities as stakeholders.

2.4. *Structures and systems*

20. When discussing VET-structures and systems on a supra-national level, it is necessary to take into account 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 challenges widely common all over 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".⁵

21. IVET is implemented in 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+) as the latter of two pathways: the general academic route or the vocational route,⁶ both throughout Europe being more or less dominated by school-based education with strong, weak or no elements of practice. 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.

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".⁷ However, the mere

⁵ Initial vocational education and training in Europe, Review, CEDFOP 2008.

⁶ Initial vocational education and training in Europe, comparative analysis, CEDFOP 2008.

⁷ Labour market outcomes of vocational education in Europe, Evidence from the European labour force survey, CEDEFOP 2013.

copying of good practice leads to contradictory effects, as the adaption of tools and methods must fit to 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, 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)".⁸

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 on the European level and pursued (though at different speeds and intensity) by all European countries. So, the European strategy remains vital to all national and local initiatives and policies.

3.1. Match 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, i.e. 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 which companies might have. In most VET-systems schools are not able, or prepared, to cope whereas workplace-based training is more closely tied to business development which improves the anticipation of demands.

28. Lastly, mobility and flexibility demands for individuals and enterprises lead to growing regional disparities. Skill shortages occur at other places than skill supply 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. 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.

3.2. Match 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 and educational standards. The truth is to be found somewhere between the poles of specific workplace requirements and rather generalized 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 recognized standards. It must guarantee stability while allowing adaptability. This can only be achieved by a system based upon continuous evaluation and negotiation amongst the key stakeholders, social partners and state.

⁸ Idem.

3.3. *Ensure 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 quota on gender-shares, for example, contradicts the employer's freedom of action that 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 introducing incentives wherever considered applicable or needed.

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

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

35. Since the emergence of post-war mass unemployment, the expectations of generations of school leavers to follow an educational route preparing them for a lifetime 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 practice.

3.5. *Ensure 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. *Ensure proper financing and encourage 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 privatized. As regards VET, proximity to the workplace suggests strong private participation. Consequently, VET-systems with strong workplace and weak low (state) school shares 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 enterprise 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.”⁹

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 its non-EU members to 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)¹⁰ (CETS No 163).

44. Article 9 requires “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 unemployed persons. People need to make informed choices and should ensure that services are in place to direct and help them make these choices.

46. Article 10.1. requires “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”.

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 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 upon members 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 (CETS No 158).¹¹

⁹ [Opportunities and challenges for ECVET, CEDFOP briefing note, July 2013.](#)

¹⁰ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=163&CL=ENG>.

¹¹ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=158&CM=8&DF=08/04/2013&CL=ENG>.

4.1.2. European Union

49. The 2002 Copenhagen declaration¹² set up a process of cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) in Europe, involving governments, social partners and EU institutions, in which EU 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 (Maastricht¹³, Helsinki¹⁴, Bordeaux¹⁵ communiqués), in 2010 a long-term vision for VET in 2020 with a commitment to implement a series of actions by 2014 were agreed.¹⁶

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 and which, in turn, is the key response on the supra-national 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 in a legal and operative environment where it does not necessarily fit.

52. In many countries, in and outside of Europe, well-established and functioning systems like the German Dual System of Vocational Training (or just elements of it) are considered as a blueprint to the introduction or reform of VET.¹⁷ 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 as footnotes/hyperlinks on good practice in the following should be seen as suggestions rather than policy proposals.

54. A VET-system and legislation should (at minimum) include/provide:

- an information system on skill needs;¹⁸
- a framework of occupations, courses and educational standards incl. entry requirements, examination standards and curricula, qualifications framework and rosters of specialisations;
- orientation strategies and communication policies on VET opportunities;¹⁹
- teacher training;²⁰
- elements and share 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 on national, regional and local levels;
- a funding system, which determines financing of training costs (staff + equipment), institutions

¹² 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 cooperation in vocational education and training, http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125_en.pdf.

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/ip/docs/maastricht_com_en.pdf.

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/helsinki_com_en.pdf.

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/bordeaux_en.pdf.

¹⁶ Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/bruges_en.pdf.

¹⁷ The Dual System of Vocational Training in Germany has repeatedly been named as 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).

¹⁸ The [German Federal Agency of Employment \(Bundesagentur für Arbeit\)](http://www.iab.de) for example operates its own [research institute \(IAB\)](http://www.iab.de), 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.

¹⁹ Good example for orientation and communication is the [UK National Careers Service](http://www.nacsc.gov.uk).

²⁰ See [Competence Framework for VET Professions](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/competence_framework_for_vet_professions.pdf), transnational handbook by the Finnish National Board of Education, 2009.

(colleges, examination boards etc.) as well as subsistence of trainees;²¹

- definition and provision of subsequent admission, transfer to and from VET for adults (unemployed, migrants, unskilled etc.);
- a system of monitoring and evaluation on 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 etc. have in various countries, projects and initiatives turned out to be supportive and innovative to 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 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 on the operative levels.²² Network-based initiatives and projects should be continuously funded and extended, 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 as a source of recruits for employers.²³

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.²⁴

61. The CEDEFOP, in its recent study on the attractiveness of the VET²⁵ – focusing in particular on the 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.

²¹ Interesting example for funding as well as for private initiative (which could be considered as good practice) are [sectoral training funds \(e.g. Netherlands and France\)](#).

²² EU-Jobrotation has been a transnational network comprising more than 50 partner organisations, which from 1995-2006 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.

²³ 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 to 26 June 2009.

²⁴ Leney et al. (2004), “*Achieving the Lisbon goal: the contribution of VET: final report to the European Commission*”. London: QCA – Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies>.

²⁵ “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, consulted on 1 April 2014. 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.

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, although 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.

Improve the permeability of educational pathways and facilitate access to other education and training opportunities

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

66. Concrete measures to increase permeability include: double-qualifying pathways; examination systems open to all secondary students; 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. I would insist on the importance of giving the best VET students concrete possibility to reach the tertiary education institutions (such as the *Fachhochschulen* in Germany) after fulfilling the higher education entrance requirements.

Increase opportunities and reduce 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 (e.g. set at ISCED 2).

68. On the same line, recognise and validate 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.

Improve 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.

Provide financial incentives

72. Financial incentives are increasingly needed to promote engagement in VET during times of financial crisis. Financial incentives may be directed to an entire programme, to employers or to students. England increased the overall budget for the apprenticeship programme – raising participation – and was offering a stipend to small businesses who recruit apprentices from February 2012 to 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).

Other measures to enhance VET visibility and profile

73. Among other initiatives, 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;
- emphasize skill development in VET through such means as skills competitions and award ceremonies; Cross-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 explored.²⁶

75. This report underscores that providing a qualified workforce, preventing skills shortage, 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 are central objectives and policy issues with regards to VET.

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, requires 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 on the other hand pose new issues and challenges to VET. Rising investment in and emphasis on VET in adult education are needed to prevent lifetime exclusion from labour markets and equal participation in society, i.e. 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 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 lifetime dependencies 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 their effective use, which in globalised knowledge- and ICT-based societies requires intensified lifelong education and training for a rising share of the population. The nations' workforces need to be adaptable and mobile, which, in Europe, enforces supra-national response and strategies.

79. On the European level guidelines and overall strategies like the VET credit system (ECVET) and the

²⁶ In European Union, life-long learning (which the VET is part of) is under 10%, while the target is 15% of the overall participation in education.

European qualification framework (EQF) following the EU's Europe 2020 strategy²⁷ are the right tracks to be pursued also by Council of Europe members outside the EU. Initiatives and incentives supporting the overall strategy and encouraging transnational exchange and co-operation in VET should be strengthened on 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 attractiveness of VET and at dealing with structural problems which make VET underutilised, such as the 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.

²⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm.