



European Forum
of Technical and Vocational
Education and Training

EfVET Statements on the European Commission Communication: ‘Rethinking Education’

Context

The European Commission launched in 2012 a new strategy called “Rethinking Education” to encourage Member States to take immediate action to ensure that young people develop the skills and competences needed by the labour market and to achieve their targets for growth and jobs.

Europe needs a radical rethink on how education and training system can deliver the skills needed by the labour market. The youth unemployment rate is close to 23% across the European Union, yet



at the same time there are more than 2 million vacancies that cannot be filled.

Europe needs a radical rethink on how education and training systems can deliver the skills needed by the labour market. To ensure that education is more relevant to the needs of students and the labour market, assessment methods need to be adapted and modernised.

The strategy also calls on Member States to strengthen links between education and employers, to bring enterprises into the classroom and to allow young people to meet employers, to bring enterprise into the classroom and to give younger people a taste of employment through increased work-based learning.

Rethinking Education in brief:

- There needs to be a much stronger focus on developing transversal skills and basic skills at all levels.
- A new benchmark on foreign language learning: by 2020, at least 50% of 15 year olds should have knowledge of a first foreign language and at least 75% should study a second foreign language.

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- Investment is needed to build world-class vocational education and training systems and increase levels of work-based learning.
- Technology, in particular the internet, must be fully exploited. Schools, universities and vocational and training institutions must be supported by well-trained, motivated and entrepreneurial teachers.
- Funding needs to be targeted to maximise the return on investment. Debate at both national and EU level is needed on funding for education especially vocational education and higher education.
- A partnership approach is critical. Both public and private funding is necessary to boost innovation and increase cross-fertilisation between academia and business.

The working document Vocational education and training for better skills, growth and jobs which accompanies the strategy can be found on the website of the European Commission DG-Education and Culture.

Recommendations

EfVET is currently conducting a survey of the views of its members on the « Rethinking Education – VET Document » through an on-line consultation on the EfVET website. A statement based upon the responses to this consultation will be completed by the end of April 2013 and widely circulated to appropriate EU institutions, organisations and agencies and all Member States' National governments. The immediate priority for all Member States is to increase the quality of all VET courses, making them generally attractive and inclusive, with highly qualified teachers and trainers using innovative learning methods, in good facilities, with a high labour market relevance.

We would add the importance of developing vocationally-focused foreign language and intercultural awareness training, both in VET institutions and in enterprises to increase intra-EU trade and global trade and facilitate the expansion of student, apprentices' and employees mobility within and outside the EU.

In advance of the publication of « Rethinking Education » The theme of EfVET's Annual Conference in Palma, Mallorca in October 2012 was: *The drive toward European Credit Transfer within Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the new LLP programme 'Erasmus for All' 2014 – 2020.* We would highlight three areas of concern to our stakeholders as discussed in workshops and some concrete proposals to be implemented to improve the situation.

1. Tackling early 'Drop out' – re-engaging young people

EfVET understands that the current situation in Europe is focus on jobs and growth. However, as stated in the Europe 2020 strategy, about 80 million people have low or basic skills, but lifelong learning benefits mostly the more educated. However, at the European level there are increasing numbers of school drop-outs, who need support of the education services. The communication does

refer to low to low-skilled education, but mainly in the context of workplace learning. We would therefore add these messages.

EfVET Key messages:

- Discovering and tackling drop out at 15-16 is too late – need to find potential drop-outs at earlier stage – more effective counselling in primary and secondary schools
- Involve all stakeholders – social services, local authorities, counsellors, teachers, families – in an holistic approach
- Connect teaching increasingly to companies’ needs in the labour market – local and beyond
- Closer contact and communication with students – recognition of the need to assess level of self-esteem –not only formal assessment
- Give students the opportunity to explore different jobs before having to choose a profession
- Offer students hands-on, practical work in the classroom as well as work-based learning
- Focus on competences students have and not those they lack
- Devise more flexible systems. Allow easier change of course without losing/wasting a whole year
- Teachers should raise expectations, stop complaining, pitying. Expect everyone to achieve excellence – “Yes you can!”
- Develop and improve counselling systems, introduce “buddy” systems and peer-coaching
- It might be that you get more money when you are on social benefits than working.
- Comprehensive monitoring for students who do not immediately find employment
- Guidance for the students when they leave school to avoid the gap between school and labour market
- Students produce products at VET institutions to show their ability as an introduction to the labour market
- We need people with broad skills since the future labour market is very unpredictable
- Teaching employment skills helps people find a job. This we have to do within VET. Students have to recognise their competences and realise how these are transferable to various professions and contexts
- Career management lessons/international skills development at VET school level
- Benchmarking all over Europe

2. Training on entrepreneurial skills

Developing Entrepreneurship skills – not just training for self-employment but includes the development of people in terms of an entrepreneurial mind set. Not a capitalist perspective but more about initiative; innovation; social and economic wellbeing. Entrepreneurial skills should be fully integrated into the curriculum in all disciplines. (Of course the European Commission has since published the “Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan” in January 2013)

EfVET Key messages:

- It was felt by all that Entrepreneurship in the VET sector was lacking initiative and sometimes there were negative perceptions about entrepreneurship
- Entrepreneurial skills should be fully integrated into the curriculum in all disciplines.
- In most cases these curricula had to be developed now.
- Change from negative attitudes had to be achieved in small steps, obstacles turned into opportunities, successes promoted, developers working in teams, with the full support of institution's management team.
- Ownership of the creative elements in projects should rest with the students.
- These projects must be realistic and authentic and must involve the cooperation of local companies.
- Teachers would act as mentors in the project.
- Teachers need to accept the challenge to be trained in Entrepreneurship themselves, although training is not enough and teachers must also work in cooperation with local companies.
- Entrepreneurial skills can be included in VET in several ways.
- Teachers attached to companies for a period to experience entrepreneurship
- Establish "practice firms"/mini-companies in VET institutions
- Invite personnel from companies into the institution to act as trainers and mentors and assist in the design and development of projects.

3. Increase the numbers of highly qualified VET teachers and trainers using innovative learning methods with a high labour market relevance.

EfVET believes that boosting this skills supply also includes the hidden skills, competences and knowledge potential in societies and the work place.

EfVET Key messages:

- Students using ICT – phones, iPad etc – to access content
- Use of Social media – facebook, twitter – students working collaboratively – Co-operative learning can make a difference
- Many appropriate resources available on the Internet
- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) new and free
- Virtual Mobility – Using ICT and social media, students can work collaboratively with other countries.
- Teachers need to understand and be able use these new tools
- Following the financial crisis, all can be creative and overcome challenges and seek new opportunities.
- Often established systems stifle innovation.
- Teachers should be allowed to take risks, make mistakes and learn from these mistakes
- Some countries still do not allow any flexibility in the curriculum

- Increasing cost of traditional resources may accelerate process of change to on-line resources
- Teachers can become “curators” – browse the Internet and select appropriate resources, create on-line menus to create the more flexible curriculum of the future.
- Young teachers coming into the profession are enthusiastic about the new tools and media. This enthusiasm must not be dampened. Good leadership is essential to avoid this.
- It is becoming increasingly essential to share knowledge between teachers, between students and between countries

EfVET Steering Team
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