

The EfVET KUOPIO Statement 2022

In the northern city of KUOPIO in **Finland**, more than 250 EfVET members discussed the theme the future of skills revolution for VET and CVET in Europe. This was the first annual conference, which could be organized face-to-face since the successful event in the Azores Portugal in October 2019.

In Kuopio, training providers and employers exchanged information about the state-of-play of vocational education and training and focused on a number of important aspects that require further support within educational institutions.

Delegates were determined to support **inclusion** as a foundation principle in vocational education and training. The VET sector is without formal barriers for enrolment and participation. Inclusivity is an overarching value that enriches the sector and provides a platform for all learners and workers to succeed irrespective of their capacity, creed and sexual orientation and acquired skills in previous formal educational experiences.

Linked to inclusion is the scenario that education and training have an increasingly international character. Every effort should be made to give learners an experience in another country of their own choice. The internationalization of education and training can be sustained through mobility programmes of EU countries that support funding. **Internationalization** is the new context of education and no efforts should be spared in engaging students in European projects that broaden the mind and provide a different experience of learning and working.

The future of skills also largely depends on the capacity of teachers and administrators to consider **learners** in VET schools, colleges and higher education institutions **as individuals** and not as a cohort of students. Formal education structures often render individuals as part of a larger group. But, experience has shown that individuals learn in different ways, have different characters, needs and aspirations. In VET, it is essential that the individual learner be given focused attention as much as possible. Referring to individuals by their proper name is an important step towards a more inclusive process of learning that respects diversity and the inner strengths and weaknesses of an individual.

It was widely agreed that the **digital language** is the new language of current and future generations. The use of technology for skills has its own benefits and disadvantages. Teachers would do well to familiarize themselves with this new way of teaching. Technology is the new

pedagogy. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, “My world is my language and the limits of my world are the limits of my language”. It is essential that both learners and teachers speak the same language or learn from each other the language of modern technology and good practices

required in places of work. In addition, employers are keen in supporting schools and colleges that instill in young generation the passion and drive to work with enthusiasm, honesty and integrity. These skills learnt in formal education serve to raise the quality of life through sustained employment and innovation.

It is also the firm belief of EfVET delegates that in promoting the future of skills one must also focus on the **well-being of managers and administrators** in vocational education institutions. COVID19 has raised the alarm of increased mental health problems among many employees. Empowering managers and administrators contributes to the smooth running of formal education. Their role is fundamental in ensuring that the infrastructure, the equipment and all ancillary assets of schools and colleges are up to standard. Attractiveness to VET can also be subject to modern buildings and state-of-the-art equipment, facilities and student services. Providing all this material context can be stressful and time consuming. It is essential that managers and administrators be provided with continuous professional development and opportunities to experience similar roles in an international context.

Delegates in Kuopio recognized that in providing skills for the future, the biggest challenge is the **speed of change**. Companies and several places of work must address speed because speed determines success, productivity and competitiveness. It is erroneous to assume that speed is not VET’s challenge of today. Reform in VET will make or break the provision of skills needed for employment. Reform in VET usually takes long and can threaten irrelevance of the learning process. It is therefore necessary that VET provision accelerate the reform processes needed to ensure that learners are ready to take their place in the labour market with skills that make them employable on day one.

In the context of VET **the skills of the future must also be embedded in the basic skills** necessary to use in the various employable contexts. Language learning, mathematics, science and IT are today considered as very basic skills required in practically all jobs. In addition to these basic skills, delegates also entertained higher goals for societies to increase their quality of life. The themes debated in workshops and roundtable discussions focused mainly on four overarching goals: the first sustainability, the second behaviours that halt the deterioration of climate and climate change, the third the promotion of gender equality and the fourth the eradication of physical and moral poverty.

The **future of education and training is the future of skills**. Delegates reaffirmed the future of education will be largely based on three crucial goals:

- The acquisition of basic skills by the end of compulsory education
- The promotion of all forms of work-based learning in vocational educational and training from the lowest to the highest degrees including doctoral programmes, and

- The third educators and employers must join their expertise in designing and supporting throughout the whole learning process curricula and training programmes that inspire passion and drive in the world of employment.

Kuopio provided an ideal background for European VET providers to reaffirm their strong commitment to be **the voice and the point of reference** of VET at European level and to make VET skills more visible to key stakeholders in 2023.

The **Finnish** VET structures (including investment in infrastructures) shared with delegates confirmed that training providers transformed the spirit of VET in a much stronger sector than ever before. The challenge now is to rope in more tightly employers and launch a Europe-wide call for VET as the post-secondary sector of education that guarantees the sustainability of the future of learning and working. The only **hope for European VET** to grow is a stronger partnership between E&T providers and employers.
