

COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN EMPLOYERS OF THE METAL  
ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY-BASED INDUSTRIES

**FINAL REPORT**  
STRENGTHENING COOPERATION  
BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**CEEMET** is the European employers' organisation representing the interests of the metal, engineering and technology-based industries (hereafter referred to as MET industries), with a specific focus on social affairs and industrial relations. As such, we have a unique insight into the socioeconomic conditions required for European manufacturing companies to thrive. Our role is to convey these to policy-makers and stakeholders at the European level.

**CEEMET's** members are national employers' organisations and federations, representing **200 000 member companies across Europe**, the vast majority of which are SMEs, providing some **12.7 million jobs** and covering all products within the metal, engineering and technology-based sectors. Together, these companies make up the **largest industrial sector in Europe**, both in terms of employment levels and added value, and are therefore vital in driving forward and securing Europe's future prosperity.

Based in Brussels, it is a recognised consultation body and discussion partner of the European Institutions, BusinessEurope, fellow associations from the MET and related industry sectors (ACEA, ASD, CESA, CLEPA, EUROFER, EUROMETAUX, ORGA-LIME) as well as the European Metalworkers Federation (EMF), which is the European-level trade union for the MET industry. CEEMET and the EMF are also social partners in a formal **sectoral social dialogue** at European level.

One of **CEEMET's** key priorities is **education and training**, communicating the very important role and stake that employers in our multifaceted industry have in this area. Ensuring the availability of highly-qualified personnel, including young people, is crucial to both the industry's future and Europe's prosperity. In this context, CEEMET has a specific interest in **initial Vocational Education and Training (iVET)** because it lies at the crossroads of schooling and the labour market and because the MET industry is heavily reliant on employees with iVET qualifications.

## The importance of iVET for industry

### **A strong and competitive industrial base is essential for European growth, jobs and prosperity –**

and this requires a skilled and motivated workforce to invent, develop and manufacture the products, processes and services needed to compete in the global market place.

The metal, engineering and technology-based (MET) industry is a key driver of Europe's economy, and people are its greatest asset. Ensuring a plentiful supply of highly-qualified personnel, including young people, is crucial both to the industry's future and to Europe's prosperity.

Initial Vocational Education and Training (iVET) - as the main supplier of new professionals to the MET sector - is therefore central to the industry's success. Similarly, industry - as the main client, source of technology and training ground for pupils in vocational education - is central to iVET. Hence, employers' organisations and companies have a key stake, and a key role to play, in the education of young people and iVET.

### **The problem**

While skills and competences are key factors for industrial competitiveness, it is widely recognised that **iVET**

**systems in Europe are currently not fully able to respond to labour-market needs, creating a gap between the supply and demand of industry-relevant skills.**

Significant problems arise when large parts of the future workforce acquire their core competences in iVET and these do not correspond to companies' needs. Added to this, iVET is not as highly regarded as general or 'academic' education, and still tends to be regarded as 'second-choice' education. For this reason, highly-motivated students with the necessary key competences all too often avoid taking this path.

These problems are closely interlinked: if we are to increase the attractiveness and prestige of Vocational Education and Training, its quality and responsiveness to labour-market needs must be improved and this must be communicated through appropriate guidance and information.

Put simply, the availability of highly-qualified personnel can only be ensured by providing high-quality iVET across Europe that provides young people with the skills and competences to meet companies' needs. The current combination of challenges we face makes this more important than ever: **global competition, shorter innovation cycles and the constantly increasing pace of technological development all require a more responsive education system.**

## iVET Value Chain

Pre-VET

Educational/career  
guidance aimed  
at pupils & families

iVET

Stakeholder  
cooperation on iVET  
contents

Enterprise  
Higher  
Education

Employability, skills  
matching and access  
to Higher Education

### The CEEMET project

In light of the crucial role that employers can - and should - play in modernising iVET systems across Europe, CEEMET launched a European-level project on **Strengthening the cooperation between the MET Industry and iVET** in 2009. Its aim was to provide an **accurate picture of the role the MET industry plays in iVET** in different countries, explore how employers think this relationship could be improved at the national and European level, and showcase examples of good practice from various coun-

tries – and iVET models – in the EU and beyond which could inspire industry, schools and policy-makers.

This report, which identifies key priorities for the future and makes a number of recommendations for action by different stakeholders, constitutes the final stage of the project, pulling together the results of a survey carried out in 2009, the CEEMET European-level conference in 2010 and interviews with CEEMET members. It is designed to contribute to the debate on how best ensure that Europe has the skilled and motivated workforce it needs to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Strengthening cooperation between Industry and  
initial Vocation Education and Training**



### Diverse systems and common trends

iVET systems and the role that employers play in them vary greatly across Europe and beyond. In some countries, employers are the main providers of training, while in others they may only be informally consulted on education and training issues. Vocational Education and Training policies remain largely a national responsibility and are shaped in line with countries' different educational traditions, labour markets and industrial cultures. There is simply **no 'one-size-fits-all'** in iVET.

However, despite the differences between iVET systems across Europe, it is also clear that there are **common trends** – across borders and within the MET sector – in relation to their structure (especially as systems are being reformed), the problems they face and, not least, the key factors that could boost cooperation between industry and schools and improve Vocational Education and Training overall.

Many of the associations and manufacturing companies that took part in this project have identified similar problems across borders in terms of the difficulties facing iVET and industry-school cooperation. For many, the central concern is the **negative image of iVET**, which is **both a cause and effect** of the weaknesses associated with iVET. Issues regularly identified and linked to this include the **low numbers of students going into iVET**, the

**number of early school-leavers**, the **need to raise the level of ambition in iVET** in terms of quality and skills, and the difficulties associated with **persuading companies to invest** more in iVET.

Finally, from the employers' perspective, it is apparent that in order to get to grips with these problems, a number of **key factors** that concern all stakeholders and are necessary to build strong partnerships between industry and iVET need to be addressed. These in turn will, in the long term, ensure high-quality education and a highly-qualified workforce.

### Importance of cooperation

It is clear from the research carried out as part of this project that there is a common awareness in the MET industry of the **importance of good and effective cooperation** between the iVET and MET industry worlds, and of the **need to strengthen such cooperation** in order to both improve iVET's image and raise its quality. This is reflected in the **relatively large investment of resources (both human and financial) by MET industry stakeholders** in this area.

The CEEMET survey shows that 91% of its member associations already work together with national governments on iVET and the same (high) percentage also work directly with companies on this issue. Thus, employer involvement in iVET

spans the entire spectrum, from policy-making at central level to the everyday provision of education and training at company level, in both SMEs and large corporations.

This clearly demonstrates not only the interest of employers in education and training, but also their commitment and willingness to deepen their cooperation with all stakeholders on this vital issue. For employers, this means that they must work actively to become **more involved in the governance of iVET, content development and quality assurance**.

Ultimately, employers must face up to the challenge of developing an integrated and holistic long-term plan for iVET and cooperation with iVET schools. Involvement in iVET must be considered as an investment with **long-term benefits** for competitiveness.

However, ensuring strong cooperation between iVET and the labour market is not the responsibility of industry alone. It is a **shared challenge** for all stakeholders, and can only flourish if the right conditions are in place.

The wide variety of iVET systems and models of cooperation between iVET and the labour market in Europe means there will be many different approaches to bringing the labour market and iVET closer to each other. However, based on the information gathered for this project, it is clear that there are a number of **fundamental ingredients** which employers deem essential to optimise cooperation and the performance of iVET: **diversity, guidance, flexibility, mobility and excellence**.

To achieve these goals, a number of basic priorities need to be addressed by different stakeholders, as set out below.

## Diversity

Effective iVET and cooperation between companies and iVET providers requires **diverse approaches**. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' in iVET and CEEMET supports this varied approach, which reflects the diversity of Europe's labour markets and skills requirements.

### TO THIS END, THE EU SHOULD:

- ✓ Support efforts at the national level to reform iVET, improve cooperation between industry and schools, and raise the quality of iVET by continuously drawing attention to these issues at the European level, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity in the area of education. The objective must be to strengthen the quality and image of Vocational Education and Training and the exchange of best practices.
- ✓ Ensure that the diversity and flexibility of national education systems – and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances - are not jeopardised by EU-level initiatives.

## Guidance

To improve cooperation and enhance iVET overall, both schools and companies must become better ambassadors for careers in the metals, engineering and technology-based sector to attract more young people into iVET and into working in the sector. Excellent iVET requires well-functioning **career guidance** which helps pupils to understand the alternatives available to them from a young age.

TO THIS END, **NATIONAL AND LOCAL ACTORS** SHOULD:

- ✓ Establish high-quality, easily accessible guidance for pupils from an early age, involving both schools and industry, by for instance setting up independent careers centres, ensuring high-quality training (including industry experience) for counsellors, and capitalising on the possibilities offered by the Internet and social media.
- ✓ Promote a culture of practical learning in primary and lower secondary education to introduce pupils to VET early on and ensure that parents are well-informed about the possibilities iVET offers.

## Flexibility

**Flexibility** in VET systems, including the ability of individual schools to adapt quickly to technological developments and changing labour market needs, is crucial to strengthen cooperation between employers and iVET.

TO THIS END, **NATIONAL AND LOCAL ACTORS** SHOULD:

- ✓ Support an effective and recognised dialogue at national and local level, building on mutual trust and openness between schools, industry and government to help give the system the flexibility required to make necessary adjustments efficiently.
- ✓ Ensure that iVET systems allow for active employer involvement in iVET governance and content development by, for example, enabling or improving the participation of employers on school governing boards.
- ✓ Allow for more flexibility in curricula frameworks and in work-based learning in relation to scheduling and content by, for example, introducing modular structures.
- ✓ Avoid a categorical focus on either technical skills or 'soft' skills, as different programmes and occupations call for different skills. Instead, flexibility and strong cooperation between industry and iVET should be promoted as the means to find the right balance between technical and soft skills in each situation, reflecting labour-market needs and increasing employability.



## Mobility

Learning **mobility** in iVET for students and apprentices contributes to the development of important soft skills (language, culture, adaptability) which are crucial in a globalised, technologically fast-paced industry and world.

TO THIS END, THE **EU** SHOULD:

- ✓ Facilitate and promote greater mobility and easier exchange and transfer between EU countries for students, apprentices, VET teachers and young professionals (whether to complete their studies or to do on-the-job training in other countries).
- ✓ Continuously work towards improving transparency of qualifications at all levels, based on learning outcomes.

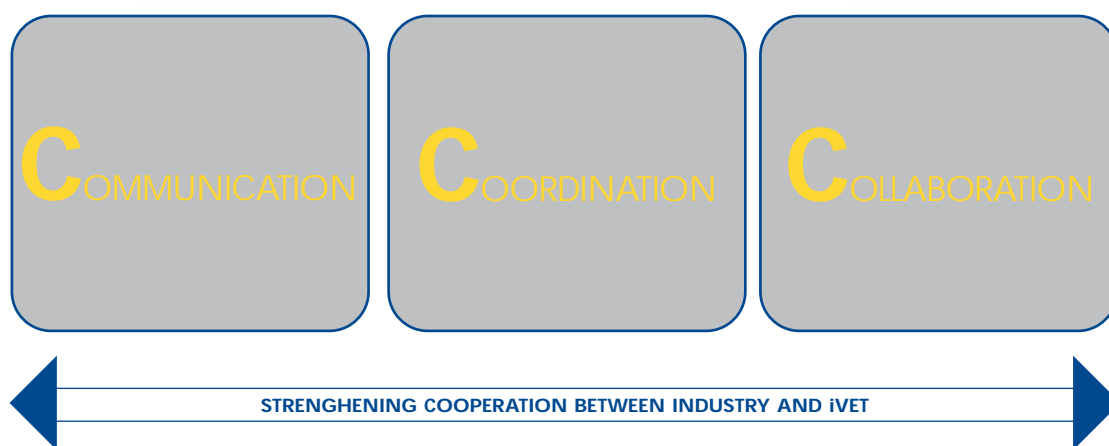
## Excellence

Finally, the promotion of **excellence** in iVET at all levels (including the European level) is one of the most essential ingredients for bringing iVET closer to labour-market needs. While Vocational Education and Training should undoubtedly promote equity, **priority must be given to promoting excellence**. This must be a joint effort by all stakeholders at all levels in order to successfully change the iVET 'mindset' among students, teachers, parents and policy makers alike, making vocational education and training 'first choice' education. This also means increasing opportunities for pupils in iVET by **improving the permeability** between iVET and higher education so that iVET is considered a real alternative for young people – both those who want to go directly from school to work as well as those who want to go into higher-level education.

TO THIS END, **ALL STAKEHOLDERS** SHOULD:

- ✓ Focus on excellence and raise the general level of ambition for iVET programmes and pupils to make iVET as esteemed as general education.
- ✓ Emphasise the need for better and more rigorous recruitment to iVET in order to attract high-calibre pupils.
- ✓ Improve and strengthen the permeability between iVET and higher education to make it easier for young people to move from one to the other.
- ✓ Pay more attention to teaching and learning methods in order to improve learning outcomes and promote excellence, including:
  - making it easier for iVET teachers to update their knowledge and competences;
  - challenging the skilled young people in VET and providing them, including the most talented ones, with individualised learning paths.
- ✓ Recognise the importance of the manufacturing industry for Europe, and promote a positive image of this multifaceted sector underpinned by supportive European and national policies.

## CEEMET ROLE



### CEEMET role

Ensuring that industry's 'voice' is central in the debate over how best to develop Vocational Education and Training at all levels is a continuous challenge – but it is one which must be met given the importance of this issue for Europe's future competitiveness.

CEEMET is committed to working for closer cooperation between industry and education and training at all levels, and will continue to bring attention to this issue at European level by:

**Communicating** the views and needs of the MET industry,

supporting the exchange of good practice and promoting a positive image of the industry;

**Coordinating** the views of national employers' organisations to speak with one voice on education and training-related issues which need to be addressed at the European level;

**Collaborating** with other stakeholders at the European level in different fora, including as appropriate the Sectoral Social Dialogue, to create an EU-wide network of experts and stakeholders working together for a stronger vocational education and training.



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