

SSD EDUCATION AND TRAINING GROUP

ON PERMEABILITY BETWEEN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Across Europe, the metal, engineering and technology-based (MET) industries form the biggest industry sector and lead in European exports. As highly skilled employees are central to ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector, MET industries are reliant on high quality education sector, including higher education (HE) as well as vocational education and training (VET).

Companies in a number of countries report about unfilled vacancies for skilled workers or engineers while unemployment rates remain high. Hence the attractiveness of vocational education and training as well as of the MET industry is a central issue for the EMF and CEEMET. Ensuring a steady supply of qualified personnel is vital to the industry's future. This can only be achieved through the provision of high quality initial and continued VET.

We support the EU target of 40% of 30-34 year olds to have completed tertiary education by 2020, and want to make sure that VET is included in this target since it is also part of higher education.

Particularly important in this context is **permeability** – facilitating access between VET and higher education. It should be easier for students to move from one to the other, **this will increase opportunities for the individual and thereby also attractiveness of VET**. Students should take for granted that VET and HE are parts of **a single ensemble with pathways between them** and that the choice of one path does not exclude the other. Permeability is also central in improving the quality of VET and attracting the right people to choose this path. To achieve this, bridge-ways from VET to HE opportunities and vice versa need to be built and promoted through proper guidance so that the notion of being pigeon-holed is taken away.

Acknowledging the fact that HE can also be higher vocational education is a crucial part of this process. Permeability is needed notably when it comes to:

- 1) Access - VET students should be granted access to HE;
- 2) Content and design - there should also be programmes on offer in HE that build on the competences taught in iVET.

Concretely, it is important to look at what HE offers to VET students - to see if the structures are sufficiently flexible in order for VET students to carry on their studies and improve their qualifications.

Further, the **transparency of competence profiles** is highly important in contributing to permeability. The generalisation of the description of qualifications in terms of skills, knowledge and competence (learning outcomes) will facilitate the interface between VET and HE, making visible the overlapping areas of the competence profiles of VET and HE qualifications, notably by identifying the skills, knowledge and technical and technological competences developed by each system and which are

transferable between occupation, sectors and countries. This should be taken into account by Member States when implementing the European Qualifications Framework. The EQF and the NQFs need to be comprehensive and open and include all levels of education. This should also be reflected when moving forward in the implementation of ECVET and ECTS, both systems using “points” that need to be a common currency at all levels of the education system.

Permeability should also concern **pedagogical approaches**. In this regard, HE could usefully integrate some patterns from VET including notably **more work-related education**. Gaining work experience, which is practice in VET, should become more common also in more academic HE. Work experience and project-based learning in industry can be very valuable in helping students to develop and internalise the theoretical knowledge gained in HE in a context where a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach is often needed. Whether or not on vocational courses, students should have work placement opportunities and the support necessary to reflect on these experiences. Permeability of pedagogical approaches can also concern exchanges between representatives of vocational training and high education (trainers and teachers).

Continuous education also needs to be developed in HE whereas it is already an integral part of VET. With increasing technological change and the development of a ‘knowledge-based society’, continuous learning and retraining are a high priority to ensure economic competitiveness.

High quality VET is central to a successful manufacturing industry in Europe. In order to realise its full potential it is necessary that the authorities and education and training systems make significant progress in increasing permeability.

The European Commission will in autumn 2011 publish its communication on the ***Modernisation of Higher Education***.

It is imperative that VET is included in this debate, not least considering the goals the EC has set in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Permeability between VET and HE has to be promoted as part of modern HE systems. This will allow:

- to reach the EU target of at least 40% of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education by 2020
- to promote employability of graduates
- to promote mobility between industry and academia
- to open up opportunities to non-traditional learners (look over teaching and learning methods as many of these learners will have work experience)
- to promote flexible learning pathways and lifelong learning.

CEEMET and the EMF support all efforts made in this area and jointly call on the EC to include and recognise the significance of this issue for the successful modernisation of higher education in Europe.