



Ceemet
European Tech &
Industry Employers

What do we need for a successful EU VET strategy?

Position paper

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Preliminary remarks

Skills shortages and gaps continue to be widespread across all sectors of the economy. Nearly 75% of SMEs^[1] report difficulties in finding the appropriately skilled workforce they need in order to grow and remain competitive.

Within the MET industries, companies are still facing significant recruitment challenges that undermine their competitiveness, capacity to innovate and ability to create high-quality employment. This skills crisis remains largely unresolved due to the fact that Europe does not produce enough graduates from higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET), nor with STEM backgrounds.^[2] At the same time, Europe continues to struggle to position itself as an attractive destination for recruiting and retaining talent from outside the EU.

Moreover, participation in continuous training^[3] once individuals have entered the labour market remains insufficient. Too often, training provision is not adequately aligned with labour market needs, which further exacerbates existing skills gaps.

On top of that, in many Member States, career guidance systems remain insufficiently connected to labour market realities and companies' needs, contributing to the widening of the skills gap.^[4] Against this backdrop, Ceemet considers excellent and well-functioning VET systems to be an indispensable instrument for equipping workers with the skills required to manage major technological change and to support the transition towards a green and digital economy.

We therefore believe that Member States must continue to invest in ambitious and high-quality VET policies. Such investment is essential for companies of all sizes, from large multinational groups to Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as for workers to keep up with the skills development that is required for the MET sector to remain strong, innovative, competitive and sustainable.

In short, Europe needs excellence in vocational education and training to sustain competitive industries, strengthen quality industrial employment and ultimately preserve and reinforce its industrial foundation.

[1] European Year of Skills, May 2023– Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in SMEs, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2994>

[2] European strategy for vocational education and training, call for evidence, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16332-European-strategy-for-vocational-education-and-training_en

[3] Decision 2023/936, on a European Year of Skills 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2023/936/oj/eng>

[4] Ceemet & ECEG position paper on career guidance, https://ceemet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ceemet-eccg_position_paper_on_career_guidance_24012023-1.pdf





Towards multifold approach

We broadly welcome the Commission's intention to deliver a European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET), in particular its objective of increasing the number of people obtaining a secondary VET qualification. At the same time, we strongly emphasise the need to fully respect national competencies in the development of this strategy. Member States remain primarily responsible for the organisation, structure and content of their vocational education and training systems.

The European Union nevertheless has an important role in supplementing, supporting and coordinating Member States' actions in this field. In particular, the EU can facilitate the exchange of information and good practices between those Member States with effective and well-functioning VET systems and those seeking to improve their models. Promoting the transfer of successful national experiences can help strengthen VET systems across Europe while fully respecting subsidiarity.

We also broadly endorse the Commission priorities as regards the forthcoming strategy on VET, including the need to foster its attractiveness, excellence, quality and labour market relevance. As a matter of fact, these have been MET priorities in the field of VET for years. Ceemet and its member associations have consistently worked to enhance both the visibility and attractiveness of VET as a first-class educational pathway that leads to quality employment in the technology industries. This requires permeability between the different (general and VET) pathways and improved career guidance and counselling.

In this context, Ceemet continues to advocate for the following priorities to be included in the forthcoming European VET Strategy:

1. Making VET a first-class training choice

To increase the number of VET learners across all levels and in all Member States, we need to strengthen the visibility and attractiveness of VET as a pathway leading to stable and high-quality employment. Although perceptions of vocational education have improved in recent years, the stigma and outdated stereotypes about VET studies persist in some EU countries and amongst certain groups of youngsters and parents.

Providing consistently high-quality VET programmes and diplomas must therefore remain a top priority to reverse this negative trend. In particular, VET systems with a strong work-based learning component are essential in addressing current skills shortages in the MET industries. Across all sectors, VET programmes and diplomas must be labour market-relevant, flexible and regularly updated to reflect evolving skills needs.

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Flexibility is equally crucial in order to accommodate adult learners. In light of demographic change and an ageing workforce, VET systems must support the retraining, upskilling and professional development of adults throughout their careers.

This being said, we would like to emphasise once again that the EU cannot exert pressure on national education systems. In this respect, we would like to mention that although the EU generally respects national competence in the field of education and training, occasionally other instruments such as well-intentioned guidelines or EU funded projects or other non-binding tools end up pressuring national education structures, especially with regard to disruptive topics such as AI.

2.Reinforcing cooperation between industry, social partners and VET providers

Experience from successful national VET systems shows that strong involvement of industry and employers in the design and delivery of VET programmes and diplomas is a key quality factor. It ensures that training remains aligned with labour market needs and enhances the credibility and attractiveness of vocational pathways.

We therefore firmly believe that cooperation between industry and VET providers must be strengthened further. The most effective level for such cooperation is often regional and local, where direct interaction between businesses, VET institutions, young people, parents and teachers can have a tangible impact.

Against this background, Ceemet members remain committed to actively contributing to the updating of VET curricula and qualifications in order to align training provisions with labour market needs. Indeed, employers possess up-to-date knowledge of evolving skills requirements and occupational shortages, and their input is essential to maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of VET systems. It is therefore essential that Member States involve social partners from the outset in the development, implementation and governance of VET policies and systems.

3. Fostering permeability between VET and general – higher – education

As employers, we believe that VET and higher education should both be recognised as first-class educational pathways and should not be positioned in opposition to one another. In our view, VET can be attractive to a broad range of learners, provided that permeability between different educational pathways is ensured. Ideally, it should be possible to more freely combine studies from different (VET) programmes and courses of different educational levels. Fostering permeability between VET, general and higher education would facilitate mobility between systems and increase the attractiveness of vocational education.

4. Investing in IVET and CVET

Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) are fundamental pillars of workforce development and labour market strategy. IVET^[1] prepares students to acquire specific technical or vocational skills for a specific job before entering the labour market and is thus key for combating skills shortages in key sectors and promoting early employability. IVET is particularly important for MET industries, notably in engineering and manufacturing, which attracted 32.7% of graduates in 2022^[2].

[1] IVET employment rate reached 81% in 2023, Cedefop key indicators on VET, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/what-new-ivet-key-pointers-statistics>

[2] Cedefop, key indicators on VET, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/what-new-ivet-key-pointers-statistics>



CVET, in turn, is a key for upskilling and reskilling adults in response to evolving labour market demands. It also supports the employability of adults in transforming industries. Indeed, CVET is a central instrument for securing a skilled workforce and staying competitive, as well as a key tool to address skills shortages. As employers, we know from experience that workplace-oriented, labour market-driven and on-the-job training is particularly effective. We therefore highlight the need to develop flexible and practice-based continuous training opportunities that meet the needs of companies.

5. Facilitating customised learning

Customised learning can help VET students develop their innate talents and capabilities more effectively. The increasing availability of digital tools creates new opportunities for personalised learning pathways adapted to each learner's strengths, needs and interests. Instead of a one-size-fits-all model, more flexible and individualised approaches can enhance learner engagement and contribute to making VET more attractive.

6. Improving career guidance and counselling at an early age

Part of increasing the visibility and attractiveness of VET as a first-class training choice that leads to quality employment lies in motivating people to choose VET as a starting point for their professional career. High-quality information, advice and guidance at an early age are therefore essential to raise awareness of the diverse career opportunities offered by VET.

While career guidance systems vary considerably across Member States, Ceemet has long been calling for national authorities to invest in effective, practical, and flexible career guidance systems that can inform and guide young people to opt for vocational education and training, and as a result, to work in the industries. Career advisers, school counsellors and teachers must be well informed about the wide range of professional opportunities available through VET in order to guide and motivate youngsters to choose VET as a starting point for their professional career.

A common challenge across many Member States is the lack of structured cooperation between career guidance and working life. For many young people, industry remains unfamiliar territory, which makes it difficult to appreciate its long-term career potential. Counsellors and guidance professionals should therefore have a solid understanding of the industry and benefit from continuous upskilling and reskilling themselves to stay informed about labour market developments and emerging skills needs.

The increasing availability of digital tools creates new opportunities for personalised learning pathways adapted to each learner's strengths, needs and interests.



In this context, the EU could play a valuable supporting role by facilitating the exchange of successful national models that effectively guide young people towards vocational education and, ultimately, careers in industry.

2

What is in for the MET industries?

MET industries are in strong need of highly qualified workers, as well as medium- and low-skilled workers.

We require both blue-collar and white-collar professionals to ensure that our industries remain competitive and resilient. To remain competitive in the current geopolitical environment, our companies depend on highly skilled experts such as data analysts, engineers, cybersecurity and ICT specialists, mechanical and metal designers, and software engineers.

Equally important are skilled workers capable of driving robotics and automation in manufacturing. Moreover, workers with strong analytical and system design skills, as well as workers with a solid STEM background, are crucial for the sustainability of the MET industries.

At the same time, demand for medium- and low-skilled workers remains significant. Mechanics, electrical and electronic technicians, boilermakers, welders and electricians are indispensable to our value chains. Across the sector, companies are experiencing increasing demand for workers with vocational education and training (VET) backgrounds.

The shipbuilding industry provides a striking illustration of these challenges. Within the next decade, 40% of its workforce will retire. Simultaneously, the sector must adapt to both the digital and green transitions. This transformation requires highly specialised profiles, including mechatronics engineers, welders, pipefitters, boilermakers, naval engineers and naval architects, many of whom are already scarce in the labour market.

More broadly, the shipbuilding and maritime technology sectors^[1] rely on a highly skilled workforce structure, with approximately 35% holding higher education qualifications in engineering and around 60% coming from VET and technical education pathways.

All these professions and skill sets are indispensable to ensuring the success of the green and digital transitions underway in our industries. This is particularly true in strategic sectors such as automotive, shipbuilding and aerospace industries, which together provide millions of high-quality jobs across Europe.

In response to these structural challenges, the European Commission has launched several initiatives aimed at bridging the skills gap, notably in the shipbuilding and automotive industries. Central to this approach is the establishment of large-scale partnerships bringing together education providers and the world of work.

[1] Leadership-Empowering the skills of tomorrow in the European maritime sector

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Among these, TRIREME stands out as a flagship EU-funded project developed within the framework of the Automotive Skills Alliance. Its objective is to support the transition of the automotive mobility ecosystem towards a greener and more digital future by developing a comprehensive and sustainable skills and training strategy, with a strong emphasis on vocational education and training.

TRIREME is an example of reinforced cooperation between education and training providers, industry and social partners. It seeks to anticipate emerging skills needs, identify skills gaps within the automotive sector, and translate these findings into adapted VET curricula and training programmes that respond directly to labour market realities.

Building on the project results, the TRIREME partnership will deliver a sectoral skills strategy containing concrete recommendations for public authorities and mobility stakeholders on how best to address the skills gap in the automotive industry.

As an active partner in the project, Ceemet is particularly interested in understanding how synergies will be ensured between the various sectoral skills strategies, the VET strategy, the future STEM strategy, the Skills Observatory, the Fair Transition Observatory and other related initiatives. In essence, we believe it is crucial to clarify how the different initiatives emerging under the Union of Skills framework will interact in practice.

It is equally important to recognise that competence for skills policy primarily rests at the national level. Effective coordination between EU-level initiatives and national approaches will therefore be critical to success.

While we strongly support efforts to reduce fragmentation and overlap, there is growing concern about the proliferation of EU initiatives, programmes, schemes and EU-funded projects in the field of skills. Without careful coordination, there is a real risk of duplication and institutional overlaps.

We therefore call on the Commission to provide greater clarity on how these various initiatives will be aligned and how their interaction will function in practice.

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3

More is needed to make VET excellent and attractive

1. Enhancing VET mobility

One of the key pillars of the Commission's forthcoming strategy is the promotion of mobility in VET in order to create more opportunities for learners to gain experience abroad. In this regard, the Herning Declaration^[1] calls to promote and facilitate inclusive mobility of learners, teachers and trainers, with a view to reaching the 2030 VET mobility target of 12%.

Ceemet and its member associations are fully convinced about the added value of learning mobility, as mobile learners are more likely to become the mobile workers of the future. The mobility of learners further contributes to the development of essential soft skills (language, culture, etc.) that are crucial for our fast-paced changing industries as well as for transitioning to the labour market.

With regard specifically to the mobility of apprentices, employers in the technology and industry sectors recognise mobility as a valuable investment. However, they are also conscious of the multiple obstacles to its implementation, such as the lack of administrative capacity and red tape, as well as financial constraints, especially in the case of SMEs.

Indeed, the mobility of apprentices is more challenging than school-based learner mobility, as it takes place in a more complex framework: the legal frameworks regulating apprenticeships are very different across Europe and in certain situations/countries, apprentices can be part of an employment relationship and thus subject to certain remuneration and social security-related provisions. This complex and diverse legal framework obviously hinders the mobility of apprentices.

We recall here that the majority of companies in the MET industries are SMEs, which often face a lack of administrative capacity and know-how to receive and follow-up a mobile apprentice. The administrative burden and financial constraints are certainly important challenges to engaging in the mobility of apprentices.

Nevertheless, Ceemet supports the 2030 VET mobility target, recognising its potential to enhance the attractiveness of VET. In order to make this target a reality, we call on the national authorities to, for example, give guidance (without being too prescriptive) on the sort of issues that need to be addressed in the sending and receiving countries, particularly on the role of employers.

[1] New declaration to strengthen European cooperation on vocational education and training, 12 September 2025, <https://danish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/new-declaration-to-strengthen-european-cooperation-on-vocational-education-and-training/>

Further, effective support mechanisms for SMEs are essential to enable their active participation in apprenticeship mobility schemes. Together with SMEs, guidance and information to learners and apprentices who are considering a placement abroad is crucial.

Clear and accessible information for learners, apprentices, as well as for companies and training centres considering a placement abroad, is equally important^[1]. In this context, Ceemet sees a potential role for the European Labour Authority (ELA) in providing targeted information to all actors involved in the mobility of apprentices.

2. Developing soft skills, languages, and basic skills

In addition to up-to-date technical content and expertise, in a changing world of work, VET must equip learners with transversal and soft skills, which are essential to maintain one's employability in quickly transforming industries.

Language learning should be integrated at an early stage of VET, as this would help reduce barriers to mobility and facilitate cross-border professional opportunities.

We would also like to stress that basic skills training should not become the responsibility of employers: the development of basic skills remains primarily the responsibility of public authorities within compulsory education systems. Basic skills education should therefore be firmly embedded in the early stages of VET.

Once individuals have entered the labour market, companies can play a supportive role in strengthening adults' basic skills. However, appropriate public support and incentives should be available for employers that invest in such training.

3. Equipping teachers with necessary skills

We cannot close the skills gap without equipping VET teachers, educators, and trainers with the necessary skills to train the workers of today and of the future in the changing needs of the world of work. For MET employers, teacher qualifications are a key issue. Teachers, educators and trainers need to have a combination of both technical qualifications and practical industry experience. It is, thus, indispensable to invest in the continuous training of teachers so that they can provide the best learning experiences for their students and enable them to navigate through different career choices. In addition, structured opportunities for teachers to undertake placements in industry would help them acquire labour market experience.

Enhancing the attractiveness of the VET teaching profession itself is also crucial to raising the overall quality and image of vocational education.

4. Funding skills' acquisition and development

A wide range of EU instruments, including ERASMUS+, HORIZON Europe, social dialogue budget lines, etc., and today the Competitiveness Fund, which is currently under discussion, provide funding for skills development. While such investment is welcome, greater coordination between EU budget lines dedicated to skills is essential.

Fragmentation across multiple funding streams creates complexity, confusion and, in some cases, duplication and overlap. Streamlined and simplified access to EU funding would ensure that resources are deployed more efficiently and reach the companies, institutions and learners that need them most.

[1] For example, France has a comprehensive legal framework for mobile apprentices and the difficulty for companies lies in understanding how this works in other countries, what will be the status of the apprentice in the host country (employee, trainee, other) as well as his/her social security situation/status.

Conclusion



For many years, Ceemet has been advocating for first-class VET strategies to support the Metal, Engineering and Technology-based industries (MET) in remaining competitive and adapting to the fast-evolving, highly digitalised world of today. Today, more than ever, it is a reality that vocational education and training are central to meeting the growing demand for skilled workers and responding effectively to structural changes in manufacturing and industrial sectors.

In this regard, we can only welcome the future EU strategy on VET, but we would like to reiterate our call on the Commission to respect national competencies in this field. The EU strategy should certainly aim at reinforcing the importance, visibility and attractiveness of VET as well as foster the exchange of information and best practices, but must not collide or overlap with the national VET strategies in place in the different Member States.

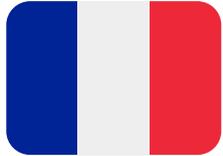
In fact, national VET systems differ greatly from one country to another and are often well advanced in responding to, for example, the digital transformation, the introduction of AI, and other disruptions. This, however, is not always well understood at the EU level, as it requires a very detailed knowledge of the national systems. As a result, the EU sometimes indirectly influences national systems through other non-binding tools.

That being said, in our view, the EU level could certainly serve to reinforce and support national reforms where necessary, but without creating additional structures or institutional complexity. Moreover, the EU also has a role to play in expanding mobility programs such as Erasmus. In short, the EU strategy on VET can be a good catalyst, as long as it continues to provide support and does not override or influence national systems.

At the EU level, it is equally important to draw lessons from VET models (both within and outside of the EU) that have successfully developed or evolved to ensure that vocational training is a catalyst for qualified industrial employment and for competitive industries, rather than allowing it to be perceived as an outdated pathway.

Ceemet and its member organisations stand ready to contribute constructively to the debate on the future of vocational education and training in Europe.

Annexe 1: National examples regarding VET systems at national level

Country	National examples
	<p><u>FINLAND</u></p> <p>Making VET more attractive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TIF has been working to make VET more attractive for years. Nowadays, MyTech brand, TIF produces a lot of social media content and also engage with schools and student counselors to find new ways to promote the MET industries. More information can be found here: https://mytech.fi/ <p>Cooperation between industry, social partners, and VET providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TIF organises the so called "strategic network for VET." This network meets four times a year, bringing together Finnish TVET education providers TIF member companies. The topics discussed vary, with a common focus on finding new ways to enhance the dialogue and cooperation between companies and TVET institutions.
	<p><u>FRANCE</u></p> <p>Improving career guidance and counselling at an early age – the active involvement of industry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publication of brochures presenting jobs in the metal industry: Publication of 32-page brochures available in PDF and PRINT versions, produced by ONISEP (French public organisation that provides students, families, and educators with official information about education pathways, vocational training, and career opportunities) in partnership with UIMM. The <u>first one</u> was dedicated to careers in industrial production. This publication, called "Zoom", is the first in a series of five publications devoted to the seven job families in the metallurgy sector. It contains 20 testimonials from professionals who shed light on their career paths, daily lives, and motivations. This guide also provides an overview of the jobs and training required to enter the industrial production sector. Web series on the worldskills competition: This is a <u>four-season web series</u> designed to target 15-18 year olds seeking career guidance, industrial companies, and the general public more broadly. The web series follows the journey of young WorldSkills competitors in various industrial trades. The professions covered in the series are: welding, industrial production, turning, aeronautical maintenance, boilermaking, turning, robotic integration, milling, mechatronics (as well as stone cutting, jewelry, fashion, and design). "Industry week": The "industry week" or "Semaine de l'industrie" was created by the French government to promote industry careers and improve public awareness of the sector, and organisations such as UIMM and its members actively participate by organising company visits, workshops, and events to showcase industrial professions and connect students with industry professionals. 8,113 events were organised in this context in 2025 (not only in our sector, but the UIMM and its members are very active and organise many events in this context), with more than 5 million participants recorded. The events organised are diverse (company and school visits, practical workshops, career forums, job dating, etc.). The main target audience is 11-25 year olds, but job seekers, career guidance and education professionals, and the general public are also targeted.



About Ceemet

Set up in 1962, Ceemet is the European employers' organisation representing the interests of the metal, engineering and technology-based (MET) industries with a particular focus on topics in the areas of employment, social affairs, industrial relations, health & safety and education & training.

Ceemet members are national employers' federations across Europe and beyond, based in 20 countries. They represent more than 200,000 member companies, a vast majority of which are SMEs.

Ceemet members provide direct employment to 16 million people and indirect employment for 35 million people, and cover all products within the MET industrial sectors, detailed below.

Together, these companies make up Europe's largest industrial sector, both in terms of employment levels and added value, and are therefore essential to ensuring Europe's economic prosperity.

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