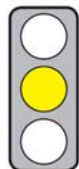


## MAIN ISSUES

**Objective of the Communication:** The Commission presents its view of the future of vocational education and training (VET).

**Parties affected:** All employers, employees, trainees, students, education and training centres.



**Pro:** (1) The comparability of educational qualifications increases cross-border mobility.

(2) Fostering entrepreneurial thinking in VET has a positive effect on growth and employment.

**Contra:** (1) The Commission's idea to omit specific courses from initial vocational education and training in favour of "modularised" training threatens to undermine the dual system of VET.

(2) Mandatory periods of study or training abroad and focusing on key competences at the expense of professional qualifications increases training costs and thus reduces companies' willingness to train people.

## CONTENT

### Title

**Communication COM(2010) 296** of 9 June 2010: A new impetus for European **cooperation in Vocational Education and Training** to support the Europe 2020 strategy

### Brief Summary

#### ► Background

- According to the Commission, vocational education and training (VET) is of immense importance. Therefore, it plans to give new impetus to the 2002 Copenhagen process, which was intended to support Member States in modernising VET systems.
- As part of the Copenhagen process, common "reference tools" were developed in order to achieve comparability in the different national qualifications and common quality standards. They serve to improve the mobility of employees.
  - At EU level there are several initiatives which, based on learning outcomes, are to ensure the comparability of different national qualifications.
    - The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) serves to develop and compare national qualification frameworks to classify EU-wide common standards for education.
    - The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) serves to compare different qualifications acquired at universities, polytechnics and vocational colleges.
    - The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) serves to compare qualifications acquired in vocational education.
  - At EU level there is also the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), which is designed to ensure and "further develop" the quality of vocational education.
- On the one hand, the point of VET is to meet Europe's immediate and future needs in terms of skilled workers; on the other hand, it serves "to reduce the social impact of and facilitate recovery from the crisis" (p. 2).
- To this end, vocational education schemes should be redesigned so as to enable workers to better adjust their skills to future labour market needs.
- With regard to vocational education and training, the Commission differentiates between initial (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET):
  - In most Member States, IVET is part of upper secondary education but also includes tertiary levels (called *Fachhochschulen*, universities of applied sciences or vocational colleges) and is regulated. Only in some Member States, for example Germany and Austria, does IVET take place as part of a dual system, which means a combination of work-based and school learning.
  - CVET can take various different forms and is offered by many different providers, who are "often" unregulated.
- The Commission would like
  - VET to be more flexible,
  - for there to be more mobility in VET and
  - VET to contribute to "social equity".

► **A general need for action in VET**

The Commission sees potential for improvement in terms of what VET has to offer, the quality and recognition of VET and the qualification of trainers.

– **Better opportunities in VET**

- The Commission recommends making better use of “work-based” learning systems, for needs-based training improves (re-)entry-level opportunities in the labour market.
- The Commission wants VET to prioritise the development of key competences – such as discipline and basic knowledge – so that workers can acquire the basic skills needed for life-long learning and are ensured adaptability and flexibility.
- At the same time, the Commission is calling for improved vocational qualifications and a focus on work-based learning.
- Furthermore, it wants employers to offer a wider range of apprenticeship and traineeship placements.
- From the providers of VET, it wants to see “risk-taking and experimentation” on the timetable so as to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking.
- VET provision should be – “based on forward planning tools” – more responsive to evolving labour market needs.
- The Commission welcomes the establishment of “skills councils” in several Member States, whose job it is to monitor labour markets and the development of skills profiles, curricula and certification.

– **Improved quality and recognition of VET**

- The Commission calls for a consistent application of EU-wide common standards to classify competences, skills and occupational profiles.
- The Commission would like Member States also to implement the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education (EQAVET) in national education policy.
- The Commission recommends that “non-formal and informal learning” also be validated, though in their opinion this does not include result-oriented learning options such as community college classes and learning from daily life, in other words personal experience and intuition; for this it suggests developing “frameworks” (p. 5).

– **Improved qualification of trainers**

- The Commission stresses that in the future teachers and trainers will be faced with “new challenges” and is therefore calling for changes:
  - Trainers in the workplace should in future have more pedagogical competences.
  - Teachers should have more knowledge of working processes and operations.
  - Entrepreneurial thinking should become an integral part of teachers’ and trainers’ education.
  - The job skill requirements and career developments should be adjusted accordingly.

► **More flexibility**

- The Commission suggests that all those involved must be more committed to flexibility in VET.
  - In order to “reconcile work, learning and family”:
    - Employers and social partners should become more flexible in organising their work and
    - Member States should introduce corresponding labour market rules.
  - Employers should “provide their employees with opportunities for intensive periods of training” (p. 4).
  - Member States should improve permeability between VET and higher education.
  - Universities should offer their own VET opportunities.
  - Providers of IVET programmes, notably vocational schools, should offer “à la carte concepts for heterogeneous groups” without specifying them.
- VET must be “coupled with” guidance and counselling services and career counselling from public employment services so as to facilitate job change and to improve the planning of individual career development.
- Career counselling should focus more on “a tasting approach”, providing young people with an opportunity to become acquainted with different vocational fields (p. 5).

► **More mobility**

- According to the Commission, “mobility” means both cross-border learning and improved permeability between the separate branches of education (training, further training and education and higher education) within the Member States. The Commission sees potential for improvement in both areas.
- The Commission wishes to “explore new concepts”, such as cross-border work placements which it was already possible to implement in IVET, and is calling for mandatory work and study placements abroad.
- The promotion of cross-border mobility is to be financed by the social partners.
- Periods spent working and studying abroad as part of VET are to be recognised by the credit point system ECVET.
- The Commission suggests developing a “benchmark system for mobility”, though it does not substantiate this proposal.
- The increase in physical mobility is to be supported by the means of more electronic training opportunities (“virtual mobility”).

### ► More “social equity”

- According to the Commission, vocational education also helps to promote “social equity” and upward social mobility. This is all the more true as “the more VET goes beyond the pure labour market aspect” (p. 9).
- It stresses that practice oriented training systems play a key role in reducing drop-out rates if early school leavers also have access to them, as they lead early school leavers back to learning.
- To better integrate people who are “less academically oriented” (p. 8) and those who are “at a disadvantage”, the Commission wishes to closely link traditional VET with the local labour market, to recognise non-formal and informal learning and establish improved counselling services.
- The Commission is convinced that IVET should not be designed as a separate training course but favours instead a modular training which enables learners to better assess their own educational efforts.
- To improve the integration of migrants, the Commission proposes special language courses.

### Statement on Subsidiarity by the Commission

The Commission does not address the issue of subsidiarity.

### Policy Context

At the end of 2010, the Council, the European social partners and the Commission will review the priorities of the Copenhagen process launched in 2002. It has not yet been implemented by all Member States.

### Options for Influencing the Political Process

Leading Directorate General :	DG Education and Culture
Consultation procedure:	Not planned.

## ASSESSMENT

### Economic Impact Assessment

#### Ordoliberal Assessment

**The comparability of educational competences** strengthens the single market, for it **meets an important precondition for cross-border mobility of learners and workers**. To this end, the Commission should be strongly supported in its efforts to give new impetus to the Copenhagen process.

**The Commission’s proposal for mandatory periods of work and training abroad, to be financed by the social partners is, however, to be rejected. First of all, it would constitute an excessive degree of intervention into the civil liberties of trainees**, as it would force them to move to a foreign cultural environment. Secondly, **it would increase the costs borne by companies offering training** without being of any benefit to them. **It should be left up to the trainees and the companies whether or not to integrate a stay abroad into their vocational education and training.**

So that stays abroad do not extend the total training period, the skills acquired abroad must be equally recognised. Therefore, the Commission is right to favour an EU-wide common quality assurance (through EQUAVET) and recognition (through ECVET).

The EU does not have the regulatory powers to define Member States’ VET programmes. Thus it can only make recommendations. These which can be assessed as follows:

The Commission fails to mention the fact that above all it is the responsibility of the trainees themselves and their employers to develop and maintain their employability through education. Indeed, it is they who benefit from improved qualifications in the form of a job or higher wages. Therefore, it is their task to “reconcile work, learning and family”.

In order to recruit the necessary personnel and to cover their own qualification requirements many employers will also have a high level of self-interest in terms of making the organisation of work more flexible and enabling “intensive training periods”. Consequently, it is not necessary to introduce labour market rules at European level as proposed by the Commission.

**The Commission is right to recommend that “work-based learning systems” should be used more intensively.** Although **the dual education and training system** – which combines classroom learning at school with work-based learning – has the disadvantage that the number of vacant training positions strongly depends on economic trends, on the other hand it **guarantees the Commission’s called for needs-based education and training that improves one’s chances of (re-)entering the job market.** For companies generally only train people when they have a need for certain qualifications.

If, however, vocational training extends beyond “the mere labour market aspect”, as requested by the Commission for reasons of “social equity”, this goes against the target of needs-based education and training. For only economically viable jobs and training positions can form the basis for “upward mobility”. The dual system of vocational training, for instance, is also open to early school leavers and leads them – as the Commission wishes – back to learning.

It is beyond dispute that learners who are “less academically oriented” or are “at a disadvantage” should be integrated, as the Commission stresses. However, the required VET educational levels must not sink as a result. For the very success of the dual system of vocational education is based on the reliably high quality of the vocational training. **The Commission’s proposal to abandon special vocational courses in favour of a “modularised” training is therefore to be categorically rejected. Otherwise the dual system of vocational training threatens to be undermined.** In addition, that would mean turning away from the so-called principle of regulated occupations and that qualifications would lose their significance. For companies would no longer be able to rely on state-certified qualifications but would have to examine every single qualification separately. The level of maturity necessary in order to be ready to enter high-quality training must be ensured primarily through the general education system. The more general knowledge also has to be included in vocational education and training – as required by the Commission through **the prioritisation of key competences as part of VET** – the less time is left for teaching vocational knowledge. This would **lead to less willingness on the part of the companies to provide training and should therefore be avoided.**

#### Impact on Efficiency and Individual Freedom of Choice

The desired higher permeability between VET and higher education increases individual freedom of choice. Moreover, it can enhance economic efficiency as it means the demand for skilled workers can be met more quickly. However, this is true only if the higher permeability does not lead to a drop in levels at universities. Naturally, the Commission does not address this issue.

#### Impact on Growth and Employment

The Commission’s intention **to promote entrepreneurial thinking** in VET is to be welcomed; it is today’s trainees in the craft sector who are tomorrow’s potential employers. Entrepreneurial thinking conveyed in VET increases willingness to become self-employed and thus **leads to positive effects on growth and employment** in the medium and long term.

#### Impact on Europe as a Business Location

The more VET makes it possible to provide a needs-based training of specialists, the more attractive Europe becomes as a business location. Of course the opposite is true if the more VET systems are supposed to contribute to “social equity”.

## Legal Assessment

### Legislative Competences

Art. 166 TFEU assigns to the EU a supportive role in the field of vocational education and training. This includes the improvement of VET as a (re-)entry measure into the labour market (Art. 166 (2) TFEU). The Communication falls under this scope.

### Subsidiarity

The EU is better able to facilitate the comparability and mutual recognition of vocational education and training offers and qualifications than Member States. In so far EU action provides a clear added value. As for the rest, added value is limited.

### Proportionality

Unproblematic.

### Compatibility with EU Law

Unproblematic.

### Compatibility with German Law

Unproblematic.

## Conclusion

The call for the improved comparability of educational competences in Europe increases the cross-border mobility of learners and workers. Mandatory stays abroad during vocational education and training and the emphasis on key competences at the expense of vocational qualification increases costs for companies and thus reduces their willingness to provide training. The proposed dispensation of special vocational training courses during IVET in favour of a “modularised” system is to be categorically rejected. This would undermine the dual system of education and training. The promotion of entrepreneurial thinking as part of vocational education would have a positive effect on growth and employment.