

FLEXIBLE PATHWAYS CONNECTING VET AND HE BY TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE DEMANDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET – THE VIEW OF EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDERS

Carme ROYO, Francesca URAS. eucen, Belgium
Hans DAALE. Chain5, Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

The following document collects and summarizes the feedback and recommendations provided by the European stakeholders consulted on the statements formulated by the TANDEM project consortium as a result of the work and analysis done by the project consortium within Work package 1 and Work package 2.

The statements were presented during the **eucen 49th** European Conference in Mainz, 07-09 June 2017, where some of the participants showed interest in the content and commented on the work presented.

To give a better account of the contributions collected, the report is structured as follows: the recommendations are provided following the order in which the 19 statements were originally proposed to the respondents, and their comments and responses follow each statement.

Statement 1

If non-formal certificates are obligatory for jobs (these refer to practical competences needed for the workplace), e.g. based on national regulations, those modules have to be integrated also in formal study programmes at the corresponding level(s) in VET and HE. This means that those affected can work directly in companies without the need to re-obtain those non-formal certificates.

Recommendations on Statement 1:

- There should be close collaboration between:
 - a) the national bodies responsible for defining the non-formal qualifications necessary for the labour market; and
 - b) the VET and HE institutions delivering formal qualifications
- This collaboration should include systems to make available and keep updated information on the skills competences and non-formal qualifications that are required for employment
- The systems for the management, control and updating of the regulated professions should be made more transparent and subject to regular review.

Statement 2

In case of international jobs foreseeing similar activities in the workplace, that include international requirements, we also need international certificates for the training programmes involved – to be recognised at international level. Those certificates can also be used as parts of international formal studies and joint degrees (offered by institutions for VET, HE and similar sectors).

Recommendations on Statement 2:

- Models of good practice already exist of:
 - a) Collaboration between multi-national companies and HEIs and higher professional schools/institutes to provide training and qualifications which can be international; and
 - b) Collaboration between HEIs in Europe and beyond (e.g. European masters, ERASMUS Mundus masters) to deliver skills, competences and qualifications which are internationalThese models should be analysed for their transferability to other domains and other professional/vocational areas.
- Such analyses should lead to the encouragement (e.g. through start-up funding) of new initiatives and experimentation for further development

Statement 3

Programmes at VET Level 4 must give the opportunity to (young) students in their final year to get specific labour market-oriented certificates, in combination with their internship. This means that the content of the modules for these certificates is developed and maintained under the control of the companies in the sector. In such a situation, the government finances part of the costs for students: material, salary, insurance, travel. In this period students can work, for instance, 3 days in a company and go to school for the remaining 2 days.

Recommendations on Statement 3:

- VET programmes at Level 4 should give young people the opportunity to obtain specific labour market oriented certificates based on their internships as part of the VET qualification
- Enterprises should be given a greater role in the design and assessment of this element
- Financing of these arrangements should be shared

Statement 4

In addition to vocational and technical training needed for the workplace, the industry also expects employees to possess other competencies, such as managerial skills. Most companies are trying to develop these skills outside of their technical training. It would also be beneficial to include this type of personal development training (team work, communication, time management, team management, etc.) in regular training programs.

Recommendations on Statement 4:

- In addition to vocational and technical skills, industry needs a wide range of generic skills: team working, communications, time management, team management, etc. The development of these skills should be included in regular VET and HE programmes.
- Collaboration in regional/local networks would facilitate the inclusion of such skills differently, in ways most relevant to the intended career path of the individuals

Statement 5

If in a country formal education is under control of Ministry X and non-formal education is organised by Ministry Y, the providers of VET and HE (at levels 4, 5 and 6) need to have a national platform to discuss issues related to Lifelong Learning.

Recommendations on Statement 5:

- Often VET, HE and LLL are organised by different ministries at national level, but they should all be involved in the development and implementation of an LLL strategy
- Platforms should be developed and supported by all the ministries involved and should be made operational at different levels – national, regional, local – so that issues relevant to all can be discussed and so that actors with different interests – policy, practice, management, research - and different levels of authority can participate appropriately and effectively.

Statement 6

Business Academies, owned by big companies and responsible for internal professional training programmes, have to be integrated in the national education system, in case they offer non-formal certificates that are (partially) funded by the (regional) government. If they are part of the system, this will allow adult learners to get exemptions in case of studying in formal degree programmes offered by colleges and universities.

Recommendations on Statement 6:

- If Business Academies offer internal, professional certified training that is funded partly by regional government, then they should ensure that the training provides genuine links, bridges and recognition arrangements with the formal professional and HE programmes offered by colleges and universities.
- Close collaboration between all the stakeholders must be put in place to achieve this.

(The following three statements were considered together, and responses and recommendations are included after Statement 9.)

Statement 7

We need more research on cases where students follow courses, training programmes and even full degree programmes at Level 5 (of the National Qualifications Framework), after completing a full degree programme at Level 6 or after dropping out from a formal programme in higher education. In cases like this, Level 5 programmes have to be offered in an apprenticeship format.

Statement 8

Experiences and good practices of adult learners in formal and non-formal programmes at Level 5 (offered by institutions that are selected by companies) must be used in the future for developing new and creative arrangements, so as to have more flexible work-based learning pathways starting from Level 4. This can help to raise the status of Higher VET at Level 5, if adult learners want to get a qualification at a higher level. It can also represent a choice for youngsters for a more attractive HVET programme, parallel to studying in Higher Education.

Statement 9

Within or after this project we need to pay attention to formulating the essential issues in order to raise the status of Higher VET for all stakeholders – next to Short Cycle HE. This is necessary knowing that a lot of adult learners want to get a well-recognized qualification at a higher level, and it will make the choice for HVET more attractive for younger people also, being a qualification similar to SCHE.

Recommendations on Statements 7, 8 and 9:

- At present there are major difficulties for students moving between Levels 5 and 6. More research should be done on the needs, opportunities and barriers to such movement, and the underlying reasons
- The development of Level 5 and 6 professional routes has been very patchy and in general slow. There is resistance to vocational drift in universities and academic drift in the universities of applied sciences and the higher professional schools. More collaboration between the two types of institutions and with enterprises should be systematically developed to promote innovation and creativity in the provision of flexible pathways between the programmes of different providers
- The flexibility should be focussed on the needs of the students and of the labour market rather than fixed to the institutional structures and budget streams
- These flexible individual pathways will require new forms of accreditation and financing that can function across existing structures
- The European commission should provide frameworks of support for the creation of such experimental arrangements and for the sharing of experience between the various actors and stakeholders
- There should be much more promotion of the idea of Level 5 qualifications to providers and employers, as well as parents, young people and adults looking to upgrade their skills or convert/transfer to different career paths
- The existing Platform for LLL should make a contribution here since it involves all the key actors and stakeholders

Statement 10

We need more attention for the role of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (and similar organisations) in proving a 'linking pin' between companies looking for tailor-made training, and the education providers of VET and HE. Examples from countries like Germany (which is doing well as an economy, using a dual system in VET) and Spain (which is still facing a lot of problems in terms of the economic situation) can be used as inspiration for similar countries.

Recommendations on Statement 10:

- The European Commission should undertake an inventory of the roles, strengths, weaknesses, functions and activities of the Chambers of Commerce and similar/equivalent organisations where there are no Chambers of Commerce
- This inventory should be the basis for sharing experience at all levels and in the development of the role of these organisations in supporting and promoting greater collaboration for innovation (e.g. of the kind recommended under Statement 7 above)

Statement 11

Social partners, involved in the development of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF for LLL) and in its European Advisory Board with representatives of all member states, need to have a formal link with an international platform for representatives of international networks (associations) responsible for international certificates (based on international qualifications).

Recommendations on Statement 11:

- An international platform should be created to promote dialogue between the national and international actors and stakeholders on the subject of possible linkages between the EQF and international certificates and qualifications
- This should lead to a structural Working Group at European level to discuss the implementation of European and national procedures that could be put in place for international certificates and certification
- The Working Group should also discuss the strengthening of links between the EQF and the EHEA, and the quality assurance procedures that underpin them in order to facilitate the inclusion of international certificates.

Statement 12

There is a need for a link between the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education and widely accepted standards for quality assurance in the world of work, controlled by other non-state organizations (national and international).

Recommendations on Statement 12:

- Discussions should take place especially with ENQA on the possible linkages between the ESG for the EHEA, which focusses on learning outcomes for diplomas, and the quality standards in enterprises (e.g. ISO system) which focus on the processes and procedures
- University departments for LLL and Continuing Education frequently work with both systems since they bridge the academic and professional domains. They should therefore be involved, especially through their national and European networks and associations for LLL and adult and continuing education

Statement 13

There is a need for a European Qualifications Framework for Non-Formal Qualifications (EQF-NF), with descriptors taking into account standards that are used by 'the world of work' and with a 'conversion table' to be used for this EQF-NF and the EQF for LLL.

Recommendations on Statement 13:

- More non-formal qualifications should be referenced to the EQF
- The descriptors in place for HE (the Dublin descriptors) should be used as a basis for developing descriptors for lower levels and for non-formal provision

Statement 14

Every country needs a national system which involves big companies paying a specific levy (taxes) for the funding of apprenticeships in their own organisations, but also for having a budget for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accepting apprentices. The government should be ‘the broker’ in this system, paying for some other ‘out-of-pocket’ costs for those SMEs.

Recommendations on Statement 14:

- Governments should broker a system of shared training and shared financing of training between large enterprises, SMEs and micro businesses
- A conference should be organised to kick-start this process involving all the stakeholders, including the social partners and the business / enterprise networks and associations, to facilitate and promote this debate

Statement 15

LLL Universities can take the lead in the (international) discussion about the role of Level 5 qualifications (the European Level 5 Area) in up-skilling workers with a VET background and in opening possibilities to develop a formal degree at level 6.

Recommendations to statement 15:

- **euken** and its member universities and national networks for LLL have considerable experience in this debate. **euken** and Chain5 should present a policy paper to BFUG for the EHEA conference in May 2018 in Paris
- Similarly, a debate should be (re)launched by CEDEFOP and the VET stakeholders and professional associations to explore links and support for the promotion of Level 5 qualifications

Statement 16

If LLL Universities are working together with Business Academies, we need to carry out research on the criteria for this cooperation and the success factors. The outcomes of the research can be discussed with social national and international partners.

Recommendations on Statement 16:

- Various organisations – UNIIN, European Business, the Business Forum – have done considerable work on the relationship between HE and the business community and there is a body of research on this topic. This should be brought into the debate and discussions about Level 5 qualifications
- Similarly, these organisations should be invited to take up the challenge of the Level 5 and 6 professional qualifications.

Statement 17

'Academisation' can currently be observed insofar as the statistical numbers of graduates are clearly growing in the higher education programmes. If the development continues in this direction, vocational training and the dual system of education will disappear or become insignificant. Vocational education must be a fully-fledged system, recognized as an educational phase of equal status. If the 'final qualifications' could be only provided by HE institutions, vocational education would be degraded.

Recommendations on Statement 17:

- With the massive increase in recent years in the participation rates in HE there is a fear that VET is being downgraded. In addition, there are skills shortages that could be addressed through VET and particularly through Level 5 qualifications. The Vocational Skills Week should be given a higher profile and, using a range of data, promotional tools and social media, the value of VET should be promoted much more effectively to young people

Statement 18

VET providers have to develop programs (VET5) and must give VET students/apprentices the right tools more precisely attuned to job market demands. Higher-level VET qualifications refer to highly skilled workers, but this does not mean necessarily that those skills can be obtained only by higher education institutes/degrees.

Recommendations on Statement 18:

- VET and professional training providers should develop more programmes at Level 5 and more career pathways through Level 5 and Level 6 training.
- They should develop work-related as well as job-specific programmes so that they offer better balance between the two and open up wider horizons for career development in a rapidly changing labour market

Statement 19

To avoid the competition between the two sectors (VET and HE), as well as duplication and wasted resources, it is necessary to redefine roles, identities and areas. For instance, it will be necessary to look at similar credit systems like ECTS and ECVET, knowing that at the moment in most countries these systems are not fully compatible, meaning that credits cannot be accumulated from VET to HE.

Recommendations on Statement 19:

- The specific roles of HE and VET institutions and providers should be clarified so that areas for collaboration and cooperation can be seen more clearly
- Local/regional partnerships and networks (see also recommendations under Statement 7) should carry out mapping exercises to see where there are actual links and pathways that may be under-exploited, and potential future ones that could be created.
- The validation of prior learning and of informal and non-formal learning should also be promoted to the full range of providers as a tool for bridging specific VET and HE programmes, not just for individuals but for groups who have a similar type of experience and qualification

CONCLUSIONS

The workshop in Mainz provided a clear picture of the dynamics that exist when it comes to the design of learning pathways connecting levels 4 and 5.

The interests of the employer focus on training and education that is important for (new) developments related to the job, while an employee also looks further into the future when it comes to his or her career.

The TANDEM project shows that there are sufficient possibilities to link these interests together. It is possible that employees and others who are involved in lifelong learning can also continue to study at higher levels, even within universities, based on work-based learning.

We must, however, ensure that the parties concerned come to the table with those targets in the back of their heads, to make plans, with a clear structure. The government of a country can be supportive in this, by considering whether adjustments are necessary within the regulations, in order to offer the education providers (formally, non-formally) more possibilities if it is about the scope in their policy and strategy.

In short, the discussions within the project and during the workshop in Mainz show that things are moving in the right direction with the upscaling of people, as all stakeholders are prepared to build the necessary bridges, from their own capabilities and responsibilities.

So, get started!

REFERENCES

Full account of the finding of TANDEM can be read at the project website <http://www.tandem-project.com>