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Conclusions

During the 2017 Mainz conference of the European university continuing education network, euken, we discussed the role that euken could play as an important stakeholder of Vocational Education Training (VET) and Professional Higher Education (PHE). During the conference we heard about different European models of continuing education (CE) and VET as possible solutions to the challenges we are facing in the labour market. Germany is a suitable country to discuss this topic because of its “dual education system” – vocational education is a key element of the system.

So what are the three key messages we take home from this 49th euken Conference? The most important perception was that the dividing lines between VET and CE/ULLL are not as sharp and clear as politicians or funding programmes presume. There is a European wide tendency to segregate education into different sectors instead of bringing things together along the “student life cycle” concept that takes into account that VET and CE/ULLL have a lot in common. If we are to take the idea of LLL seriously and adopt the perspective of the learners themselves, segregation is not useful. These matters were discussed in the following contributions:

- *From earth to heaven: Formats to allow adult learners to combine working, living and learning*
- *Professional and academic: opposite concepts? The French approach for filling the hypothetical gap*

Another finding was the difference between the definitions of VET in comparison to that of ULLL. This can be substantial depending on the education system of the countries we represent and come from. By systematically analysing the different VET concepts from both the employee’s and employer’s viewpoints, we realized that we are far away from “a unique” European VET understanding as outlined in the IACEE paper - *Global trends in the contribution of ULLL in shaping the labour markets and its applicability to EU*.

Finally, yet importantly, we found that VET and CE/ULLL effectiveness for the labour market depends on the strength of the working partnerships with industry. VET and PHE have key contributions to make in shaping and strengthening the labour market in Europe.

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