

eucen and the World of VET ¹

There is momentum for HEI/VET cooperation

Current trends challenge the educational systems in a fundamental way. Globalisation and digitalisation demand committed efforts for productivity and competitiveness as well as for the sustainability of our economies. Social inclusion of all the members of society including immigrants and newcomers in general is a necessity for both enduring economic success and societal well-being. The strivings for a stronger skills base should be accompanied by learning possibilities that support contemporary and future careers. Education providers and stakeholders have to search for fruitful ways of cooperation at all levels so as to enhance flexible pathways for high-quality learning. We need to find a balance between responsiveness and a proactive focus.

The high profile of the vocational skills week in December 2016 clearly indicates the momentum for change also in vocational education and training. The VET providers, stakeholders and very importantly the European Commission show long-term commitment to promote the attractiveness and quality of VET as a relevant option for the youth of Europe. The recent CEDEFOP initiatives offer a relevant possibility to open new pathways. Promoting flexible learning pathways for adults, development of LLL throughout universities and recognition of prior learning, lifewide and lifelong, **eucen** wants to promote bridges between Universities and the world of VET.

The bottom-line of the efforts must be *to benefit the learners, working-life and societies*. In this cooperation, the HE and VET providers have key roles in finding ways for progress, each in their field and also jointly for the greater good. The **eucen** network is prepared to use its excellence and expertise in shared efforts with relevant actors and networks. The theme of our Conference in June 2017 in Mainz will be “University Lifelong Learning and the labour market in Europe – the contribution of continuing education and vocational education to the challenges of changing work and qualifications requirements” <http://www.eucen2017.uni-mainz.de/>

Balmes 132-134
08008 Barcelona - Spain

T. +34 935 421 825
F. +34 935 422 975

www.eucen.eu
office@eucen.eu

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eucen is a network bridging research, lifelong learning and professional and daily life

eucen aims to contribute to the social, economic and cultural life in Europe through the promotion and advancement of lifelong learning (LLL) within higher education institutions (HEI) in Europe and elsewhere. We also aim to foster universities' influence in the development of LLL knowledge and policies throughout Europe, promoting a democratic model that takes into account societal needs.

eucen provides a forum for the development, interchange and dissemination of innovation and good practice on lifelong learning in European higher education. High quality standards in all areas of lifelong learning, as well as the harmonization of LLL related levels of quality among its members are encouraged. eucen represents the interests of the LLL community both within HEI and to European policy makers. The promotion and conduction of research in the LLL area and the dissemination of the results contextualizes the interaction with other appropriate bodies and organisations. eucen seeks to promote the facilitation of communication, liaison and collaboration with external stakeholders.

eucen membership activities are different but not separate from the VET world

The regulations and arrangements of both higher education and vocational education and training differ from country to country: in some countries universities may be considered as VET providers whereas this is not the case everywhere. Instead, all the eucen member universities deliver professional HCVET and promote LLL at higher education level. It is also evident that the concept of HCVET is far from established and the features of its activities are diffuse. Still, in addition to the different position in the education frameworks, the research-based development of professional expertise *differs fundamentally* from the skills-oriented education and training for vocations.

Still, there are various activities that *link higher education with VET* and whose situation clearly indicates the need of enhanced cooperation. Although VET was not one of the fundamentals for the creation of eucen originally back in 1991, its importance and relevance for higher education in general and for our network in particular are clear. As a part of widening access to universities, they could actively promote the pathways, tools and procedures opening doors to new publics from VET. The pathways from VET to universities are partially open but the numbers of applicants, not to say students, are limited and there are various hindrances to be tackled and procedures and practices to be developed. Many universities train teachers for VET institutions and support their continuous education. Various fields of research focus on issues that are relevant for the VET world. The institutions from both fields cooperate in various development projects.

More than 65% of European universities (EUA Trends 2015) have a *lifelong learning strategy* and 24% are in the planning stage. This can mean developing a specific offer for LLL learners, Master or Bachelor degrees dedicated to mature students with work experience or social engagement. It can also mean intensive courses or continuous professional development (CPD) programmes. Also, 45% of the European universities (EUA Trends 2015) consider mature students and 44% part-time students as targeted audience.

The mature/part-time students usually combine work activities and university programme activities and bring diverse opportunities to *bridge the professional and university world*:

- trying to transfer what they learn to their own practices;
- challenging the conceptual frameworks developed on basis of university scientific research with their experience;
- feeding university research;
- enriching university courses with concrete examples and issues;

A part of university Master and Bachelor curricula currently include apprenticeship activities. Some universities offer Master or Bachelor degrees in a “dual studies” format, articulating practice and theory.

eucen expertise has potential relevance for the VET world

The **eucen** network and its members have built *education systems expertise* that is also relevant for the VET world: the flexible pathways in education and especially into and in universities are a constant focus of interest (TANDEM²). The implementation of Erasmus+ for mobility of students and staff would certainly gain from the established practices of universities (OBSERVAL³). The concepts of admission and access as well as widening participation are at the core of **eucen**'s ‘searching, learning and sharing’ for understanding and good practices of lifelong learning (COMMIT⁴). The inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers into European societies is a widely shared objective of **eucen** members (HE4u2⁵ and VINCE⁶).

The guidance of entry level students, enrolled students and alumni or professionals are examples of *practical know-how to support learning*. This is another long-term focus of **eucen** and its members. The renewal of pedagogies and learning methods cover e.g. work-based learning, research-based solutions, experiential learning, collaborative evaluation and appropriate use of technology.

² TANDEM, Shapping flexible learning pathways <http://www.tandemflexiblepathways.eu>

³ OBSERVAL, European observatory of validation of non-formal and informal activities <http://observal.eucen.eu>

⁴ COMMIT, Committing to the social dimension in HE <http://commit.eucen.eu>

⁵ HE4u2, Integrating cultural diversity in HE <http://he4u2.eucen.eu>

⁶ VINCE, Validation for inclusion of new citizens in Europe <http://www.eucen.eu/projects/vince>

One of the key profiles of **eucen** is to support the reforms of validation of prior learning (OBSERVAL-Net⁷). We have also been active in the quality enhancement agenda (EQUIPE and EQUIPE Plus⁸).

eucen sees cooperation with the VET world as a possibility for both parties

eucen is open for *versatile cooperation* with VET providers, their networks and stakeholders. The majority of **eucen** members are research universities that have the capacity for practical mapping, analysis and reporting of the state-of-the-art but also for relevant scientific research. Consultation and coaching as well as continuing education could be used for human capacity building in the form of staff development. Due to its non-profit NGO nature, **eucen** needs to find arrangements to cover the costs of its activities appropriately e.g. through joint venture development projects or benchmarking in relevant themes.

It is obvious that while the university and VET provision are fundamentally different, both parties share similar interests: finding excellent practices in work-based learning, making the most of new technologies in education, enhancing both the juvenile and adult participation and successful studies, to name just a few. Functional cooperation could *benefit both higher education and VET*. As to the developments in VET, **eucen** considers the VET providers to be the best experts in their field and thus have the ownership of transformation while the university world can support the initiatives with their expertise.

⁷ OBSERVAL-Net, <http://www.observal-net.eu>

⁸ EQUIPE, European Quality in Individualised Pathways in Education <http://equipe.up.pt> and EQUIPE Plus, <http://www.cfp.upv.es/webs/equipeplus/index/index.jsp>

APPENDIX: Key concepts

VET providers The analysis of the specific type of VET providers does not identify common patterns for higher-VET types of programmes and qualifications. It rather highlights the vast diversity of the field that can be considered higher VET. They may be offered by various types of providers, including secondary, post-secondary VET providers, CVET providers and various types of higher education institutions. Based on the examples studied, also sectoral bodies and enterprises play a role as higher VET providers, although to a smaller extent.⁸

VET – Vocational Education and Training ‘Education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market.’⁸

IVET - Initial VET can be understood as VET carried out in the initial education and training system, usually before entering working life. Moreover, IVET can be carried out at any level and in various forms (full-time school-based or alternance training or apprenticeship pathways). However, since in most countries IVET is linked to upper-secondary education, it is usually not considered as higher VET. For example, in some cases, types of programmes classified at ISCED 1997/2011 level 4 are very closely linked to upper-secondary education and are therefore not seen as higher VET.⁹

HVET – Higher Vocational Education and Training There is no consensus on the definition of higher VET. Higher VET does not correspond exactly to any of the segments of education and training. Depending on the country, higher VET can overlap with higher education (covered by the European Higher Education Area - EHEA), post-secondary non-tertiary education, continuous vocational education and training or other segments of adult learning.

Higher VET is not a homogeneous area. There is a great deal of diversity within this field. It could be questioned whether it is meaningful to analyse this field as a single group of qualifications when in reality it encompasses very different types of programmes and qualifications⁸. The field of higher VET could be defined as follows:

- Higher VET leads to qualifications that are at EQF level 5 and above; and
- The qualifications have a clear professional or vocational orientation.

The VET dimension is much more blurred than the level dimension. Professional qualifications offered in HE (covered by the EHEA) could be considered as higher VET. This concerns in particular the short cycle programmes and the professional Bachelor and possibly Professional Master Degrees.

⁹ CEDEFOP (2014) *Terminology of European Education and Training Policy. Second edition. A Selection of 130 Key Terms*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

Higher VET is often based on the perception that VET is considered an inferior option to proceeding along a more traditional or academic higher education route. Thus, it is sometimes suggested using the term ‘professional (tertiary) education’ rather than higher VET, in order to underline its complementarity to ‘academic tertiary education’¹⁰.

CVET – Continuous Vocational Education and Training Offered in the formal education system (usually after entry into working life). These qualifications give access to nationally recognised qualifications but are targeting adult learners. VET ‘after initial education and training – or and training after entry into working life aimed at helping individuals to: - improve or update their knowledge and/or skills; - acquire new skills for a career move or retraining; - continue their personal or professional development’²⁷. The CVET landscape differs across countries.⁹

HCVET - Higher Continuous Vocational Education and Training Based on the report’s recommendations⁹, HCVET could be the provision of Higher Apprenticeships and WBL programmes/activities to promote up-skilling and competences to achieve work-relevant qualifications for a varied target group, designed by academics and employers or their representatives and delivered by both teachers and by trainers/mentors with professional experience in the sector.

¹⁰ Study on higher Vocational Education and Training in the EU, DGESA, Feb 2016, DOI 10.2767/421741