



‘REINVENT EDUCATION TOGETHER WITH INDUSTRY’

CEEMET welcomes Commission’s renewed efforts to speed up and catalyze education reform, but stresses the need to properly involve industry representatives and warns against oversimplifying benefits of dual systems.

The Communication “Rethinking Education” successfully pins down the problems that are found in education and training systems around Europe, including not being able to provide the right skills, lack of cooperation with industry and employers, and absence of a lifelong learning culture. Together with the economic crisis, these problems have resulted in a situation where it is virtually impossible for young people in some countries to find work while at the same time some companies in Europe face difficulties in finding skilled workers to recruit.

Capacity to innovate - Making learners add value should be a primary goal in education and training

CEEMET agrees with the conclusion in the communication that changes in the operating environment such as digitalisation, fast technological development etc. make it necessary

to rethink the principle goal of education and training. In general, what one knows will matter far less than what one can do with that knowledge. To a large extent, focus will lie on the capability to re-engineer and update ones jobs much more often than before.

Therefore, helping learners add value to what they do should become a primary focus in today’s education and training. Apart from providing learners with a solid conceptual understanding and knowledge base in education and training, we need to increasingly focus on how teaching and learning takes place and to nurture the will to learn and to make a difference.

In view of the multidimensional and often very complex problems and phenomena for which the MET industry companies develop and produce solutions, **STEM skills** and knowledge are crucial in education at all levels. Industry is working hard on trying to illustrate the broad importance of STEM-subjects in general education and especially what career pathways can be chosen. This also requires better cooperation between school and industry. While this has been repeatedly said over the past decade, further reform is needed in education to open it up to cooperation. The Commission would serve the education and business community well by strengthening efforts on promoting an exchange of best practice, discussing how to reach such openness in practice – the VET-Business forum which was set up in 2012 is a good start.

CEEMET also agrees that **basic skills** have to be achieved by all. This is also a factor in improving VET, as VET often has to correct the shortcomings of general, basic education. Indeed, as the Commission points out, these efforts must start even before compulsory schooling. CEEMET is



convinced that in order to achieve lifelong learning, learning to learn must start at a very young age. Individuals need to become attuned to lifelong learning already in the early years of childhood education and care. Only then will we achieve a culture of continuous learning and individual responsibility for employability also in professional life.

In particular, CEEMET fully supports the recognition of **vocational education and training (VET)** as essential to jobs and growth in Europe. As the biggest sector of the manufacturing industry in Europe, dependent on good quality vocational training, we have for long time fought for the promotion of VET in policy (albeit not always successfully). The approach taken in the communication of highlighting excellence in VET is absolutely correct and absolutely crucial in meeting labour market needs.

Nevertheless, there are still some areas of the European policy on education and training – and especially VET - reform which require further ‘rethinking’ in order to be able to respond to competence demand and industry needs, and thereby support the growth and jobs desperately needed in Europe today.

- ***Excellent VET requires sectoral industry involvement***

First and foremost, evidence shows that successful vocational education involves sectoral industry representatives and local companies. Sectoral and local industry is able to judge the quality of VET from different perspectives and bring knowledge about company systems and needs, which policy makers often lack. The European Commission also recognises this in the communication. Yet, national and European policy makers often do not consult the

employers’ representatives of major sectoral industry regarding education and training policy and analysis thereof, thereby missing out on evidence-based input.

Consequently, CEEMET finds it important that the European Commission habitually consults the major representatives of the MET industry on education and training policies in general, and VET policies in particular, if the aim is to promote good quality education and training fit for the labour market.

- ***Time for concrete action on permeability***

CEEMET have earlier pointed to the importance of permeability in enabling excellence in VET and attracting young people to choose this educational pathway. It is clear that still more focus and progress on this issue is required at European level. The Commission has ample opportunity in their ‘Agenda on Modernisation of Higher Education’ to look at how Member States best could open up pathways between VET, Higher Learning and continuing education, but so far there has been little action on this issue.

CEEMET urges the Commission to place permeability between VET and Higher Education and strategic industry university co-operation at centre stage of the Modernisation of Higher Education Agenda.

- ***Benefits of dual principle are real – implementation however requires proper governance and a number of conditions to be fulfilled***

Good quality vocational education and training which has a strong component of work-based learning increases employment prospects and



CEEMET is pleased that this is finally being recognised at policy level. However, there is a real danger in the rhetoric coming from the European Institutions that dual systems are being touted as a panacea for youth unemployment around Europe. The benefits of the dual principle are real, but the implementation thereof requires a number of conditions to be fulfilled, ranging from governance with strong social partner involvement to financing. Further, creating well-functioning VET that embraces the dual principle is not simply a question of introducing work-based learning into VET – you also need companies with job and training vacancies and the confidence to take on learners. This requires more than reform in education and training, including support for SMEs, a policy environment that makes a country a competitive place for companies to operate and invest in, and often a change in mindset about the purpose of education and training.

- **To meet demand, focus on impact of CET**

Attracting more people to good-quality vocational education and training is essential, but it is not enough to fill the competence demands of industry. This is why lifelong learning and continuing education and training (CET) today is vital for both companies and employees. While much of the discussion on CET centers on increasing uptake, we would like the debate – at all levels - to focus more on the *impact* of CET. It is absolutely essential that CET supports growth and jobs, and will only do so if better understood and targeted to the needs of the labour market and learners.

- **Strong actions needed to support new approaches to teaching and learning**

Reinventing education and training calls for new approaches to teaching and learning. CEEMET’s experience is that to improve the quality of VET and Higher Education it is essential that co-operation between industry and educational institution becomes an integral part of teaching and learning processes. A learning outcome-based approach in the curricula makes the integration easier. CEEMET fully agrees that teachers too need support to be able to respond to the change in the goal of education and training and new expectations. It is obvious that both initial and continuous teacher education needs to be rethought accordingly. Partnerships between industry and teacher education and training institutions no doubt serve as a means to support the teachers’ and teacher trainers’ capacity development as well.

Furthermore, as the EU digital scoreboard clearly shows, the capability to adopt and effectively use new teaching and learning technologies varies a lot between different schools and Member States. Taking into account the increasing importance of e-skills in almost all jobs, for creation of new businesses and as basic skills in a digitalised society, CEEMET strongly welcomes the emphasis given by the Commission to scaling up the effective use of ICT in learning and teaching.

- **Do not forget career guidance**

CEEMET notes that there is very little mention of career guidance in the communication on ‘Rethinking Education’. However, well-planned career guidance is *central* in ensuring excellence in VET and in guiding people towards education that will lead to jobs. It should be a policy priority at both national and European level to promote the establishment of high-quality, easily accessible guidance for pupils from an early age,



involving both schools and industry. This can be done by, for instance, setting up independent career centres, ensuring high quality training (including industry experience) for counsellors and teachers, and capitalizing on the possibilities offered through web-based resources and social media.

Mainstreaming excellence in education and training

Overall, the VET and Higher Education situation in Europe is clearly uneven and sharing of best practice at European level is useful and important in this context. Many of the recommendations that have been put forward in the communication have already been trialed by some Member States and social partners. With their comprehensive overview of the situation, the Commission is in a beneficial position to analyse the outcomes of these actions and discuss with governments and other stakeholders what has worked, what has not worked, and why. CEEMET believes that this would greatly help provide evidence-based incentives to mainstream excellence in both VET and Higher Education and the kinds of skills, knowledge and competence needed in the MET industry.

