

CEEMET STRATEGY PAPER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training for a competitive industry

Moving beyond rhetoric

Introduction

Industry is the major source of value creation in the EU and people are its greatest asset. Despite much talk of the demise of manufacturing, the sector remains imperative to the European countries in terms of exports, GDP and employment. This reality provides the basis for CEEMETs ongoing commitment to education and training.

National education & training systems differ substantially across Europe and education policies remain a largely national responsibility. CEEMET supports this variety and the continued application of the principle of subsidiarity in this domain. Nevertheless, as an industry we share common problems regarding education and training. These include a mismatch between skills provided and skills needed together with an acute skills shortage (both qualitative and quantitative) resulting from having an ageing workforce and an accelerated pace of technological change.

Against this background, there is a need to rebuild and strengthen the links between the labour market and secondary and tertiary education and training systems. Employers are a vital part of this two-way communication.

Primarily, it needs to be recognised on *all* levels that ultimately it is competences which can provide for a competitive European industry and thereby also jobs and welfare in Europe in the near future.

Further, it has to be understood that mobilising resources for competence development is a shared challenge. This needs to be acknowledged by all stakeholders, including the individual.

To achieve this, CEEMET believes that a comprehensive approach combining a wide range of tools is needed in the field of education and training. At national level, it is for each Member State - in close cooperation with the stakeholders - to decide about the combination that suits its specific situation regarding skills and competences.

As employers we consider that the areas outlined below should be prioritized in order to equip our current and future workforce (engineers and technicians) with the skills and competences to compete in the global marketplace.

Attracting technical competence to the industry

The image of the manufacturing industry today does not reflect the fact that it constitutes the core of the European economy. For the MET industries specifically, further action has to be taken to improve the image of the metal sector in order to attract more young people to study related vocational subjects as well as technology, science and maths and bring their skills to the sector. Such measures have to be addressed at the **existing workforce, parents, children, young people, teachers and career counsellors**. Much of the responsibility for changing the sector's image lies with the **social partners**, but their efforts need to be underpinned by supportive European and national policies. In this context, national education and training systems have to be able to assure optimal education and guidance, beyond simple information.

Taking responsibility for continuous training and professional development

Continuous training and development and the motivation to learn for life is a horizontal and fundamental issue which should lie at the heart of any attempt to improve the level of workforce competence in Europe. The importance of continuous learning to meet labour market needs cannot be stressed enough.

Motivation for, and **investment** in, continuous education and training is a **shared responsibility between industry, individuals, employees and public authorities**. Changing the way European citizens view education and training is by far the biggest and most pressing challenge. Nevertheless, the lifelong development of skills and competences is a precondition for the competitiveness of industrial companies and improved employability of workers.

While individuals should benefit from education and training they also have to take *responsibility* for the development of skills which will ensure their own employability. Thus, individuals need to become attuned to continuous learning already in the early years of education, and be aware that ongoing training is the **key to achieving and maintaining employability**, especially as economies restructure. Central to this development is the communication and cooperation between industry and education systems.

Not least, this cooperation should be supported by valuable **career guidance**, which is an important means to initiate and to further the motivation for lifelong learning.

Quality and flexibility - focus on competence

The **quality** of education, training and learning in Europe is a growing problem for industry. Education and training systems must focus on the **competences** that a person gains as a result of learning and not solely on the duration of the learning period. Simultaneously, **assessment** of competence needs and individual capacities and **quality assurance** of education and training systems need to reflect this development to ensure that the standard of education and training in Europe remains competitive. Quality has to be improved **at all levels**, including **general education, vocational education and training and higher education in order to provide competent operators, technicians and engineers**. Already the skills gained in primary school must be suitable to continue in further education and training. Currently, this is not the case.

To improve quality and the focus on technical competences, **permeability between industry and education and training** has to be advanced on all levels to overcome current problems of a **mismatch between skills supplied and skills demanded**. This can be achieved by, among other things, further developing practical ways to cooperate (workplace training, alternance training, and adult training in companies and in higher education institutions), introducing entrepreneurial skills as part of all levels of education, and adapting the volume and content of courses to the needs of the job market

Overall, developing tools for the **anticipation of skills** is essential in order to adapt education and training and react to labour market needs in time. In this context it is necessary that the scope of **dialogue and cooperation between the schools (secondary and tertiary) and the business sector** is widened to be able to anticipate which qualifications will be needed and which will become obsolete. It should be stressed, however, that the anticipation of technical skills requirements can only be a serious exercise if it is understood and carried out as a **continuous process**.

For the **MET sector in particular** and for providing skills that underpin the real economy in general, high quality **initial Vocational Education and Training is essential**. In order for industry to remain **competitive** and for **innovation** to thrive, VET has to reflect the development in companies and be able to attract **young, first-rate students**. Stakeholders need to work together to **promote excellence** in VET both on the national as well as European level. On a structural level, VET programmes must be made more flexible in order to quickly adapt to the changing skills needs of the market.

Continued Vocational Education and Training is *essential* in implementing lifelong learning. VET provides an opportunity for individuals to retrain as well as further their competence throughout their working life, and it can also be a means of attracting those who are on the periphery of the workforce. *Because* it is continued VET that will deliver the upskilling of the workforce necessary to maintain competitiveness, the quality and attractiveness of VET systems in Europe must be heightened. Further, in terms of competence, **informal and non-formal training** should be **recognised as a valuable contribution** to, or part of, occupational/vocational training all along training pathways. In this context, **recognition and assessment** of competences need to be developed.

Overall, it is crucial that the **permeability and continuity of learning paths between VET, general education and higher education** are improved and strengthened. However, this should not lead to a streamlining of education. On the contrary, the unique character of VET and the close link between VET and the changing needs of the labour market should be respected and actively supported.

A key factor in the context of quality of education and training is an **improvement in teacher training**. Teachers need to be well aware of the labour market they teach for. In this respect, the quality of teachers' initial and in-service training is crucial. For vocational education and training, it is especially important to ensure a high level of correlation between teachers' knowledge and industrial realities. An immediate increased exchange of staff with different forms of employment may be one way of meeting this demand.

Flexibility is also required to meet the **needs of learners** in the education and training system. As people have to learn over a lifetime, education and training systems must adapt to life-long learners. Therefore, **new teaching methods** that are attuned to the needs and attitudes of different groups and which take into account **new technologies** should be encouraged.

Transparency and Mobility - optimizing potential

Finally, **transparency of occupational qualifications and recognition of skills** are important factors in increasing the geographical and occupational mobility of workers, both at national and European level thus contributing to tempering the effects of the Europe-wide shortage of skills in the MET sector and the problems associated with an ageing workforce. Currently, **European and national frameworks for transparency and for the recognition of qualifications** are being developed on the basis of learning outcomes. CEEMET strongly supports **the promotion of learning outcomes as a basis for a common competence based language to describe qualifications. However** it is of fundamental importance that the present implementation of these frameworks remains voluntary and does not lead to further rigidities in education and training systems.

Further, any measures taken to ensure transparency and recognition of qualifications must also be supported by **information exchange** and **quality assurance mechanisms** to ensure that technical competence anywhere in Europe is rendered mobile, easily recognised and of high quality.

Conclusion

Only through enhanced cooperation between national authorities, education institutions and social partners will more effective education and training policies be outlined and implemented. Only through a strengthened relationship between schools, universities, training centres and companies can the demands and realities of the labour market be brought closer to education and training. And only through continuous learning and training will employability and competitiveness be optimised.

While changing education and training systems is a long-term process, we nevertheless cannot neglect the work and investment required in the short-term to nurture a highly skilled European workforce and a competitive manufacturing industry. Investing time and effort into changing mindsets and improving education is no longer an option – it is a necessity.

A better match between skills and labour market needs is essential for European industrial competitiveness, in order to provide companies with the skills they need. For the European MET industry there is no time to spare. Rhetoric has to become reality.

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