

## SSD EDUCATION AND TRAINING GROUP

### ON PERMEABILITY BETWEEN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Across Europe, the metal, engineering and technology-based (MET) industries form the biggest industry sector and lead in European exports. As highly-skilled employees are central to ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector, MET industries are reliant on high quality education, including higher education (HE) as well as vocational education and training (VET).

Companies in a number of countries report about unfilled vacancies for skilled workers or engineers while unemployment rates remain high. Hence the attractiveness of vocational education and training, as well as the attractiveness of the MET industry, is a central issue for the EMF and CEEMET. Ensuring a steady supply of qualified personnel is vital to the industry's future. This can only be achieved through the provision of high quality initial and continued VET.

We support the EU target of 40% of 30-34 year olds to have completed tertiary education by 2020 which we believe will contribute to develop employability and access to high quality jobs. However, the aim to increase the share of 30-34 year olds to have completed tertiary education is not sufficient alone. The strategy should be to increase the proportion of people having higher education degrees that lead to a high value-added job.

Particularly important in this context is **permeability** – facilitating access between VET and higher education. It should be easier for students to move from one to the other as **this will increase opportunities for the individual and thereby also the attractiveness of VET**. Students should take for granted that VET and HE are parts of **a overall system with bridges between them** and that the choice of one path does not exclude the other. Permeability is also central to improving the quality of VET and attracting the right people to choose this path. It can also contribute to the reduction of social inequalities with regards to access to higher education. To achieve this, bridges need to be built from VET to HE opportunities and vice versa and promoted through proper guidance so as to do away with the demarcation between the two.

**Acknowledging the fact that HE can also be higher vocational education is a crucial part of this process.** Permeability is needed notably when it comes to:

- 1) Access - VET students should be granted access to HE
- 2) Content and design - there should also be programmes on offer in HE that build on the competences taught in VET.

Concretely, it is important to look at what HE offers to VET students - to see if the structures are sufficiently flexible to enable VET students to carry on their studies and improve their qualifications.

Further, the **transparency of competence profiles** is highly important in contributing to permeability. The generalisation of the description of qualifications in terms of skills, knowledge and competence (learning outcomes) - whether technical, technological or transversal - will facilitate the interface between VET and HE rendering the overlapping areas of the competence profiles of VET and HE qualifications visible. This should be taken into account by Member States when implementing the European Qualifications Framework. The EQF and the NQFs need to be comprehensive and open and include all levels of education. This should also be reflected when moving forward in the implementation of ECVET and ECTS, both systems using “points” that need to be a common currency at all levels of the education system.

Permeability should also concern **pedagogical approaches**. In this regard, HE could usefully integrate some patterns from VET, including **more work-related education**. Gaining work experience, which is the practice in VET, should also become more common in more academic HE. Work experience and project-based learning in industry can be very valuable in helping students to develop and internalise the theoretical knowledge gained in HE in a context where a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach is often needed. Whether or not on vocational courses, students should have work placement opportunities and the support necessary to reflect on these experiences. The permeability of pedagogical approaches can also concern exchanges between representatives of vocational training and high education (trainers and teachers) through the development of concrete partnerships between VET providers, research institutes and companies.

**Continuous education** also needs to be developed in HE, whereas it is already an integral part of VET. With increasing technological change and the development of a ‘knowledge-based society’, continuous learning and retraining are a high priority to ensure economic competitiveness.

**High quality VET is central to a successful manufacturing industry in Europe. In order to realise its full potential, public authorities and education and training systems must make significant progress towards increasing permeability.**

The European Commission published its Communication on the ***Modernisation of Higher Education*** in autumn 2011.

It is imperative that VET is included in this debate, not least considering the goals the EC has set in its Europe 2020 Strategy. Permeability between VET and HE has to be promoted as part of modern HE systems. This will permit:

- Attainment of the EU target of at least 40% of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education by 2020
- Promotion of the employability of graduates
- Promotion of mobility between industry and academia
- Opening up of opportunities to non-traditional learners (by examining teaching and learning methods as many of these learners will have work experience)

- Promotion of flexible learning pathways and lifelong learning.

CEEMET and the EMF support all efforts made in this area and jointly call on the EC to include and recognise the significance of this issue for the successful modernisation of higher education in Europe.