

Guidance in the new EU Skills Agenda and in the current EU framework for VET cooperation

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Question 1: In the new EU Skills agenda and current framework for EU VET cooperation, would you please identify the key EU level guidance related incentives in VET to meet the specific goals identified in the Riga conclusions?

VET learners and apprentices; showcasing excellence in VET and promoting higher VET skills and qualifications; enhancing access to continuing training, re-skilling and upskilling the workforce.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe launches a number of actions to ensure that the right training, the right skills and the right support are available to people in the European Union. Through the Agenda, the Commission encourages Member States, social partners, industry and other stakeholders to work together to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation, to make skills more visible and comparable, and to improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices. One of the ten actions proposed to achieve these objectives is making Vocational Education and Training a first choice.

Guidance is a key element linking these different priority areas and in providing the high-quality VET which forms individuals' skills. The Riga priority on access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, highlights the importance of **offering efficient and integrated guidance services** to link potential learners to the best learning opportunities. The Skills Agenda reinforces this emphasis on guidance services, calling for better tools to enable public authorities and private bodies to improve their guidance, training and mentoring services for young people, job seekers and people in general. Other developments include an improved Europass platform enabling people to make informed career and learning choices, and share information on skills, qualifications and jobs; better information on the labour market outcomes or learning progression of higher education and higher VET graduates through a new graduate tracking initiative, to be launched later this year.

The 2015 Riga priorities and the VET actions envisaged in the 2016 Skills Agenda streamline European VET policy around key areas which are: enhanced support for work-based learning and apprenticeships; building upon EQAVET to further enhance quality assurance; building upon ECVET to make VET more open and flexible; supporting mobility of

Another key action, the Council Recommendation on Upskilling pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, will assist low-qualified adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy or digital skills or progress towards a higher qualification and its success will depend on the existence of strong guidance services to support this target population.

Question 2: What do you see as major drivers for national educational policies to respond to the challenge of promoting the acquisition of career management skills among VET students, in addition to the development of information on available VET study options as well as on validation of formal and in-formal learning?

The biggest driver is without a doubt the fast-changing labour market and the need for future-proof education and training systems that respond by equipping people with key competences for lifelong learning, and access to continuing training and retraining throughout their lives, to enable them adapt easily to technological progress and to be open and ready to embrace new challenges. The recent World Economic Forum report on the Future of Job highlights that in such a rapidly evolving employment landscape, the ability to anticipate and prepare for future skills requirements, job content and the aggregate effect on employment is increasingly critical for businesses, governments and individuals in order to fully seize the opportunities presented by these trends – and to mitigate undesirable outcomes. In this scenario, career management skills are essential.

Apprenticeship is receiving unprecedented publicity through the impressive uptake of the European Alliance for Ap-

prenticeship and the Pact for Youth – business-education partnerships for youth employability and inclusion.

Encouraging more people to choose VET, including apprenticeship, requires more guidance and information both for young people and companies, big and small. For apprentices this means having career management skills to steer their way successfully between work-based and formal learning and onto employment. Such skills that might be considered in the review of the Key Competences are equally important for experienced employees faced with career change or job losses which may result in mid-career reviews.

The Youth Guarantee is an important driving force based on commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

Question 3: In your message, you mention the first results of the Riga monitoring. At this point, can you identify indications of progress in meeting the guidance related goals of the Riga conclusions?

In general, we note progress on all five Riga priorities, but the greatest focus is clearly put on work-based learning and apprenticeships. Nearly all countries are working on or planning to work on promotion of work-based learning and apprenticeships in VET. Many countries are putting in place efforts to make apprenticeships more attractive for both learners and employers (in some cases using incentives). Some countries strengthen social

partner involvement in VET or promote apprenticeships that nurture an entrepreneurial culture.

The third priority related to enhancing access to quality VET, is also signalled as a high or medium priority by most countries. The very preliminary results of the first round of monitoring carried out by CEDEFOP suggest that when it comes to guidance, the spectrum of actions taken by countries ranges from new strategies (for instance in Croatia and Ireland) and piloting development of new systems supported by ESF (e.g. in Slovakia and Poland) to implementation of new online guidance services and tools (e.g. in Luxembourg, Netherlands and Croatia).

Considering the recent focus on preventing early leaving, youth guarantees and youth employment, it is not surprising that guidance related initiatives feature quite prominently. In the first three years, 14 million young people entered Youth Guarantee. A recent report¹ shows that many initiatives include outreach, information and guidance to this particularly at-risk group.

However, as in the past, the monitoring reports analysed so far seem to indicate that fewer activities have been taken by countries to enhance access to VET and qualifications **for adults**. We can only hope that when moving forward implementation of the Upskilling Pathways, guidance will feature prominently in the measures put in place to support adults to access these pathways.

Question 4: What kind of incentives are there on the level of EU for using the outcomes of previous EU level cooperation (e.g. the ELGPN 2015 guidelines on lifelong guidance and systems development) on guidance systems and policy development for further enhancement of quality and efficiency of guidance systems and policies?

Erasmus+ offers annual possibilities for groups of countries and regions to get together to form strategic partnerships to develop aspects of education and training. Guidance is a horizontal theme which spans school, higher, and adult education as well as vocational education and training. Tools created by ELGPN can be a basis for such a project.

In addition, Key Activity 3 projects provide opportunities for these tools to serve policy experimentation and development. The 2017 Call for forward-looking policy projects offers a specific opportunity to develop approaches or services that promote innovative technology in providing career guidance, which could be mainstreamed in national policy. The same Call invites proposals that develop innovative outreach and guidance approaches to identify adults with low basic skills levels, and to connect them with appropriate learning opportunities.

Furthermore, ESF operational programmes that focus on promoting access to employment, adaptation of workers, active inclusion, prevention of early school leaving, supporting lifelong learning and VET could finance guidance actions, which could exploit the ELGPN guidelines.

¹PES practices for the outreach and activation of NEETs http://iccdpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ICCDPP-PES-practices-for-the-outreach-of-NEETs-report-2015.pdf?utm_source=activetrail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=jmc@iccdpp.org.

Question 5: Are there particular European developmental projects that you would like to bring up as good examples for developing guidance for vocational education, both young and adults?

In terms of national initiatives, I would like to mention Italy where, in December 2013, the government, the regions and local administration reached agreement on a “definition of guidelines on the national system of lifelong guidance”. It provides a broad description of the new multilevel governance, with strong cooperation between Regions and State. In particular, the State defines the national priorities, and each Region examines in depth the national priorities in order to define specific territorial priorities, together with local authorities, social partners and local level universities, schools, etc.).

Guidance is also at the core of most of the actions related to the Youth Guarantee, financed through the Youth Employment Initiative or the ESF. I would like to give special mention to the one-stop guidance centres in Finland, which aim to strengthen and simplify services for young people and to eliminate the duplication of activities, and have already been established in 35 municipalities since 2015. This initiative serves as a good example of practice!

At the same time, I also want to highlight some examples of Erasmus + projects which we find of particular interest because they demonstrate how the programme is being used effectively to take forward EU policy priorities in adult learning at national level. The BRIDGE project (Building up Regional Initiatives to Develop Guidance for low-skilled adults), led by the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for

Lifelong Learning, underlines the importance of working at regional and local level while at the same time learning from different approaches across Europe. The project focuses on specific guidance needs of low-skilled adults, especially of those in employment who risk being excluded from the job-market because they lack qualifications.

As part of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation, the GOAL project (Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners), is developing educational guidance services for lower educated adults in six countries across Europe: Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Iceland, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Slovenia. (<http://www.project-goal.eu/>).

Question 6: Is there anything else, specific items or themes you would like to address in this journal in relation to the topic?

In December 2016, the Council adopted the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, which is the first concrete new action to emerge from the New Skills Agenda for Europe. It aims to support adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to enhance their literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or to acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards higher qualifications. The initiative targets all adults who are not eligible for the Youth Guarantee and who have at best achieved a lower secondary education qualification, and seeks to empower them to improve their life chances. The proposed format is a three-step pathway to provide: skills assessment to enable low-qualified adults to identify their existing skills; a tailor-made learning offer and mentoring to update them and fill important deficits; and lastly

validation and recognition of the acquired knowledge. Guidance is an intrinsic element to ensure success in steering people towards an upskilling pathway and supporting them successfully through each stage, in order to gain the desired learning outcomes.

Upskilling Pathways is closely related to the recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, since many low-qualified adults have many invisible skills. Together these measures have the potential to make education and training more flexible and responsive to the

needs and styles of learners today. Moreover, they can help reach and motivate over 64 million potential learners who need upskilling most.

We intend to work with Member States and all stakeholders to develop the role of guidance and counselling services in taking both recommendations forward, and we intend to collect and promote successful initiatives.

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Resumé

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With her legal background having obtained a Masters and Postgraduate degree in European law and international relations, before joining the Commission, she worked as a lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights (2008-2011), the European Court of Justice (2007-2008) and she managed regional projects in the field of environmental law in Central and Eastern Europe (2000-2007).

