

I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RECOMMENDATIONS

COUNCIL

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 24 November 2020

on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

(2020/C 417/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 166 and 165 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union ⁽¹⁾ recognises education and access to vocational and continuing training as a fundamental right, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals envisage by 2030 equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, and a substantial increase in the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- (2) The European Pillar of Social Rights ⁽²⁾ proclaimed on 17 November 2017 sets out a number of principles to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems, including Principle 1 on the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, and Principle 4 on active support to employment.
- (3) High quality and innovative vocational education and training systems provide people with skills for work, personal development and citizenship, which help them to adapt to and deliver on the twin digital and green transitions, to cope with emergency situations and economic shocks, while also supporting economic growth and social cohesion. Thereby providing them with skills that help them get or create jobs in demand on the labour market.
- (4) Effective vocational education and training policies are essential in order to achieve the goal of promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce and labour markets responsive to economic change, set in Article 145 TFEU.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, p. 391.

⁽²⁾ Doc. 13129/17.

- (5) The Commission Communication on ‘The European Green Deal’ ⁽³⁾ is Europe’s new growth strategy aiming to transform its economy and society and put them on a more sustainable path. Schools, training institutions and universities are well placed to engage with pupils, parents, businesses and the wider community on the changes needed for a successful transition. Pro-active up- and reskilling are necessary to reap the benefits of the green transition.
- (6) The Commission Communication on ‘A strong social Europe for just transition’ ⁽⁴⁾ highlights the need to place skills, employability and human capital at the centre stage, through the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience ⁽⁵⁾, accompanied by a proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training. It also announces further work on the European Education Area and a new education and training cooperation framework with the Member States.
- (7) The Commission Communication on A New Industrial Strategy for Europe ⁽⁶⁾ calls for decisive action to make lifelong learning a reality for all and ensure that education and training keep pace and help deliver the twin transitions. It also calls on higher and vocational education and training to provide more scientists, engineers and technicians for the labour market. The New Circular Economy Action Plan ⁽⁷⁾ and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 ⁽⁸⁾ highlight the key role of skills in the transition to a green and clean economy.
- (8) The Commission Communication on An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe ⁽⁹⁾ highlights that availability of skilled staff or experienced managers has become the most important problem for a quarter of EU’s micro, small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and that lack of skilled employees is the most important obstacle to new investment across the EU. Vocational education and training is particularly relevant for SMEs to make sure that their workforce has the skills needed.
- (9) The Commission Communication on a Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 ⁽¹⁰⁾ highlights the importance of vocational education and training for women and men to ensure a gender balance in professions which are, traditionally, male or female dominated, to tackle gender stereotypes.
- (10) The Commission Communication on EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe ⁽¹¹⁾ sets out a bold and comprehensive plan for European recovery, based on an emergency European Recovery Instrument (Next Generation EU) and a reinforced multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. This plan is based on solidarity and fairness, and deeply rooted in the Union’s shared principles and values. The plan sets out how to kick-start the European economy, boost the green and digital transitions, and make it fairer, more resilient and more sustainable for future generations.
- (11) Since 2013, the Youth Guarantee ⁽¹²⁾ has helped young people enter the labour market by offering them a quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeships or traineeships within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving school. Vocational education and training has been effective in smoothing transition to the labour market for young people at risk of exclusion. In the future, attractive and labour-market relevant vocational education and training, notably apprenticeships can play an even a stronger role under the Youth Guarantee in preventing young people from becoming unemployed and preparing them for future labour market opportunities, in particular as part of the green and digital transitions.
- (12) The Commission Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) aims at ensuring better labour market relevance of education and training system and equal access to lifelong learning opportunities for all, through up- and reskilling pathways.

⁽³⁾ COM(2019) 640 final.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2020) 14 final.

⁽⁵⁾ COM(2020) 274 final.

⁽⁶⁾ COM(2020) 102 final.

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2020) 98 final.

⁽⁸⁾ COM(2020) 380 final.

⁽⁹⁾ COM(2020) 103 final.

⁽¹⁰⁾ COM(2020) 152 final.

⁽¹¹⁾ COM(2020) 442 final.

⁽¹²⁾ Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1).

- (13) The Commission Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 provides that the integrated nature of the 2014-2020 programme covering learning in all contexts - formal, non-formal and informal, and at all stages of life - should be maintained to boost flexible learning paths allowing individuals to develop those competences that are necessary to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.
- (14) The present Recommendation is building on a number of initiatives in the area of education and training and skills that have been developed at European level, as summarised in Annex I and will contribute to the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, the updated Digital Education Action Plan, the European Education Area and the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.
- (15) The present Recommendation aims at fulfilling the objective of the European Education Area to develop a genuine European learning space where high quality and inclusive education and training is not hampered by borders and which aims at removing obstacles for recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and learning periods abroad, and work towards the smoother cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning outcomes.
- (16) Building on the priorities of an enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (the Copenhagen process), adopted as a Council Resolution on 19 December 2002 ⁽¹³⁾, the objectives of high quality and flexible vocational education and training and of transnational mobility continued to be at the core of the global vision for the modernisation of vocational education and training defined by the Ministers in charge in 2010 in the Bruges Communiqué.
- (17) In the Riga Conclusions of 22 June 2015, the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training agreed on a set of priorities to support the achievement of this vision, as integrated in the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) ⁽¹⁴⁾ and in the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe ⁽¹⁵⁾ which gave a further strong boost to the Union VET policy with a stronger focus on attractiveness and quality.
- (18) The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training ('EQAVET') ⁽¹⁶⁾ set out a reference framework to support Member States in improving the quality of their vocational education and training systems and to contribute to increased transparency of vocational education and training policy developments between Member States. During the ten years of its implementation, EQAVET has stimulated reforms in national quality assurance systems, but did not contribute significantly to the improvement of transparency of quality assurance arrangements. Furthermore, it was mostly applied in school-based initial vocational education and training. Therefore, the 2009 EQAVET framework should be integrated into this Recommendation and elements addressing the shortcomings of its implementation in relation to the quality of learning outcomes, certification and assessment, stakeholders' consultation, the role of teachers and trainers, work-based learning and flexibility of vocational education and training should be added. In order to improve mutual learning, enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements in the provision of vocational education and training and reinforce mutual trust between EU Member States, EU level peer reviews of quality assurance at system level should be introduced.
- (19) The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training ('ECVET') ⁽¹⁷⁾ set the objective to improve the recognition, accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes, supporting mobility and lifelong learning as well as the establishment of a EU credit system in vocational education and training. During the ten years of its implementation, ECVET has widely contributed to the development of a better-quality mobility experience through the use and documentation of units of learning outcomes. The concept of ECVET points however was generally not applied and ECVET did not lead to the development of a European credit system in vocational education and training. Therefore, this Council Recommendation should include the key principles of ECVET (e.g. units of learning

⁽¹³⁾ OJ C 13, 18.1.2003, p. 2.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25.

⁽¹⁵⁾ COM(2016) 381 final.

⁽¹⁶⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 1.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 11.

outcomes) related to flexibility. The ECVET tools (e.g. learning agreement and memorandum of understanding) supporting mobility of vocational learners, are to be further developed in the framework of other EU instruments such as those supported under the Erasmus+ programme. For vocational qualifications at post-secondary and tertiary level, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System already in use may be applied.

- (20) The Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships ⁽¹⁸⁾ identifies 14 key criteria that Member States and stakeholders should use to develop quality and effective apprenticeships ensuring both the development of job-related skills and the personal development of apprentices.
- (21) CEDEFOP monitoring of the priorities agreed in the Riga conclusions of 22 June 2015 shows a number of areas where countries have progressed with the modernisation agenda of vocational education and training, in particular in relation to apprenticeships and work based learning, quality assurance, setting up of skills anticipation mechanisms and of advisory bodies involving social partners, increasing permeability and flexibility and recently a stronger focus on digital skills. However, in light of the green and digital transitions there is a need to significantly expand and improve the offer for vocational education and training both for young people and adults, while also increasing the attractiveness and quality of initial vocational education and training.
- (22) Many countries have in place initiatives to promote excellence in vocational education and training and to better connect VET to innovation and skills ecosystems. Building upon these examples, the concept of Centres of Vocational Excellence is being piloted with a view to becoming world-class reference points for training in specific areas for both initial training and continuing up-skilling and re-skilling.
- (23) In its Opinion on the Future of Vocational Education and Training, adopted in December 2018, the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training ('ACVT') set the vision for an excellent, inclusive and lifelong vocational education and training that meets the requirements of the future generated by economic, technological and societal changes. This Opinion invited the Commission to prepare a proposal to streamline and consolidate the EU policy framework for vocational education and training, its governance and existing instruments in the form of an overarching Council Recommendation.
- (24) Given its non-binding nature, this Recommendation respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and should be implemented in accordance with European law, national law and practice. In particular, this Recommendation is without prejudice to the Directive 2005/36/EC ⁽¹⁹⁾ as amended by Directive 2013/55/EU ⁽²⁰⁾ on the recognition of professional qualifications and the regime of automatic recognition provided therein.

Taking into account the following definition of 'vocational education and training':

For the purposes of this Recommendation, vocational education and training is to be understood as the education and training which aims to equip young people and adults with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market ⁽²¹⁾. It may be provided in formal and in non-formal settings, at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), including tertiary level, if applicable,

⁽¹⁸⁾ OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications (OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22).

⁽²⁰⁾ Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System ('the IMI Regulation') (OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 132).

⁽²¹⁾ Based on Cedefop definition: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training: Terminology of European Education and Training Policy, 2014.

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:

in accordance with national and Union legislation, available resources, national priorities and circumstances, including the socio-economic situation and the characteristics of national VET systems, and in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders:

- a) work towards implementing a vocational education and training policy which:
 - equips young people and adults with the knowledge, skills and competences to thrive in the evolving labour market and society, to manage the recovery and the just transitions to the green and digital economy, in times of demographic change and throughout all economic cycles,
 - fosters inclusiveness and equal opportunities and contributes to achieving resilience, social fairness and prosperity for all and
 - promotes European vocational education and training systems in an international context so that they are recognised as a worldwide reference for vocational learners;
- b) deploy actions and investments for implementing this policy, in accordance with the principles defined below in points 1-21 and
- c) work towards achieving by 2025 the following EU-level objectives ⁽²²⁾ which are part of relevant European monitoring frameworks, including in the area of education and training and social and employment policies:
 - the share of employed graduates from VET should be at least 82 % ⁽²³⁾;
 - 60 % of recent graduates from VET benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training ⁽²⁴⁾. This objective refers to all forms of work based learning at a workplace, and will also thereby contribute to increased apprenticeship opportunities which can be supported with the Youth Guarantee;
 - 8 % of learners in VET benefit from a learning mobility abroad ⁽²⁵⁾.

Vocational education and training is agile in adapting to labour market changes

1. Vocational education and training programmes offer a balanced mix of vocational including technical skills well aligned to all economic cycles, evolving jobs and working methods and key competences ⁽²⁶⁾, including solid basic skills, digital, transversal, green and other life skills which provide strong foundations for resilience, lifelong learning, lifelong employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development;

⁽²²⁾ The objectives are defined as EU average values to be achieved collectively by MS. When reporting on progress towards achieving these objectives, including where relevant in the context of the European Semester, the Commission should take into account specificities of different national systems and circumstances. Member States should make full use of Union funding opportunities in line with their national circumstances, priorities and challenges. The three quantitative objectives do not pre-empt decisions on how Union funding instruments under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the Next Generation EU are implemented.

⁽²³⁾ This will cover the age group 20-34 who have graduated 1-3 years ago from upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary VET.

⁽²⁴⁾ This will cover the age group 20-34, having left education and training 1-3 years ago. The indicator will be based on data that will be collected as of 2021 as part of the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) as defined in the variable identifier 'HATWORK' in the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2240. This refers to work experiences at a workplace in a market or non-market unit (i.e. in a company, government institution or non-profit organisation) that were part of the curriculum of the formal programme that led to the highest level of education successfully completed. If a respondent had several work experiences, the cumulative duration of all work experiences should be considered. The work experiences should be expressed in full-time equivalents.

⁽²⁵⁾ This will be measured as the share of mobile learners in a calendar year, as a proportion of a cohort of VET graduates in the same year. The indicator will be based on the mobility data sourced from Erasmus+ data and VET graduate data sourced from the Unesco-OECD-Eurostat. Where available and only if the data provided is comparable to Erasmus+ data, including the duration of mobility, data from national authorities mobility programmes could also be used to complement the data from Erasmus+. In case data from national authorities is included, it should be displayed in a transparent manner.

⁽²⁶⁾ The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning defines the following key competences: Literacy competence; Multilingual competence; Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering; Digital competence; Personal, social and learning to learn competence; Citizenship competence; Entrepreneurship competence as well as Cultural awareness and expression competence.

2. Vocational education and training curricula, programme offers and qualifications are regularly updated, as relevant, building on skills intelligence (i.e. graduate tracking systems, skills anticipation mechanisms, including at sectoral and regional levels);
3. Providers of vocational education and training have, in line with national context, an appropriate degree of autonomy, flexibility, support and funding to adapt their training offer to changing skills needs, green and digital transitions and economic cycles, while ensuring quality;
4. Vocational education and training programmes at all levels comprise work-based learning components that are further expanded also in continuing vocational education and training; apprenticeship schemes ⁽²⁷⁾ are further developed, to enhance Youth Guarantee offers ⁽²⁸⁾, and are complemented by appropriate support ⁽²⁹⁾ and measures to stabilise the offer of apprenticeships, and to address specific challenges of small companies; in order to create work-based learning opportunities in different sectors of the economy, incentive measures could be provided for employers in line with national context;

Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of vocational education and training

5. Vocational education and training programmes are learner centred, offer access to face-to-face and digital or blended learning, flexible and modular pathways based on the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and open up career and learning progression; continuing vocational training programmes are designed to be adaptable to labour market, sectoral or individual up- or reskilling needs;
6. Vocational education and training programmes are based on modules or units of learning outcomes and validation mechanisms are in place allowing the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to gaining a qualification, a partial qualification, as relevant in the national context; ⁽³⁰⁾ In initial VET the primary goal is to progress to a full qualification.

Vocational education and training is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for the digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand

7. Vocational education and training is made resilient by being part of economic, industrial and innovation strategies, including those linked to recovery, green and digital transitions. As a consequence, the offer of vocational education and training needs to be significantly adapted and/or expanded, especially for adults, by fostering the acquisition of entrepreneurial, digital and green skills;
8. Centres of Vocational Excellence act as catalysts for local business investment, supporting recovery, green and digital transitions, European and regional innovation and smart specialisation strategies, development of vocational education and training, including at higher qualification levels (EQF levels 5-8) in line with national context and provide innovative services such as clusters and business incubators for start-ups and technology innovation for SMEs, as well as innovative reskilling solutions for workers at risk of redundancy;
9. Vocational education and training institutions have access to state-of-the-art infrastructure, have in place digitalisation strategies ⁽³¹⁾ in line with national context and embed environmental and social sustainability in their programmes and organisational management, thus contributing to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals;

Vocational education and training is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills

10. Initial and continuing vocational education and training are part of the lifelong learning. Flexible and permeable pathways are in place between both initial and continuing vocational education and training, general education and higher education;

⁽²⁷⁾ As defined under the Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

⁽²⁸⁾ As defined under the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee.

⁽²⁹⁾ These might include inter-company training centres.

⁽³⁰⁾ In accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

⁽³¹⁾ For example, the SELFIE self-reflection tool supports VET institutions in using digital technologies for teaching and learning effectively and in enhancing their cooperation with employers in work-based learning schemes.

11. Vocational education and training programmes at EQF levels 5 to 8 are further developed to support a growing need for higher vocational skills in line with national context;
12. Vocational education and training programmes are delivered through an appropriate mix of open, digital and participative learning environments, including learning conducive workplaces and are supported by state-of-the-art and accessible infrastructure, equipment and technology, and versatile pedagogies and tools, for example ICT based simulators, virtual and augmented reality which increase the accessibility and efficiency of training provision, including for small enterprises ⁽³²⁾;
13. Teachers, trainers and other staff in vocational education and training undertake initial and continuing professional development in order to: deliver high quality training; foster technical and digital skills and effective innovative training methods, including teaching in virtual environment; in line with state of the art vocational and digital pedagogy, work with digital learning tools, and in diverse and multicultural environments. Their career paths become more attractive through broader recruitment approaches, enhanced career opportunities ⁽³³⁾, as well as strengthened cooperation between vocational teachers/trainers and companies and other workplaces;
14. Internationalisation strategies support a strategic approach to international cooperation in vocational education and training, including in border regions of the EU; such strategies promote successful national practices worldwide and can be implemented by different means such as mobility of learners and teachers/trainers, and participation and joint preparation in international skills competitions;
15. Opportunities for learning mobility of vocational learners and staff, including virtual mobility, long-duration mobility and mobility to third countries are in place, facilitated by the use and recognition of units of learning outcomes and of relevant European tools; ⁽³⁴⁾
16. Clear and user-friendly information on learning and career opportunities, and validation opportunities, in the entire EU is ensured through high quality lifelong learning and career guidance services, making full use of Europass and other digital services;

Vocational education and training promotes equality of opportunities

17. VET programmes are inclusive and accessible for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, low-qualified/skilled persons, minorities, people with migrant background and people with fewer opportunities because of their geographical location and/or their social-economically disadvantaged situation; Targeted measures and flexible training formats prevent early leaving from education and training and support the school-to-work transition;
18. VET programmes are accessible through digital learning platforms, supported by tools, devices and internet connection, in particular for vulnerable groups and people in rural or remote areas;
19. Targeted measures promote gender balance in traditionally 'male' or 'female' professions and address gender related and other types of stereotypes together;

Vocational education and training is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance

20. The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (the EQAVET Framework) as described in Annex II is used in national quality assurance systems, for both initial and continuing vocational education and training; it covers vocational education and training in all learning environments (such as school-based provision and work-based learning, including apprenticeship schemes) and all learning types (digital, face-to-face or blended), delivered by both public and private providers, and is underpinned by a set of indicative descriptors and common reference indicators for quality assurance in vocational education and training applied both at system and provider level, according to national context, as listed in Annex II;

⁽³²⁾ These may furthermore include collaborative teaching, interdisciplinary and project-based learning, and new organisational methods in training institutions and companies, as well as artificial intelligence.

⁽³³⁾ These may include multiple paths for career progression, recognition of previous professional experience, hybrid teachers/trainers in line with national context.

⁽³⁴⁾ For example, templates for the Memorandum of Understanding and the Learning Agreement.

21. A Quality Assurance National Reference Point for vocational education and training continues to bring together all relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels to:
- take concrete initiatives to implement and further develop the EQAVET Framework,
 - inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to implementing the EQAVET framework,
 - support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to allow the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement, including with respect to digital readiness of VET systems and institutions
 - participate actively in the European network for quality assurance in vocational education and training,
 - provide an updated description of the national quality assurance arrangements based on the EQAVET Framework,
 - engage in EU level peer reviews ⁽³⁵⁾ of quality assurance to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements, and to reinforce trust between the Member States;

Implementation at national level

It is recommended that Member States take actions to implement this policy at national level, together with social partners and other relevant stakeholders. In doing so, they should:

22. Support sustainable partnerships for the governance of vocational education and training, in accordance with national context and, where relevant, through public-private partnerships. Involve social partners and all relevant stakeholders, including vocational education and training institutions, industries and businesses of all sizes, public and private employment services, VET teachers and trainers and their representatives, intermediary bodies such as chambers of industry, commerce and crafts, professional and sectoral organisations, national coordinators for the Youth Guarantee, ESF and other EU initiatives, the information technologies sector, Centres of Vocational Excellence, clusters, learners' and parents' organisations, as well as local, regional and national authorities. Promote such partnerships at regional and sectoral level;
23. Make best use of the European transparency tools such as the European Qualifications Framework, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Europass and the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), facilitate automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad ⁽³⁶⁾, enable learners to use the various features of Europass (e.g. recording their experience, skills and qualifications in an online profile that serves for career guidance, mobility experience, obtaining digitally signed credentials, and receiving suggestions and searching for learning and job opportunities, qualifications, validation, recognition, etc.);
24. Make best use of European Union funds and instruments supporting reforms and/or investment in vocational education and training, including on digitalisation and environmental sustainability, such as the Next Generation EU (Recovery and Resilience Facility, REACT-EU), European Social Fund+, SURE, the European Regional Development Fund, InvestEU, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Interreg, Digital Europe, the Just Transition Mechanism and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the Modernisation Fund; stimulate further investments in vocational education and training from both public and private sectors;
25. Define by building on relevant existing national arrangements and financial frameworks measures to be taken for the implementation of this Recommendation at national level within 18 months of its adoption and follow up their implementation, including with national resource allocations as adequate at national level and with a strong focus on mainstreaming digitalisation and environmental sustainability across the entire VET sector with due regard to the responsibility/autonomy of education and training institutions in line with national context.

⁽³⁵⁾ A peer review is a type of voluntary mutual learning activity with the objective to support the improvement and transparency of quality assurance arrangements at system level not leading to accreditation procedures, based on a specific methodology to be developed by the European Network for quality assurance in vocational education and training.

⁽³⁶⁾ In line with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.

HEREBY WELCOMES THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION, WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

implement the Union's vocational education and training policy, supporting the action of the Member States, including through:

26. Ensuring effective governance of the EU policy for vocational education and training through the tripartite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, on the basis of a rolling work programme and in cooperation with Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training ⁽³⁷⁾, learners' representatives and providers of vocational education and training;
27. Ensuring that the EU policy for vocational education and training is fully reflected in taking forward the EU Recovery Plan, the European Green Deal and the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, the SME-Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe and is a consistent and coherent part of the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, the Digital Education Action Plan, the overall European cooperation framework for education and training and the European Education Area;
28. Further providing support for structural reforms on apprenticeship through the apprenticeship support service and a new boost to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in synergy with the Youth Guarantee; gradually expanding support services for vocational education and training in cooperation with CEDEFOP;
29. Exploring the concept and use of microcredentials, including in VET, together with Member States and relevant stakeholders, including in the context of the EQF Advisory Group, as proposed in the European Skills Agenda.
30. Supporting the goal of gradually establishing and developing European Platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence and exploring European Vocational Core Profiles together with Member States and relevant stakeholders, as part of Europass platform and complemented, where possible, by vocational digital content developed in the framework of European transparency tools, with a view to facilitate mobility of learners and workers and the transparency and recognition of qualifications;
31. Supporting qualitative and effective digitalisation of VET provision in both school-based and work-based learning through promoting the use of European competence frameworks ⁽³⁸⁾ and self-assessment tools ⁽³⁹⁾, and exploring the feasibility of an EU wide survey for VET schools;
32. Reinforcing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Digital Skills and Job Coalitions as announced in the European Skills Agenda;
33. Promoting European vocational education and training systems in an international context so that they are recognised as a worldwide reference for vocational learners, including by supporting internationalisation of vocational education and training systems also with regard to EU candidate countries and to European Neighbourhood countries in cooperation with the European Training Foundation, skills competitions and communication campaigns to raise the attractiveness and image of VET and providing user-friendly access to information about vocational education and training and related career opportunities, building and further developing the Europass features;
34. Cooperating with international organisations, in particular OECD, ILO, UNESCO and the World Bank, in the field of vocational education and training.
35. Supporting the Member States' efforts for the implementation of this Recommendation, strengthening capacity of vocational education and training institutions, including their digitalisation and environmental sustainability and promoting research in VET at both national and EU level through funding from the relevant Union funds and programmes (the Next Generation EU (Recovery and Resilience Facility and REACT-EU), European Social Fund+, SURE, European Regional Development Fund, InvestEU, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Interreg, Digital Europe, Just Transition Mechanism, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the Modernisation Fund);

⁽³⁷⁾ Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training are designated by the Member States.

⁽³⁸⁾ Such as the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp), Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) and the Digital Competence Framework for Organisations (DigCompO).

⁽³⁹⁾ Such as SELFIE.

36. Ensuring qualitative and quantitative monitoring in line with the common objectives defined in this Recommendation as well as other relevant data, including on investment, and feeding this data into the European Semester and relevant European monitoring and reporting frameworks and reporting to the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation every five years, building on data available at national and European level and annual monitoring by CEDEFOP.

This Recommendation replaces the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

Done at Brussels, 24 November 2020.

For the Council
The President
M. ROTH

ANNEX I

Relevant Union acts in the field of skills, education and training

1. Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving ⁽¹⁾.
2. Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽²⁾.
3. 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) – New priorities for European cooperation in education and training ⁽³⁾.
4. Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults ⁽⁴⁾.
5. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ⁽⁵⁾.
6. Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates ⁽⁶⁾.
7. Decision (EU) 2018/646 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 April 2018 on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC ⁽⁷⁾.
8. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽⁸⁾.
9. Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area ⁽⁹⁾.
10. Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad ⁽¹⁰⁾.
11. Council conclusions on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults ⁽¹¹⁾.
12. Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems ⁽¹²⁾.
13. Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing ⁽¹³⁾.
14. Commission Communication on ‘Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020’ ⁽¹⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 15.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 423, 9.12.2017, p. 1.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 112, 2.5.2018, p. 42.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p. 7.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1.

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 23.

⁽¹²⁾ OJ C 389, 18.11.2019, p. 1.

⁽¹³⁾ 13432/19.

⁽¹⁴⁾ COM(2019) 650 final.

ANNEX II

The EQAVET Framework

Part A. EQAVET indicative descriptors

This annex proposes indicative descriptors aiming to support Member States and VET providers, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the EQAVET Framework. They are structured by phases of the quality cycle: *Planning – Implementation – Evaluation – Review*. They can be applied to both initial and continuing VET and are applicable to all learning environments: school based provision and work based learning including apprenticeships schemes.

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
<p>Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators</p>	<p>Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European and Sustainable Development Goals taking into account environmental sustainability considerations</p> <p>Social partners and all other relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels</p> <p>Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria)</p> <p>Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify the training needs of the labour market and society</p>	<p>European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers</p> <p>Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored, and programmes are designed to meet them</p> <p>Ongoing consultation with social partners and all other relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs</p> <p>Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated</p> <p>There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development</p>
	<p>An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/outcomes subject to national/ regional data protection requirements</p> <p>Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined</p> <p>VET qualifications are described using learning outcomes</p> <p>Mechanisms are established for the quality assurance of the design, assessment and review of qualifications</p> <p>VET programmes are designed to allow flexible learning pathways and to respond quickly to changing labour market needs</p>	<p>Providers plan cooperative initiatives with relevant stakeholders</p> <p>The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs</p> <p>VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place</p> <p>Measures are designed to ensure compliance with data protection rules</p>

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
<p>Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles</p>	<p>Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels</p> <p>Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support</p> <p>Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels. These guidelines and standards include assessment, validation and certification of qualifications</p> <p>Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers, including for digital skills and environmental sustainability</p>	<p>Resources are appropriately internally aligned/ assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans</p> <p>Relevant and inclusive partnerships, including those between teachers and trainers, are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned</p> <p>The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers</p> <p>Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance</p>
	<p>VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent</p> <p>A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET-provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation</p>	<p>VET providers' programmes enable learners to meet the expected learning outcomes and become involved in the learning process</p> <p>VET providers respond to the learning needs of individuals by using a learner – centred approach which enable learners to achieve the expected learning outcomes</p> <p>VET providers promote innovation in teaching and learning methods, in school and in the workplace, supported by the use of digital technologies and online-learning tools</p> <p>VET providers use valid, accurate and reliable methods to assess individuals' learning outcomes</p>
<p>Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement</p>	<p>A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation</p> <p>Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described</p> <p>The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector</p> <p>Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate</p>	<p>Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers, covering also the digital readiness and environmental sustainability of VET institutions</p> <p>Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education and training including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction</p>

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
	<p>Early warning systems are implemented</p> <p>Performance indicators are applied</p> <p>Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement. Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics</p>	<p>Evaluation and review includes the collection and use of data, and adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders</p> <p>Early warning systems are implemented</p>
Review	<p>Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined and used to improve the quality of provision at all levels</p> <p>Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised. Systems are adjusted accordingly</p> <p>Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available</p>	<p>Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers', trainers' and all other relevant stakeholders' feedback this is used to inform further actions</p> <p>Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available</p> <p>Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation, support the development of high quality provision, and improve opportunities for learners.</p> <p>Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place</p>

Part B. The reference set of EQAVET Indicators

This section proposes a set of reference indicators which can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of national/regional VET systems and/or VET providers when implementing the EQAVET framework.

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
Overarching Indicators for Quality Assurance		
Number 1		
<p>Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:</p> <p>a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative</p> <p>b) share of accredited VET providers</p>	Context/Input indicator	<p>Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level</p> <p>Increase the transparency of quality of training</p> <p>Improve mutual trust on training provision</p>
Number 2		
<p>Investment in training of teachers and trainers:</p> <p>a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training</p>	Input/Process indicator	Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
b) amount of funds invested, including for digital skills		Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market Increase individual learning capacity building Improve learners' achievement

 Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies

Number 3

Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes ⁽¹⁾ , according to the type of programme and the individual criteria ⁽²⁾	Input/Process/Output indicator	Obtain basic information at VET- system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups
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Number 4

Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	Process/Output/Outcome indicator	Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
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Number 5

Placement rate in VET programmes: a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria ⁽³⁾ b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	Outcome indicator	Support employability Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
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⁽¹⁾ For IVT: a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant. For lifelong learning: percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes.

⁽²⁾ Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrants, persons with disabilities, length of unemployment.

⁽³⁾ For IVT: including information on the destination of learners who have dropped out.

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
Number 6		
Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences	Outcome indicator (mix of qualitative and quantitative data)	Increase employability Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
Context information		
Number 7		
Unemployment rate ⁽⁴⁾ according to individual criteria	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level
Number 8		
Prevalence of vulnerable groups: a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups
Number 9		
Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market: a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels b) evidence of the use of such mechanisms and their effectiveness	Context/Input indicator (qualitative information)	Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support employability
Number 10		
Schemes used to promote better access to VET and provide guidance to (potential) VET learners: a) information on existing schemes at different levels b) evidence of their effectiveness	Process indicator (qualitative information)	Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups Provide guidance to (potential) VET learners Support adapted training provision

⁽⁴⁾ Definition according to ILO: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.