



European  
Commission

# Developing Skills for the labour market

## The Riga Conclusions European cooperation in vocational education and training 2015-2020

**P**eople need high-quality skills to play an active role in the European labour market of today and tomorrow. Modernising vocational education and training (VET) will empower them to develop the right skills throughout their lives using flexible learning pathways.

In a fast-changing global economy, nurturing skills and putting them to good use will, to a great extent, determine our capacity to drive innovation and growth and sustain our social model. Europe needs to equip its people with the right skills so that they can play an active role in the labour market and society. The New Skills Agenda for Europe has been put forward as an EU-level contribution, in order to guide this policy debate and provide Member States with concrete areas for action and cooperation.

When it comes to skills for the labour market, vocational education and training (VET) come into their own. Forecasts in several Member States indicate a future shortage of people with VET qualifications. Yet, for too many young people and their parents, initial VET remains a second choice, and only a minority of workers are offered opportunities for further skills development. VET can only become more attractive if people trust its outcomes and if it provides learners with more opportunities for work experiences and for placements abroad. People who follow VET programmes should get recognition for the skills they gain, while those who obtain VET qualifications should be able to move on to higher levels of education or training. This requires close partnerships with business, higher education and research.

# The Riga conclusions

## 5 goals to improve VET

Under the Copenhagen Process, Ministers responsible for vocational skill development from all EU Member States, EU Candidate Countries and EEA countries along with the European Social Partners (ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP) and the European Commission met in Riga on 20 June 2015. Together, they agreed on the Riga Conclusions, which set out the ‘five VET medium-term deliverables’. These key deliverables form the basis of the agenda for modernising VET over the 2015-2020 period.



1

**Promote work-based learning in all its forms, with a special focus on apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, and by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.**

Work-based learning has proven to be very effective in developing skills relevant to the labour market, including soft skills as well as skills applicable to a variety of work environments. Yet, only 25% of initial VET students attend work-based programmes. There is a clear need for more quality apprenticeships and work-based learning. This requires partnerships between education and training institutions and labour market

The European Alliance for Apprenticeship brings together public and private stakeholders to improve the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe.  
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147>

The European Pact for Youth supports the employability of young people, through partnerships between relevant public and private stakeholders.  
<http://www.csreurope.org/pactforyouth>

businesses and organisations. Such partnerships are promoted by the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and European Pact for Youth.

2

**Further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes.**

Across countries and sectors, employers need to trust that workers really have the skills shown in their qualifications. Quality therefore needs to be assured in all phases of VET — design, teaching, assessment, validation and certification — to ensure that the outcomes are good, for both initial (I-VET) and continuing VET (C-VET). The EQAVET tool is



being developed to provide better support for the quality of work-based learning and C-VET and to track the occupational outcomes of VET.

EQAVET is a network for European collaboration in developing quality assurance in VET using the European reference framework.  
[www.eqavet.eu](http://www.eqavet.eu)



3

**Improve access to VET and qualifications for everyone through more flexible and open systems, notably by offering efficient and comprehensive guidance services and validating non-formal and informal learning.**

People today have a wide choice of ways to develop their skills, from vocational centres to internet courses, work, volunteering and other life experiences. For people to make

the most of such opportunities, the right conditions need to be in place: skills, no matter how they have been acquired, should be assessed, validated and count towards a qualification. Implementing the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning and revising the European Qualifications Framework, the Europass service and the ECVET instrument will support open and flexible learning pathways.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) defines eight levels of learning outcomes, so that qualifications across countries and sectors can be better compared and understood.

The Europass portal is being developed, as part of the Skills Agenda, to include all online services covering skills and qualifications. ECVET is a European credit framework for VET that supports flexible learning pathways.  
[www.ecvet-secretariat.eu](http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu)

The Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning calls for national arrangements enabling individuals to request validation of skills acquired outside institutional education.



4

**Provide an added boost to key competences in VET curricula and offer more effective opportunities to acquire or develop these skills through I-VET and C-VET.**

At the end of initial education and training, everyone should have acquired a core set of skills in line with the eight key competences for lifelong learning. These form the basis for any further learning and for an active life in today's society and labour market. Initial VET programmes need to ensure that, in addition to specific vocational skills, their graduates develop all key competences, including digital skills and entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented skills. These are necessary and useful as people move through their careers. To help address this issue, the European framework of key competences is being revised under the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

As part of the Skills Agenda, the Commission has proposed a Skills Guarantee, to provide low-qualified adults, including recently arrived migrants, with the opportunity to raise the level of their basic skills — literacy, numeracy and digital skills — and possibly of all key competences.  
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en>



5

**Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, initial and continual professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both education and work-based settings.**

The quality of teachers, trainers and mentors remains a crucial factor in determining how much and how well people develop skills through education and training. Good teaching is an essential element in the mix that leads to good outcomes. Teaching staff also play a major role in inspiring and guiding learners, encouraging them to work towards higher levels of qualification or widen the scope of their competences.

Exchanges of good practices and mutual learning are effective approaches to supporting Member States in raising the quality of VET teachers and trainers, with specific reference to enhancing work-based learning and apprenticeships.

## KEEPING TRACK OF PROGRESS

Progress towards the five medium-term deliverables will be monitored with the support of CEDEFOP, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, which analyses European and national developments in vocational education and training, and ETF, the European Training Foundation, which supports human capital development in transition countries.

### Find out more

Vocational education and training  
(European Commission):

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/index_en.htm)

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1146&langId=en>

The European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

The European Training Foundation:

<http://www.etf.europa.eu/>

