



## EU VET Priorities: Defining Priority Areas and Critical Actions

### Contextual Overview

Vocational education and training (VET) has long been recognised as a critical enabler of societal development and economic growth, while also fostering employment and societal eco-systems in which inclusivity, equal opportunities and social fairness are fundamental elements. One of the key attributes which allows VET to achieve major societal and economic impacts, is the agile manner through which it can adapt to market needs, facilitating learner centred development based on current or future work-based needs, in which their accessibility transcend traditional educational models. While the adaptable nature of VET has been cited as a major facilitator in preparing society for post Covid economic changes, several drivers associated with this transition have been ever present and pre-date the current changeable landscape. Factors such as digitalisation in adult learning, shifts to more learning centred organisations, and inclusive societies although ever present, have experienced a major paradigm shift in terms of the rate of change and recognition of importance as a result of global challenges such as climate change, geopolitical tensions, and armed conflict. The VET sector as an education provider in many countries is tasked with meeting large proportions of the labour market needs and more work-based learning models, and therefore has a critical role to play within this paradigm shift. Furthermore, the targets and ambitions set out by policy makers, particularly within the Green Transition realm, are simply unattainable without quality VET provisions, and the diverse array of skills that they produce.

Besides catering in an agile way for the rapidly changing demands of the labour market, VET is a strong alternative pathway to reach academic degrees. Instead of following a traditional pathway of pre-academic secondary schools, followed by an academic study, experiences from several countries suggest that those academics, who followed an earlier VET study, experience numerous benefits over those who followed a schoolish or solely (pre) academic pathway due to their work-based experiences. All this justifies the demand of the VET sector to come to parity of esteem with higher education.

The members of the European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET) are therefore ready to take up their responsibility in cooperation with all other relevant actors to contribute to the EU objectives as they are defined in the Osnabrück declaration. To do so, EUproVET



has defined the priority areas and associated actions required to meet the challenges of the next decade.

## EUproVET Priority Themes

### Priority Area 1 statement

*VET is the key to navigating complexity, and delivering a smarter, sustainable, and competitive Europe for the future*

Traditionally, the agile nature of VET has facilitated greater adaptability to change across educational, industry and societal contexts. With VET being deeply embedded within these arenas, the sector has a long-standing track record of quickly adapting to meet labour market needs in both current and future terms. However, throughout the last 5 years, society has witnessed seismic shifts in both the rate and scope of change. There has been a major acceleration in both the rate and frequency of technological change, a factor which is having major disruptive influences on economic models. Beyond traditional macro factors such as technological and economic change, global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and in more recent times international conflict, have further compounded these complexities, highlighting the need for humanity as a whole to be able to embrace complexity in an ever shifting volatile and uncertain seascape. The ever changing and complex nature of global markets and societies highlights the need for VET to be a change agent as a well as a coping mechanism for change, paving the way in innovation in education, future forecasting and social responsibilities.

### Priority Areas 1 Objective

In order to deliver a resilient, adaptable, and inclusive society through quality and flexible VET, we recommend that the EC prioritise the following actions:

#### **Actions:** Enhancing VET through:

- Recruiting, training, upskilling and retaining learning facilitators
- Including digital competencies as required throughout all VET programmes
- Facilitating closer partnership between industry and the VET sector (e.g. CoVE's)

### Priority Area 2 Statement

*VET is a necessary requisite to realise a greener, sustainable, and circular economy*

Global challenges such as climate change and the need to embrace more sustainable outlooks are multifaceted concepts which have traversed all political, economic, societal and technology contexts.



Policies such as the EC's Green Deal, and the holistic and the all-encompassing way the actions are being rolled out, places green skills and the need to adopt more sustainable strategies at the core of all learning contexts<sup>9</sup>. Beyond the Green Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a global framework with thematic areas designed to facilitate great understanding of these global challenges, while also providing a mechanism through which common goals and objectives can be based on regardless of the political, economic, societal and technology context. These policies and global frameworks are centred on extremely ambitious targets to produce energy autonomy and net zero carbon societies, all of which are unattainable without the skills produced throughout VET.

#### Priority Area 2 Objective

In order to deliver a substantial contribution to a greener and sustainable environment and the climate targets, we propose that the EC focus on the following actions:

**Actions:** Promote the greening of VET programs by:

- Defining and adopting sustainability at the core of all learning contexts
- Defining labour-market-relevant skills for the green transition
- Promoting the skills and knowledge of the workforce to make the sustainability targets a reality

#### Priority Area 3 Statement

*VET fosters effective social inclusion and lifelong learning while meeting labour market needs*

The traditional hierarchical and '*rite of passage*' themed approaches to education, particularly those associated with higher education, are not fit for purpose when it comes to meeting the demands of the everchanging economic, technological, and societal seascape. As a result of the accelerated rate of change which continues to manifest as a result of digital and green transitions, individuals are experiencing an increased frequency in the need to upskill as new technologies, industries and global challenges emerge. This rapid change calls not only for a need to upskill more frequently, but for individuals and employers to experience guidance and mentoring in relation to their careers not only at the beginning of their careers as with traditional focuses, but also throughout their careers in their entirety. Such access provides a means of ensuring that citizens are continuously engaged in actively managing their careers/employment, while also empowering them to take greater ownership in the process of identifying suitable learning opportunities to develop and grow. This active engagement will



also stimulate the necessary attributes and individual reflections to cultivate cultures of lifelong learning and development, while continuously meeting labour market needs.

#### Priority Area 3 Objective

In order to increase participation in Adult Learning including the most vulnerable groups, we propose that the EC prioritise the following actions:

**Actions:** Develop national skills strategies for quality and inclusive lifelong learning by:

- Defining required Skills for a lifetime and for the rapidly changing labour market
- Creating strategies which will facilitate opportunities for an all-inclusive participation in lifelong learning
- Promoting the use of micro credentials and Individual learning accounts

#### Priority Area 4 Statement

*VET overcomes barriers to open education and increases access and agility in the labour market*

The need to continuously maintain and develop international engagement is cited extensively throughout EU education contexts. The Council of the EU highlight the importance of maintaining dialogues and collaborations between all educational stakeholders with a view to not only improving the quality and relevance of education throughout the EU, but also to facilitate more scope for joined up thinking across nations. Furthermore, the Council emphasises the need for VET policy to reflect the need to be not only inclusive in nature and provide a resilient and socially fair educational eco-system but should also consider the VET system as an international player so that they are viewed as a global reference point for vocational learners. Beyond council recommendations, EU action plans such as the European Skills Agenda places multi-stakeholder transnational cooperation as a key focal point for delivering skills throughout the EU which meet the volatile, uncertain, and ever-changing landscape in which VET and indeed EU citizens in general currently find themselves.

#### Priority Area 4 Objective

In order to remove barriers for an open European education- and labour market, the EC should consider the following actions:

**Actions:** Increase all efforts to come to general recognition of qualifications across borders:

- Fostering Transnational Cooperation through Peer Learning activities and projects
- Defining a common set of quality criteria and values based on learning outcomes
- Increasing the rate of mobility in VET and teaching roles within VET



## Priority Area 1 statement

***VET is the key to navigating complexity, and delivering a smarter, sustainable, and competitive Europe for the future***

- In order to deliver a resilient, adaptable, and inclusive society through quality and flexible VET, we recommend that the EC prioritise the following actions:
  - **Actions:** Enhancing VET through:
    - Recruiting, training, upskilling and retaining learning facilitators
    - Including digital competencies as required throughout all VET programmes
    - Facilitating closer partnership between industry and the VET sector (e.g. CoVE's)

## Priority Area 2 Statement

***VET is a necessary requisite to realise a greener, sustainable, and circular economy***

- In order to deliver a substantial contribution to a greener and sustainable environment and the climate targets, we propose that the EC focus on the following actions:
  - **Actions:** Promote the greening of VET programs by:
    - Defining and adopting sustainability at the core of all learning contexts
    - Defining labour-market-relevant skills for the green transition
    - Promoting the skills and knowledge of the workforce to make the sustainability targets a reality

## Priority Area 3 Statement

***VET fosters effective social inclusion and lifelong learning while meeting labour market needs***

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## Priority Area 4 Statement

***VET overcomes barriers to open education and increases access and agility in the labour market***

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    - Increasing the rate of mobility in VET and teaching roles within VET