

**Summary of the Round Table  
Presentation and debate on Vocational  
Education and Training for all (VET)**

**8 May 2013, European Parliament**



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## OPENING

### **SUMMARY OF THE LAUNCH OF THE EUROPEAN STUDY ON VET CONDUCTED BY THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION.**

#### **Vocational Education and Training: What works, why it works and how it works for young learners with disabilities and/or special needs education**

#### **Hosted by Ádám Kósa, Member of the European Parliament, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Chair of the Disability Intergroup**

Mr Kósa explained that the conference covers three objectives. The first is to present the study from the European Agency. This new research is launched and the results and findings will be presented. The second objective is to exchange good practices. The third objective is to share the messages from the study with the rest of Europe.

Mr Kósa provided, first of all, some information about the new European Disability Strategy. The new strategy was adopted 15 November 2010. He underlined that this is quite an important accomplishment and highlighted that there is one key point included in this strategy: education. However, Europe is facing a difficult situation right now. The number of active workers will decrease annually by 1 million people. In addition, there are many youths who want to join the workforce. Unfortunately, there are no opportunities for them. In addition to that, there are more than 25 million people without job in the European Union now. Evidence clearly shows that people with lower skills have three time less opportunity to continue learning or taking part in training as well.

This is a serious problem that has to be considered for the future and it will have effects on vocational training. The European parliament has its own firm position on this issue by having adopted the Kósa report on mobility and inclusion of people with disabilities and EU Disability Strategy 2010/2020. Another important data: there are 12 million jobs that require lower skills which will disappear in the near future. These workers will have a big problem in the future. Therefore the research done by the European Agency is important to inform on what is being done well and what can be done better in the future for VET.

#### **Per Gunnvall, Chair of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE)**

Mr Gunnvall shortly introduced the event. He mentioned there are in this meeting participants from European and international organisations as well as representatives from ministries of education and participants from associations. Vocational education and training is a key issue at national, international and European level. In the Agency's project 26 countries participated with 53 national experts from the different countries. The aim of the project was to find out what works, why it works and how it works.



## PRESENTATIONS

### **Cor Meijer, Director of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE)**

Mr Meijer gave a short debriefing about the study before introducing the members of the panel.

The Lisbon European Council of 2000 highlighted the area of vocational education and training as a priority. It stated that every citizen must be equipped with the skills to live and work in the new information society. In addition, special attention is to be given to disabled people. A few key issues from the Lisbon European Council of 2000 were mentioned: the development of high quality VET is a crucial and integral part of the Lisbon strategy, particularly in terms of inclusion; VET should be addressed to all sections of the population, including those at risk of disadvantages and labour market exclusion such as students and pupils with special needs. Data shows that disabled people continue to be disproportionately excluded from the labour market. This exclusion is a serious concern from the perspective of equal opportunities. Countries should make as a priority to achieve better results for learners with special needs.

The study conducted by the Agency is aimed to identify and investigate key positive aspects of VET projects for young learners with disabilities. It looks at the age group of 14–25 years with a link to employment opportunities. Three basic questions were looked at: what works, why is it working and how it is working. The first presentation will focus on what works based on the study visits and the analysis conducted. The second will deal with the reasons why it is working: What is the evidence we have from the theoretical and scientific perspective? Finally, the last presentation will look at the last question: How is it working from a practical perspective?

### **Harald Weber and Mary Kyriazopoulou, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education: 'What works in VET'**

The three year Vocational Education and Training (VET) project has explored the key factors of VET for learners with special educational needs (SEN) / disabilities with a clear link to employment opportunities. Although the project has examined the content of the vocational education and training programs, its main focus has been on the VET outcomes in relation to the labour market. In order to identify the key factors of VET for learners with SEN / disabilities, the project took a closer look at 28 successful VET practices in 26 European countries, selected according to various criteria agreed by the project participants. Small teams of nominated experts visited each of these sites and engaged with local partners and stakeholders. The project particularly sought to extract similarities and differences of successful VET systems for people with SEN / disabilities. In particular, it tried to extract some similarities and differences in those 28 successful practices. In the end, all the long lists of factors were reduced and transformed to a set of 68 success factors.

Following a systemic approach, the project participants developed a system model for VET in order to try to formulate some recommendations, which respect the complexity of the VET systems. In all the 28 study visits, 4 areas were observed and identified. These are called patterns within this project.

1. VET institutions management pattern: issues of commitment and motivation, both of staff and directors, with leadership, teacher qualification, multi-disciplinary team set-ups, suitable staff: learner ratio, support staff, suitable policies, etc.



2. Vocational education and training pattern: all factors that concern the design and implementation of VET programs and the respective educational approaches involved.
3. Learners' pattern: Exemplary factors within this pattern relate to active parent involvement, providing support during transition and work, policies that support learners and their parents, but also on awarding portfolios or certificates on achievements and skills.
4. Labour market pattern: all factors that are of relevance to the labour market stakeholders, mainly current and future employers. Factors within this pattern focus on established networking structures between educational institutions and employers, co-operation with regard to practical training/work expositions, but also with regard to information employers can provide on current and future labour market needs that the educational institution should take into account in updating their VET programmes.

Within these 4 patterns mentioned above, certain issues were identified where VET systems need to further improve. Specific recommendations have been developed in order to improve the performance of the countries' VET systems in particular areas. Five out of the 12 recommendations are explained as follows:

#### ***Vocational Education and Training institution management pattern***

Recommendation No 2: Teamwork-approach by the educational staff, with various disciplines represented in that team is very important. Multidisciplinary teams, however, require clear roles, and they need to have a team-work approach and co-operate with a high level of internal communication.

#### ***Vocational education and training pattern***

Recommendation No 3: Learner-centred approaches should be implemented with regard to planning, goal setting and curriculum design. These approaches need to be used in the learning process of VET so that pedagogical methods and materials, the curriculum and assessment methods and goals, are tailored to individual needs.

Recommendation No 6: VET programs/courses need to be reviewed periodically both internally and/or externally in order to adapt to current and future skill needs. Internal reviews would be used to validate current offers against labour market analysis, which would benefit from good links to employers who could provide up-to-date input on this.

#### ***Learners' pattern***

Recommendation No 8: The learners' wishes and expectations should be identified; that there is a sufficient number of VET options for the learner to select from; and that the individual is supported throughout the VET process to achieve a good match between the wishes and real work opportunities.

#### ***Labour market pattern***

Recommendation No 10: Each school/VET institution needs to establish and maintain connections with local employers over time. It is important that both sides should provide sufficient time so that positive experiences during practical training and successful transitions can be collected.



## **Serge Ebersold, Senior researcher, INSHEA, France: ‘Why it works in VET’**

Data gathered by the European Agency indicate that strategies developed aim at fostering synergies between the education system and employers and to smooth the transition to the labour market. It highlights the importance of work place training or on the job learning opportunities to provide youths with practical skills on up-to-date equipment. This is also in order to provide them with the key soft skills required in a real-world environment and to overcome fears and prejudices in work situations.

Mr Ebersold highlighted three core issues that may support professionals in understanding what and why it works:

Education policies:


- Valuing equally general and VET education;
- Promoting a competence based qualification framework to connect general and VET courses in relationship to the needs of the labour market;
- Fostering inclusive education policies providing diversified educational and professional pathways.

High quality management allowing for:

- Developing policies and strategies linking academic success to professional inclusion;
- Promoting flexible education strategies building upon several techniques (ICT, etc.) and empowering staffs’ skills and expertise, especially on labour markets requirements;
- Implementing a quality assurance framework building upon on a learner-centred approach. It will develop appropriate individualised and flexible outcome based curricula and offer progression opportunities to the students;
- Promoting assessment methods focusing on students’ capabilities and added value in the firm. This will increase students’ self-confidence in their abilities to manage the challenges they face and overcoming employers’ prejudices;
- Embedding schools’ policy in their local environment to foster formalised partnerships with firms and support services. It empowers schools and teachers to become their own problem solvers, to prevent drop out and secure transition to work.

A shift from job matching strategies to job development strategies in order to take into account the needs of a ‘volatile’ labour market:

- Job development strategies aim at creating innovative job opportunities tailored to firms’ needs and students’ wishes and expectations. These strategies will empower both students and firms throughout the process;
- Job development strategies aim at developing local integrated transition systems able to ensure effective and secure pathways to the labour market and to maintain learners’ employment;
- Job development strategies shift from placement to career guidance and mentoring. It allows overcoming gaps due to differences in approaches to disability between general and professional education. It also supports students in finding an on the job training opportunity and to foster their awareness;

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- Job development strategies aim at transforming disability in competences by developing an individual transition plan including both academic and professional issues. It involves stakeholders from the labour market, the school, employment support services and families;
  - Job development strategies assess and formalise academic and professional skills and competences acquired both in schools and at the work place. It documents added value of youth with disabilities at the work place.

### **Rory O`Sullivan, Principal, Killester College of Further Education, Ireland: 'How it works'**

The wide variety of programs and levels that are offered at Killester College of Further Education in Ireland is provided to a diverse student population in an inclusive way. There are many definitions of inclusive education. In Killester College inclusive education is seen as being about improving the quality of learning for all students by dealing with all barriers to accessing, participating and succeeding in learning, whoever experiences them and wherever they are located throughout all aspects of the college – our culture, policies and practices. A range of the recommendations are covered as they apply to the College under four main headings:

1. Profile of the students in Killester College;
2. Access to VET programs;
3. Successful participation on VET programs;
4. Successful completion.

This year in Killester College there are 360 full-time and 180 part-time day students. Of all of these students 102 or (over 18%) declared a learning support need at enrolment. Following a needs-assessment, 41 required additional support, with the remainder being supported through inclusive teaching and learning methodologies in the classroom.

A key element of the inclusive strategy is to ensure that there is a 'best fit' between the student and the program – the admissions or access process. Formal educational qualifications are one way of demonstrating capacity. However, the assessment of capacity is not solely based on previous learning and/or experience. Many of the students lack confidence or self-esteem.

The Learning Support Team, which includes an access officer, a visiting disability support officer and the career guidance counsellor, meet students regularly from the time of application until completion of the program. Successful participation in a program is dependent as much on the student's effort as on the teacher's. All of the teachers in Killester College have received training in inclusive teaching and learning methodologies. A significant element of the Killester College inclusion strategy is the use of ICT to support students' learning. The College is part of a City of Dublin VEC web-based learning system: Moodle. In addition, Google Apps is used. Thus, all of the teaching and learning resources are available on-line. Work experience placement is a mandatory requirement of programs certified at levels 5 and 6 on the Irish national certification system. These are the levels at which students enter employment and further study. For many students this is difficult. While, the students are given as much assistance as possible, the placement is in the gift of the employer. The support infrastructure with Killester College begins with the Class Tutor assigned to every class group. He/she provides a day-to-day contact person for all of the students in the group. All of the programs are assessed using college-based assessments. Different methodologies are developed as required throughout the program. In the area of science and technology, the use of technical jargon can present some



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difficulties for sign language interpreters. In these cases the interpreters would meet the program teachers with the student to develop appropriate signs both for the ordinary classes and the assessments, particularly the practical examinations.





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## RESPONDENTS TO THE PRESENTATIONS

### **Heinz Becker, Member of the European Parliament, Culture and Education Committee**

Mr Becker focused on two aspects. The first is the relevance of strengthening already developing synergies of vocational education and training at all levels. This means prioritising successful synergies and strong cooperation of social partners and labour services, with political actors and stakeholders.

Secondly, job development strategies. Job development requires all actors not to neglect any other important tool on the labour market. This fosters creativity and opens previously unexplored opportunities of job development.

### **Geraldine Libreau, European Commission, DG Education and Culture**

In the Commission's work there is a lot of policy material to express the importance of social inclusion in education. It is sometimes difficult to implement it. The Commission works with the national policy makers and stakeholders. It will do its best to use the offered recommendations each time there is an opportunity to develop the VET sector. Ms Libreau mentioned that there are tools to implement some of the recommendations. There is budget available for these types of issues. Raising the competences of teachers does cost money. There will be a lot of funding available for teacher training. This type of training, to teach teachers how to be more inclusive in their practices, in their pedagogies, will be available. They will still be available as well as some funding for projects in developing new pedagogies, not only for teachers.

### **Olympia Stylianou, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus**

Over the last 8 years Cyprus has been going through a process of major educational reform. The effort has been made to make the system more efficient and effective. Ms Stylianou wanted to focus on one particular aspect, which is very important to bear in mind when it comes to discussing successful VET systems for people with special educational needs. This concerns the importance of organising not just VET systems or education of people with special needs, but the whole of the educational system. These learner-centred approaches should be the principle of all activities in the educational system. In a sense, every child should be addressed as a child with special educational needs. They should have the system, the teaching methodology and content adapted to those needs. There has been a focus on curriculum reform. The student-centred approach has been adopted as the basis of this new curriculum. The focus lies on the outcomes, rather than the inputs. A lot of stress is put on the basic skills, not just giving the knowledge and co-operation etc. This should be the point of focus.

### **Rudi Delarue, International Labour Office (ILO)**

ILO is very pleased to co-operate with the actors, institutions and community at large, dealing with inclusion for persons with disabilities. At an international level, this had a positive impact on initiatives on vocational training and inclusion for people with disabilities. The ILO works on a pragmatic basis. They have instruments and conventions. It also has guidance materials, including very concrete recommendations for vocational training for persons with disabilities, also for technical co-operation programs. It is important to co-operate with the employers. A network of international enterprises that



support human resources policies related to disability has been established. The main focus is to make more efforts for persons with disabilities in the normal labour market.

### **Simona Giarratano, European Disability Forum (EDF)**

EDF is the umbrella organisation representing 80 million people with disabilities in Europe. It is run by persons with disabilities. It works for a better society. That includes persons with disabilities in all aspects. Ms Giarratano made two main comments. The first one regards a big absent: the state with a reference to the role of local, national and European authorities in this debate. Vocational education and training is not a public service in several countries. There is not a lot of awareness about it. Public institutions have a key role to play. Access to education including vocational educational and training and access to employment is the right of all the citizens. The states could provide financial support. In times of crisis they might not have enough money. It is important to use the resources we have in a better and more efficient way.

The second comment regards quality. Persons with disabilities should be involved in the definition of the quality criteria and in the development and creation of the services. Ms Giarratano focused mainly on some of them that regard management: leadership and consistency with the organisations. Continuous learning and innovation will bring clarity to the purpose and clear direction to the organisation. The clear identities will benefit the service institution as a whole. These barriers need to be shared by all the staff involved. The staff needs to have a role model behaviour. If a service is well managed, the continuity is ensured. The users can rely on a long-lasting and sustainable service without fearing it will be interrupted and disappear. High quality of staff and training is necessary. The VET institutions recruit their staff to match the competences and the needs of the users and maximise the potential, both of pupils and the staff involved. A user-centred approach is fundamental. How should this be implemented? Excellent organisations that know and understand the users and their needs are important. This results in higher confidence of the users in their own capacities, which means strong commitment. Result orientation is a quality criteria to measure and anticipate the needs and expectations and monitor the perception and the changes in the society. There is sustainability: long lasting success of the users, which will bring job retention. Finally, innovation has been mentioned. It is very important that an organisation providing VET services is engaged in continuous learning and improvement.

### **Don Mahon, Irish Presidency**

The report is a valuable support for policy makers and practitioners in the vocational training sector. Their challenge is to create programs and pathways that are achievable for learners and relevant in the workplace. The report places the focus firmly on the learner. It sets out how program goals, methods and materials and assessment can be tailored to meet the needs of learners, including learners with disabilities and special educational needs. The relationship between the education and training institutions and local employers is also given importance. Mr Mahon stressed that the recommendations of the project will be helpful for policy makers and all organisations and individuals who are involved in the field of vocational education of young learners.



## MAIN ISSUES RAISED DURING THE DEBATE

### **National budget constraints**

The current budgetary constraints faced by member states and their need to be careful with budgets were highlighted. For several member states this is a pragmatic need. The non-participation of disabled people, of millions of disabled people, in education and training, and in employment also carries a huge hidden financial cost. However, it is also a time of opportunities. The European Commission has put forward to the member states its priorities for the new program period of the European Structural Funds. The member states are negotiating with the Commission about these priorities and these investment priorities in order to translate them into more specific operational programs with specific objectives and timeframes for implementation. In this context, the member states should be reminded that for the next 7 years, billions of Euros will be at their disposal.

### **Fighting against exclusion**

When one talks about the European economic strategy of growing in a sustainable but also inclusive way, one must not leave behind 80 million European citizens with disabilities otherwise the fight against exclusion will not be achieved. It is very much a political debate. All support is necessary in order to safeguard the positive elements in the proposed regulations in order to make a difference and impact on it.

The inclusive strategy was imposed on a centralised system. Policies, strategies, political will and political pressure is required and needs to be discussed. These are all important. When it comes to all the changes at the highest level and all the policies, it can also change the strategies. In reflection 'How responsive is the system really? How inclusive can it be?' The teaching unions and stakeholder bodies are needed as well as the disability organisations, the employer organisation, etc.

There is also the question of qualifying the people. Most of the unemployed do not have the right qualifications for today's labour market and this presents a problem. All children should be treated as children with special needs. In the new understanding of education, old talents should be found independent of whether they have special needs or not. If information on this point of view is made available and this approach practiced it would mean that many good things could be done for inclusion and for working equally with every person in our society.

### **Political commitment**

What society needs more than anything is political commitment to education and VET systems. The biggest challenge is how to deal with the huge and rising levels of unemployment in Europe. People with special needs and disabilities are more difficult to accommodate in the labour market. It is more costly. There is a very serious risk that they might be left out all together.

Political responsibility can transform theory into everyday life.

### **Employers' role**

An important point relates to: how does one get employers on board? Society has to overcome employer's prejudices and fears. However, the question is 'How is this done?'

This is not easy. It is a requirement of the courses that the students take work placement. This means they have the contacts for every course and every student. This is done through building up networks and relationships over time. It takes time. When it comes to a



student with a disability or special educational need, it is sometimes the access officer who meets with the employer. They will discuss what particular requirements there may be and the support needed to match the demands of the job.

In ILO, employers are part of the decision-making process. It is very important that the EU and the member states continue to support associations of employers to make them strong, also at the member state level. Doing this in countries where the dual system is most effective and where they are fully involved is important. Otherwise there will be no networks.

How does one involve and commit the employers? Three issues appeared in a project on working transition to work for people with disabilities. Firstly, there is the level of qualifications. It is difficult to put disabilities and qualifications on the same level. The second point is related to the fact that schools assess needs in terms of academic skills. The third issue is to formalise the added value that persons with disabilities have, as research shows, being involved in a team. This requires the team to change their way of working together. It impacts on the way a firm is organised which basically means that the approach to disability is very important. As long as one sees persons with disabilities as disabled and related to impairment then it will be complicated for an employer to hire someone.

### **Changing mentalities**

There are some associations who are working towards changing mentalities with regards to the education of people with disabilities. In Europe there are great disparities between countries in terms of mentalities and in terms of efforts from governments to adapt and change schools for people with disabilities. There are schools adapted for people who are blind but there is no-one to accompany these young people to the main school. A question to reflect on is 'Why can't we make a legislation to harmonise what we do in all countries of Europe?' Human resource services need to be trained because employers are afraid of unknown situations. On the other hand, all persons who have disabilities have to be trained to highlight the competences they have through their disability. Employers are obliged to employ people with disabilities. One must ignore the disability and always see the competence of the person.

### **Data collection**

The need for better data collection needs to be stressed and underlined. In the topic discussed today, there was a great need to harmonise definitions and to improve data collection which will in turn enable cross country comparisons.

EA/VS/05/2013/VET