



Thessaloniki, 29 January 2015

COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION AND DISSEMINATION

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vocational education and training in Europe: old roots for new routes

The challenges of the 21st century require new approaches to learning for work. Vocational education and training (VET) in Europe is evolving, but we need a clearer vision of what modern VET systems should look like.

This was the central message of Cedefop Director James Calleja's* presentation to the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs committee, in Brussels today.



Cedefop Director Joachim James Calleja (l) and Deputy Director Mara Brugia at the European Parliament

This year marks Cedefop's 40th anniversary. Citing its theme, *Old roots for new routes*, Mr Calleja says: 'The old roots of established European VET systems must provide new routes - pathways, options and opportunities - to jobs and careers. VET has long-established roots in many European Union Member States. These roots nurture skills that grow into qualifications that sustain transition to work and further career development. But those old roots need to provide new routes and new ways for people to update their skills and gain new qualifications to find work, build rewarding careers and enjoy quality of life. Modern VET systems also need to provide new routes for enterprises to develop skills for economic excellence and competitive performance.'

Mr Calleja highlighted that many of the features of modern VET systems are emerging, illustrated by work Cedefop is doing. 'With the European Commission, Member States

and social partners, we are, for example, rethinking the role of work-based learning for young people and adults. We are working together on European instruments to make VET systems more flexible, so that all types of learning count, mobility for learning and work is easier and learning opportunities of all kinds are available throughout life.'

However, these different initiatives need to be integrated more closely. 'For example,' he says, 'it is not just a case of improving how VET systems operate, but also their interaction with and relevance to the labour market. Cedefop has also shown that skill supply and demand forecasts that inform policy-makers about labour market trends are an essential feature of any VET system.'

Mr Calleja stresses that it is for Member States to decide the features of their modern VET systems. However, European cooperation has had a strong and positive influence in this area. Debating, agreeing and translating those features into a shared vision of what modern VET systems should look like may help to focus and uphold VET reform during a difficult period following the economic crisis when resources are limited and tough decisions needed.

For the Cedefop Director, 'modernising VET will probably always be a work in progress.' He adds: 'This underlines the case for having a point of reference that sets out the features of modern VET systems. These features should recognise the important role VET plays in both personal and economic goals, of helping directly people and enterprises.'

** Cedefop Director James Calleja is available for interviews on the occasion of the agency's 40th anniversary. Please contact the Press Office.*

Notes to editors

- Cedefop's Founding Regulation was published on 10 February 1975.
- The agency's first home was in West Berlin, West Germany.
- Cedefop was set up with the aim to assist the [European] Commission in encouraging, at Community level, the promotion and development of vocational training and of in-service training.
- In 1995, Cedefop moved from Berlin to its current base in Thessaloniki.

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About Cedefop

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), an agency of the European Union based in Thessaloniki, Greece, supports European policy-making in the field of vocational education and training. www.cedefop.europa.eu

