

**BRIEFING NOTE**

Global labour market, global VET

Opportunities and challenges of a new training frontier

In a landscape of unprecedented global competition, fast-changing technology, global regulatory standards, increasingly mobile populations, and the constant generation of new jobs and skills sets, the entry of new elements into VET – new forms of VET provision and qualification – comes as no surprise. Vocational education and training (VET) is no longer the exclusive territory of national systems. New players have come into the field – international sectoral bodies, multilateral agencies, multinational companies – changing the way skills are delivered, acquired and assessed.

National and public education and training authorities continue to play a central role in maintaining standards. Proof of skills lies in recognised qualifications, which require quality assurance arrangements governed by trusted authorities. These continue, in most cases, to be public authorities. Nevertheless, many European countries understand the need to integrate a global dimension when developing or updating their national qualifications, study programmes and curricula. Countries also use standards developed by international and sectoral bodies to shape their own national requirements. In cases such as the aviation and the maritime sectors, international legislation provides the basis for national qualifications.

Recognising the importance of this trend, in June 2015 ministers responsible for VET committed to addressing the impact of globalisation.

'We are determined to further contribute to the international competitiveness of the labour force developed by the European VET systems and to improved recognition of VET qualifications in Europe and global context.'

Source: Excerpt from the declaration of Ministers in charge of vocational education of training, preamble to Riga conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-20 (Riga, June 2015).

http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/RigaConclusions_2015.pdf

The globalised perspective highlighted in the Riga conclusions encompasses international sectoral qualifications and their potential links to the European qualifications framework (EQF). The European Commission is currently examining various ways of addressing this issue.

Thinking beyond formal education: initiatives across Europe

A number of public, private or semi-private bodies have developed an international sectoral qualifications system or framework. These take different forms: some only aim to set standards while others include qualifications.

European agency initiatives

The growing flow of migration is placing particular strain on asylum officers and border guards. Frontex, the European Union agency for the management of the EU's external borders, realised that not all border guards in the EU perform their jobs to the same standard. Systems vary considerably between countries: some have specialist border guards, while others use police units or other authorities. But for border authorities, coastal or land-based, to work together to the same standards, common ground needed to be established that overcame such differences. Frontex initiated a harmonised qualification and tailored training programme for border guards that complements national training. The Frontex-initiated sectoral qualifications framework (SQF) for border guarding is a framework encompassing learning outcomes inherent in all border guarding activities across the EU. It encompasses all levels of qualifications acquired in vocational and academic education and training for border guards. Frontex is now in the process of establishing equal standards, including assessment standards linked to its learning outcomes and methods of ensuring compliance with its standards. An overall quality assurance system is

currently being developed, and validation of the SQF in several national qualifications systems is being initiated.

EASO, the European Asylum Support Office, another EU agency, considers training a key practical tool in fulfilling one of its main aims, that of ensuring effective implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). EASO develops and provides common training to help improve quality and to achieve greater harmonisation in asylum provision. The quality of training will benefit from the establishment of European certification and accreditation of the EASO training curriculum. EU and other States will play a central role in developing and implementing certification and accreditation through the EASO certification and accreditation working group. Certification and accreditation of the EASO training curriculum will be developed without prejudice to national systems.

Over the past 10 years, Frontex has been developing common curricula and training standards, in cooperation with all Member States/Schengen countries, addressing their national needs. These curricula and courses are shared with national organisations wishing to use them. Similarly, EASO favours a harmonised international sectoral qualification corresponding to its already harmonised training curricula, the EASO training curricula for asylum officials.

Sectoral body initiatives

The European Welding Federation's course guidelines cover all professional levels in welding technology and related areas, including plastics welding and underwater welding, and lead to qualifications in 31 European countries and internationally.

'The EWF education, training and qualification system for welding personnel is recognised worldwide not only by training and accreditation bodies but by the industry itself – its original target. This EWF system is recognised by ISO, namely on the ISO 14731 – welding coordination – tasks and responsibilities, as a way for a welding coordinator to prove his technical knowledge in welding'

Source: European Welding Federation.
<http://www.ewf.be/training-qualification>.

In response to industry needs, EWF also created short courses that address specific issues and do not lead to a qualification.

The European Banking and Financial Services Training Association launched the 'triple E qualification', a quality standard for professional qualifications in the European banking and financial industry. It is not intended for certification, but to accredit institutions for qualifications they provide. The standard integrates three lifelong learning instruments, EQF, EQAVET and ECVET ⁽¹⁾. This quality standard was created to rebuild trust and confidence in the banking sector.

Multinationals in alliance with public authorities

In Ireland, a panel including international experts convened to consider the application by Microsoft Ireland to become a provider for the Higher Education and Training Awards Committee (HETAC, now QQI) by agreeing quality assurance policies and procedures. The expert panel also considered the associated application by Microsoft Ireland for validation of five programmes at Level 6 of the national framework of qualifications (1) (EQF level 5). Five-year accreditation of the company for this was agreed in 2010.

This promising interaction between public authorities and private company did not, however, lead to expected results. Microsoft never issued HETAC qualifications; nor did the partners activate, as planned, the external quality assurance regime. When accreditation lapsed in 2015, no plans were made to renew it. Irish authorities are now seeking alternative solutions.

Responses within national systems

National impact studies

Member States have long studied the impact of programmes and qualifications provided by non-governmental bodies within their borders. One of the earliest examples is Denmark, which carried out a globalisation study 10 years ago. Most recently, Latvia published a report in which it identified advantages to globalised VET, such as greater international competitiveness in programmes and curricula and greater opportunities for professional development of teachers and trainers.

Peer-to-peer cooperation

EU countries work together to improve their VET systems and make sure they are in line with developments in each given sector worldwide. They organise exchanges between ministries, standard-setting institutions, VET providers and businesses to

⁽¹⁾ European quality assurance for VET; European credit system for vocational education and training.

explore opportunities to internationalise VET. They sometimes develop common core modules based on agreed learning outcomes. Such European cooperation allows VET systems to build on their links to local economy and society, and make sure VET continues to be responsive to local needs while flexible enough to adapt to global challenges.

EU countries also cooperate with third countries – an example being the USA/Denmark partnership for vocational education – on developing skills standards, and curriculum development and assessment.

Competitions

For national authorities who need to establish standards addressing the skills gap, WorldSkills competitions have emerged as a valuable resource. Their standard specifications are subject to consultation with industry and to a review every two years through the WorldSkills competition cycle. Countries including the UK, Finland and Switzerland have integrated these global standards into the training programmes of their national systems.

Skills councils

In some countries, sectoral skills councils bring stakeholders together to help devise qualification standards and provide training. They help to shape national VET strategy and respond to changing market needs. Many of these sectors have strong global ties and training activities of their own.

Each council focuses on a specific sector of the national economy, for which it provides a platform for cooperation between stakeholders in the sector to help them gain insights into likely developments in employment and skill needs, and contribute to policy-making on VET and qualification standards.

Policy challenges

Quality

The extent to which international qualifications, training programmes and curricula are considered credible on the labour market and on a global scale depends on whether transparent quality assurance arrangements are in place. While this is also a challenge for national qualifications – and quality assurance will certainly be central to Member State action on VET, as it is a deliverable in the Riga conclusions 2015 – the extreme diversity of international solutions makes these even more dependent on visible and trusted mechanisms of quality assurance.

Questions central to Cedefop's research on the globalisation of VET now include:

- what kind of quality assurance arrangements does each sector carry out?
- are these arrangements explicit and transparent? To what extent?

'The quality of VET provision ultimately depends on governments setting the right conditions for quality assurance and quality of teaching... But if we are to make a real difference (to boost quality) it is imperative that all stakeholders are on board.'

Source: Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, speaking at the meeting of ministers in charge of VET and European social partners, Innovating for the future of VET, Riga, June 2015.

Balance

Beyond quality assurance, the EU and its Member States must also decide on the best mix of globalised and national solutions.

National curricula that are in line with international standards offer learners a chance to acquire international qualifications, alongside national. But integration of global training solutions should be carefully done. Leaning too much on global solutions risks loosening standards and diluting the impact of education and training systems; insufficient integration of global solutions may undermine competitiveness and the relevance of national solutions on a global labour market.

The challenge for policy-makers is to cooperate with all interested parties in establishing the optimum role for globalised solutions in qualifications, standards and curricula for each sector, and within each education and training system. Conversely, the challenge for providers of international qualifications and curricula, is to be responsive to the standards laid down by national systems.

Joint qualifications

Technology, open labour markets and society require common solutions that cannot be defined exclusively within a national frame. European joint qualifications could be relevant where businesses operate across borders, such as in logistics, transport, and some manufacturing.

For this, voluntary cooperation between national and sectoral stakeholders is necessary.

The role of European stakeholders (mainly the Commission, but also sectoral stakeholders at EU level) could be to agree on a stable framework within which joint VET qualifications can be developed. This, in turn, requires development of a working method addressing not only development stages (as is currently the case in the lifelong learning programme and Erasmus+) but also stages required for permanently implementing joint qualifications.

Cedefop activities

Cedefop began its work on the globalisation of VET with a study on international qualifications published in November 2012. The Agency assists national authorities, sectoral bodies, and EU agencies such as Frontex and EASO by providing them with information on how to ensure relevance and trust for their qualifications across systems and borders. The Centre has now embarked on a research project to

study issues related to the globalisation of VET, including:

- how national VET systems are being influenced by global developments;
- how different national systems are currently dealing with the challenge of globalisation;
- to what extent international VET curricula and qualifications complement national ones;
- whether international sectors awarding qualifications can respond to national criteria when establishing education and training programmes.

Publication on international qualifications
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/node/11854>

Conference *Impact of globalisation on VET: challenges and opportunities*, Thessaloniki, 26 and 27 November 2015.

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/cedefop-conference-impact-globalisation-vet-challenges-and-opportunities>

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