



## Fostering partnerships for continuing training: Cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises

Workshop, Thessaloniki 11-12 February 2016

### Background paper

#### Workshop

New approaches to adult learning, both for enterprises and for learners, and closer cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises are necessary to stimulate learning and to foster excellence in and through continuing vocational training (CVET). Cooperation between higher education and enterprises in CVET offers benefits for all parties, but studies show that the extent to which it is used varies between countries. While cooperation in the form of special learning alliances and tailored programmes for continuous professional development seems comparatively widely practiced in some countries, it remains still exceptions in others.<sup>1</sup> There is increasing demand as well as need for further development. So far, cooperation between higher education and enterprises is mostly promoted and taking place in the area of research, development and innovation. Cooperation in the field of education is much less practiced,<sup>2</sup> especially when it goes beyond initial higher education and comes to continuing education and training, for example systematically linking work-based learning in enterprises with learning at higher education institutions.

To address this, Cedefop initiates a new research strand on cooperation between enterprises and higher education institutions to foster excellence in and through CVET. The workshop will provide a platform for experts to share experience as well as results of previous and on-going research and activities. It aims at contributing to shaping design and approach of future activities. Among the issues that will be discussed at the workshop are:

- Which forms/models of cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises in the field of CVET exist in Europe, and what are their key features? E.g.: Types of programmes, types of alliances, degree of cooperation (regarding content, joint implementation, etc.)?
- In how far do approaches explicitly link learning in enterprises to learning in higher education? What is the role of work-based learning?

<sup>1</sup> Hanft & Knust (Eds.) (2009): Continuing Higher Education and Lifelong Learning. An international comparative study on structures, organisation and provisions. Dordrecht: Springer.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2014): Measuring the impact of university-business cooperation. <http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:NC0214337:EN>; Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre (2011): The state of European University-Business Cooperation. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/uni-business-cooperation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/uni-business-cooperation_en.pdf)

- What are barriers and drivers for cooperation?
- What are future developments and challenges? How to deal with them?

The workshop will contain presentations and interactive sessions, allowing participants to actively participate and to share their knowledge, experience and expertise.

### Rationale and policy relevance

#### ***Promoting learning and excellence in and through CVET***

Labour demand for people with tertiary attainment has constantly increased in Europe over the years, and forecasts predict that the share of jobs which request highly qualified staff will continue to rise.<sup>3</sup> Due to rapid technological change, globalisation, demographic trends and other factors, enterprises need to broaden and up-date the knowledge, skills and competences of their employees, and employees need to participate in lifelong learning. Therefore, widening participation in higher education, providing adults with possibilities to go ‘one step up’ and promoting their engagement in lifelong learning are currently high on the political agenda. New approaches to adult learning, both for enterprises and for learners, and closer cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises are necessary to stimulate learning and to foster excellence in and through CVET. The need to stimulate learning and to increase skill levels is mirrored in the Education and Training 2020 (“ET 2020”) target of reaching a 15% average participation rate of adults (age 25-64) in lifelong learning by 2020.

As learning is a major driver for competitiveness, job growth and innovation, the promotion of excellence through vocational education and training (VET) is one of the central aims of European VET policy. The Bruges Communiqué and the 2015 Riga Conclusions place importance on implementing flexible and high-quality CVET, integrating work-based learning and developing excellence in and through VET.

#### ***Encouraging cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises***

Both the Bruges Communiqué as well as the 2015 Riga Conclusions call amongst others for further action to encourage partnerships for innovation, creativity and excellence, for example partnerships between VET providers, enterprises and higher education institutions.<sup>4</sup> This is in line with the EU 2020 flagship initiative “Innovation Union”.<sup>5</sup> Fostering cooperation between higher education and enterprises is also a core element of the EU’s agenda for modernising higher education.<sup>6</sup> On European level, several initiatives have been launched to promote and develop such cooperation.<sup>7</sup> In 2008, the European Commission

<sup>3</sup> Cedefop (2015): Briefing note - Europe’s uneven return to job growth.

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9098>

<sup>4</sup> Council of the European Union; European Commission (2010). The Bruges communiqué.

<http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2010/75928.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index\\_en.cfm?pg=intro](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=intro)

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2011): Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0567&from=EN>

<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/university-business\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/university-business_en.htm)

established the University-Business Forum to advance and facilitate interactions between the worlds of business and higher education. It brings together higher education institutions, enterprises, business associations, intermediaries, and public authorities and provides a platform for discussion, networking and mutual learning. To foster cooperation between higher education and enterprises, the European Commission has also launched various activities under the Erasmus+ Programme, for example Knowledge Alliances and Strategic Partnerships,<sup>8</sup> offering opportunities for cooperation and implementation of innovative practices.

Cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises can take different forms. In a study on ‘The state of European University-Business Cooperation’<sup>9</sup>, eight types of cooperation were identified, amongst them – most relevant to the workshop topic – cooperation as regards lifelong learning (here “...restricted to the provision of adult education, permanent education and/or continuing education involving the acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours at all stages of life by HEIs”).<sup>10</sup> Comparative research on continuing higher education in six countries shows that organisation, structure and the extent to which it is used vary.<sup>11</sup> Generally, evidence suggests that cooperation in the field of education – especially on continuing level – is much less common than cooperation in research and development.<sup>12</sup>

This is unfortunate as cooperation for continuing training offers various mutual benefits, for example: It helps higher education institutions and enterprises to gain valuable insights into new developments and competence needs and to develop professional excellence and innovation, and it encourages employees to engage in learning and to go ‘one step up’, opening higher education also to non-traditional target groups. Cooperation contributes to fostering excellence in and through CVET.

### ***The role of work-based learning***

Approaches that explicitly link work-based learning in enterprises with learning at higher education seem to be particularly relevant. They have the potential to integrate and value learning that is happening informally while working, and to take non-formal learning into account. Informal and non-formal learning at the workplace can be combined with more structured and systematic learning at higher education level, leading also to certification. The learning can be tailored to the actual workplace needs of the individual learner and employer, focussing on current and future challenges. Approaches that link learning in enterprises to learning in higher education can take different forms, for example special

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/business\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/business_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre (2011): The state of European University-Business Cooperation. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/uni-business-cooperation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/uni-business-cooperation_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The other types are: collaboration in research and development (R&D), mobility of academics, mobility of students, commercialisation of R&D results, curriculum and development, entrepreneurship, governance.

<sup>11</sup> Hanft & Knust (Eds.) (2009): Continuing Higher Education and Lifelong Learning. An international comparative study on structures, organisation and provisions. Dordrecht: Springer.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2014): Measuring the impact of university-business cooperation.

<http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:NC0214337:EN>; Science-to-Business Marketing

learning alliances and tailored programmes in CVET. Due to their nature, cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises is crucial.

**Further information**

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