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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Vocational education and training: a road to excellence**

The issue of permeability between different sections of education was the subject of two speeches Cedefop Director James Calleja gave at international conferences last week.

At the international congress on vocational and professional education and training in Winterthur (Switzerland) on 16 September, Mr Calleja addressed the question of whether vocational education and training (VET) is the end of the road or the beginning of a university career. He argued that, while both negative/positive answers are possible, VET is a lifelong learning process that may start with the acquisition of key competences and, possibly, lead to continuous professional development.

The Cedefop Director added: 'In today's labour market environment, career prospects are ongoing. VET provides learners with a complete learning pathway up to higher VET and has the advantage of covering all levels of qualifications. It bridges, through apprenticeships and work-based learning, the worlds of work and education. It responds to labour market needs in a very dynamic and direct way, creating a common platform for trainers whether coming from education or industry.'

Mr Calleja highlighted the added value of a Level 5 qualification as the link between upper secondary and higher VET, with significant characteristics leading to employment, particularly as medium qualifications are increasing in demand.

At a congress organised by Germany's Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BiBB) in Berlin (18-19 September), Mr Calleja said that permeability between different sectors of education aims to help VET achieve its double objective of contributing to excellence and inclusion.

In many countries, VET, and in particular apprenticeship, is still perceived as second-rate and reputation of VET institutions falls short of attractiveness. VET systems in Europe are heterogeneous and Member States are at different stages of developing attractive propositions. According to Mr Calleja, 'whether VET is considered attractive or not by learners, employers, and generally by society, depends on a complex interplay between socioeconomic and labour market

features, education authorities, perceptions, traditions, reputation and factors inherent in the education and training system as such.'

While focus on VET within countries' youth guarantees emphasises inclusion and permeability, 'countries increasingly realise its potential at post-secondary and tertiary levels.' The European alliance for apprenticeships supports initiatives to set up or expand apprenticeship-type programmes at different levels. So, Mr Calleja noted, 'one of the main internal features that help make VET attractive is the chance for people to progress to higher-level qualifications.'

He also argued that 'structurally, in Europe there are only few barriers to progression. Where dead ends exist, they tend to be in apprenticeship-type programmes. Germany and Austria (as well as Switzerland) exemplify that apprenticeships can lead to high-level qualifications. The European qualification framework that focuses on outcomes of learning rather than institutions where people acquire qualifications, the Recommendation to validate the skills and competences people have acquired at work and in other situations outside formal education, and the credit system for VET support this endeavour at EU level.'

The Cedefop Director concluded that 'the role guidance and counsellors play in schools is vital for making VET more attractive to high flyers as well as to low achievers. But it is not enough to amend structures and provide tools; we also need to ensure that the expected outcomes are achieved, as PIAAC survey results suggest. We need to analyse positive and negative data carefully, and understand them in their specific contexts to be able to provide evidence and convince people of VET's benefits to change their mindsets.'

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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](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)

