CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MINUTES OF THE 103RD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING
2 AND 3 OCTOBER 2025
CEDEFOP, THESSALONIKI

Thursday 2 October 2025

1. WELCOME AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Welcome

The Chairperson opened the meeting at 15.00 and welcomed the participants to the 103rd meeting of Cedefop's Management Board (MB). He thanked the Mayor of Thessaloniki for offering the Council's conference room for the plenary meeting of 2 October, which marked a special jubilee for Cedefop, the 50th anniversary from its establishment and the 30th anniversary of its relocation to Thessaloniki.

He informed members that discussions would be recorded for the minutes. According to Cedefop's rules on public access to documents adopted by the MB on 2 September 2019, conclusions of the EB and minutes of the MB would be published on Cedefop's website, once adopted.

He addressed a special welcome to the new MB members and alternates and also welcomed Mr Zisimos from the ETF.

Note: The names of the members excused, new members and alternates were displayed on screen.

The Chairperson said that according to Article 11 of the Rules of Procedure of the MB and EB of Cedefop (RoP), the presence of the majority of members or – in their absence – their alternates shall constitute a quorum. This equalled 43 members or alternates. In the current meeting, 55 of the total 84 voting members were present (including eight alternates) and 15 had given a proxy – a total of 70 votes, so the quorum had been met. On 3 October, 56 voting members would be present (including nine alternates), bringing the total to 71.

Decisions of the MB were taken by a majority of members with the right to vote (Article 9(1) of Regulation (EU) 2019/128). However, for the adoption of the Single Programming Document (SPD), the budget, the election of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairpersons, as well as the appointment, extension or removal from office of the Executive Director, a two-thirds majority was required. A total of 43 votes were needed to reach simple majority (50%+1 = 43) and 56 votes to reach a two-thirds majority.

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Article 14(1) of the RoP the provided that *'If there is consensus of the members present on the motion tabled, no vote is required'.* A vote of the Management Board was thus required only if there was no consensus of all members with the right to vote, present at the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to present Cedefop staff attending the meeting.

Mr Siebel introduced Cedefop's management and staff: Ms Mara Brugia – Deputy Director; Mr Maurizio Roncaccia – Head of Department for Communication (DCM); Mr Antonio Ranieri – Head of Department for VET and Skills (DVS); Ms Pascaline Descy – Head of Department for Resources and Support (DRS); Ms Irene Mandl – new Head of Department for VET and Qualifications (DVQ) who took up duties on 1 October 2025; Mr Pier Paolo Angelini – Chair of Cedefop's Staff Committee; Mr Adriano Graziosi – senior assistant in the Directorate; and Ms Christina Koufa – rapporteur.

Draft agenda of the MB

The Chairperson informed members that items 8, 9 and 10 would be discussed at the plenary of 3 October, at Cedefop's premises. An in-camera meeting for MB members would take place during the 3 October plenary. He congratulated the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, the Heads of Department and Cedefop staff on finalising all MB documents in time and to a high quality standard. On behalf of the MB, he thanked Cedefop for its excellent preparation.

He asked members if there were any comments or proposals to the draft agenda.

No comments were received.

The Chairperson concluded that the agenda was adopted.

1 **Welcome and adoption of the agenda** (*decision*)

2 **Minutes of the Management Board meeting of 3 and 4 October 2024** *(adopted by written procedure on 13 November 2024)*

3 **Implementation of the 2025 Work Programme and budget** *(discussion)*

4 **Cedefop's role in the Union of Skills, including the European Skills Intelligence Observatory and its impact on the 2026 work programme and 2026-2028 SPD** *(discussion)*

5 **Revised draft 2026-2028 Programming Document,** including Opinion of the European Commission *(discussion/adoption)*

6 **Strategic initiative Cedefop@ – progress update** *(information)*

(a) State of play

(b) The MB's role in the process for approving ad hoc projects

7 **Progress update on the action plan following the external cross-cutting evaluation** *(information)*

8 **Proposal for a revised (Extended) Executive Board meeting schedule** *(discussion/decision)*

9 **The future of ReferNet**

(a) Alternative ways of financing *(discussion/decision)*

(b) Audit report on ReferNet *(presentation by IAS)*

10 **Elections of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairpersons of the MB and composition of the (Extended) Executive Board** *(decision)*

11 **Reporting from the Executive to the Management Board** *(information)*

12 **Administrative issues**

(a) Reporting on Internal Control (ICC) activities – *(information)*

(b) HR-related issues *(information)*

(c) Outcomes of the 2025 staff engagement survey

(d) General implementing provisions *(if any – decision)*

(e) Transfers of commitment and payment appropriations in 2025 *(information)*

(f) Annual report of the Chair of Cedefop's Appeals Committee for the year 2024 and follow-up *(information/discussion)*

13 **Any other business**

(a) Dates of Executive Board and Management Board meetings in 2026 *(decision)*

(b) Outcomes of the briefing meeting of 2 September 2025 with (new) MB members and alternates *(information)*

2. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING OF 3 AND 4 OCTOBER 2024

The Chairperson reminded members that the minutes had been adopted by the Management Board on 13 November 2024, by written procedure.

They were available in English and were posted in the eGB community and on Cedefop's website.

Members took note of the information.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2025 WORK PROGRAMME AND BUDGET *(INFORMATION)*

The Chairperson said that the report showed the work progress from January to June 2025.

He invited the Executive Director to present the item.

Mr Siebel said that the budget execution was expected to reach 100% by the end of the year, for yet another year. The document included two contingencies: (a) the first instalment of the SUMMA onboarding fee, which had to be paid in 2025; and (b) the salary indexation rates and correction coefficient for Greece, which would be announced in late October/early November. Mr Siebel listed the following main changes in the 2025 Work Programme: (a) the swapping between the two publications on '*The impact of learning outcomes-based curricula on work and practice-based IVET*' (1.9). The reason was that the report initially planned for 2025 required more internal work than the one planned for 2026; (b) the postponement of the publication

'*Developing and sourcing skills for digital transition – Evidence from the EU and neighbouring countries'* (3.4 – joint Cedefop/ETF publication). This was due to significant changes to the ETF expert team; (c) the cancellation of the joint high-level institutional event with the EU Agencies Network. The event aimed to celebrate the 50th jubilee of Eurofound and Cedefop and send a signal on the success of decentralised Agencies of the EU. Regretfully, it was not possible to secure the necessary high-level institutional guests for the visibility of this event; (d) the new online dashboard (4.10) which was deployed for Cedefop's 50th anniversary event in Brussels on 27 May 2025.

The Chairperson invited the members to comment.

Comments from Employees

Mr Frising welcomed the implementation of the budget so far, which showed the good and timely progress in Cedefop's work programme. He asked if there was any information on the expected salary indexation and new coefficient for Greece, which would help estimate the potential impact on the Agency's overall budget.

Ms Roman congratulated Cedefop on the list of publications and events. The briefing to the MB on 2 September was very useful and concise. However, the participation rate was not satisfactory. She congratulated the organisers of the first European Vocational Teacher Survey event, which offered hybrid participation, and thanked the Commission for co-financing the audiovisual system upgrade of the Europa meeting room. For the next hybrid meetings, she proposed designating a person to follow up the online comments. She congratulated Cedefop on the organisation of the first symposium on CVET on 1 October and proposed finding a way to ensure gender and geographical balance of speakers in all events. She asked if the ninth CareersNet meeting was open to participants outside the network experts and requested information on the date of Cedefop's Brussels Seminar on citizenship in VET.

Comments from Employers

Mr Donohoe said that the first symposium on CVET on 1 October had been very well received by the group. He looked forward to the virtual get-together on national implementation plans (NIPs) on 9 October, and the online workshop on microcredentials planned for 23 October. The group welcomed the implementation of the budget so far. The expected commitment rate of 100% by the end of the year showed the continued effectiveness of Cedefop's management. He noted with regret that Cedefop had to find its own resources for moving to the new financial system SUMMA and welcomed the management's approach for addressing contingencies. The new Talent Gap Index dashboard was an important tool for understanding and anticipating labour and skills shortages.

Comments from Governments

None.

Comments from the Commission

Ms Geleng thanked Cedefop staff and management for their hard work. The implementation of the work programme was on track. The Commission welcomed the clear overview of the changes, and the explanations provided. The number of substantial changes was very limited. The expected

implementation of the budget at 100% was very welcome and confirmed the quality of Cedefop's budget management.

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to respond.

Cedefop's responses

Mr Siebel said that Cedefop did not have a policy on gender and geographical balance for conference panels. However, a better distribution might be considered in future events. The date of the Brussels Seminar had not yet been decided. The information on the first instalment for the move to SUMMA had come rather late. Cedefop welcomed investments that would lead to savings in administrative processes but there should also be a differentiation of costs depending on the size of each Agency.

Mr Ranieri said that the new Cedefop Talent Gap Index had been published on the occasion of Cedefop's flagship event in May. New developments were under way to ensure greater granularity and geographical coverage. New data received from Eurostat would be combined with Cedefop data on vacancies to provide more accurate analyses of future shortage occupations. CareersNet was composed of independent national experts selected through an open procedure and on a voluntary basis. However, Cedefop organised relevant events and policy learning activities in various policy areas, open to all three stakeholder groups. In the beginning of November, in cooperation with other international organisations Cedefop would organise the Career guidance month. The publication of the new guidance guidelines in early 2026 will mark an important milestone and form the core of a dedicated policy learning activity later that year.

The Chairperson congratulated Cedefop's management and staff on their work and concluded that members took note of the information.

4. CEDEFOP'S ROLE IN THE UNION OF SKILLS, INCLUDING THE EUROPEAN SKILLS INTELLIGENCE OBSERVATORY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE 2026 WORK PROGRAMME AND 2026-28 SPD *(DISCUSSION)*

The Chairperson informed members that at the Executive Board meeting of 27 March 2025, DG EMPL had presented the Communication from the Commission to the EU Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions on 'The Union of Skills'. Acknowledging that Cedefop's core business and long-standing solid expertise, especially on skills intelligence, were directly relevant to the successful implementation of the 'Union of Skills', members concluded that Cedefop should prepare a note on its proposed role in the European Skills Intelligence Observatory. This note had been discussed at the Extended Executive Board (EEB) meeting of 3 and 4 July 2025. The three groups – Governments', Employers' and Employees' organisations – supported the Agency's proposal and strongly advocated for Cedefop to assume a leading role in the skills intelligence component of the Observatory. They also encouraged the Executive Director to address this request directly to Executive Vice-President (EVP) Mînzatu. The letter to the EVP had been sent on 11 July 2025. The EVP's response was received on 25 September. On the same day, members received a note from DG EMPL on Cedefop's contribution to the Union of Skills (UoS). The Chairperson invited the Commission to present its note.

Presentation by the Commission

Ms Geleng said that Cedefop's work was very relevant to the UoS. The current presentation would focus on a few initiatives, but the Commission had a much broader view of how Cedefop could contribute to the UoS. The new Commission acknowledged early on that skills were fundamental for a stable and resilient Union. Skills were a key enabler for innovation capacity, the need to decarbonise the economy and society, the reduction of excessive dependencies, and increasing security.

Ms Banczyk said that Cedefop's work would feed into some of the key elements of the European VET Strategy. As announced in the political guidelines and specified in the UoS Communication, the future VET Strategy would focus on VET's role in supporting competitiveness and innovation; addressing skills shortages and mismatches; enhancing the attractiveness, quality and labour market relevance of VET; and supporting mobility and internationalisation through transparency and recognition of qualifications internationally. The Commission's work programme was expected later in October and the publication of the VET Strategy would in principle be announced for Q2 of 2026. In the current intense preparatory phase, collaboration with Cedefop was very important. The Agency provided input to the Commission report on the implementation of the VET Recommendation, to the VET attractiveness study, citizenship competences as well as the report on the progress of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. The Commission counted on Cedefop for the preparation of targeted stakeholder consultations. The contribution agreement on the Skills and VET Week would help disseminate the messages of the future VET Strategy. The EU teachers' and trainers' agenda aimed to address teacher shortages, improve attractiveness, recognition and sustainability of teaching careers, and strengthen initial and continuing professional development. Cedefop was expected to contribute to the consultation process and gather evidence through its dedicated EU survey. She also referred to the Commission's action plan to enhance basic skills in VET and in apprenticeships by building on what Cedefop did for many years and continued to do, for example its dedicated study on citizenship skills.

Ms Branch said that the Commission would draw very much on Cedefop's existing work, which would feed into the European Skills Intelligence Observatory. One of the key issues in the UoS was the need for skills systems to become quicker at adapting to the rapidly changing labour market needs. In this context, skills intelligence was extremely important. Indeed, a lot of skills intelligence existed but it was not adequately and efficiently deployed. To address the urgent need of systems to adapt, the Commission proposed a new governance for the UoS, which was tightly connected to the Commission's work on the European Semester. This governance had three elements: the Skills Intelligence Observatory, set up by the Commission; the new European High-Level Board, which would comprise key stakeholders; the new EU-27 Recommendation on human capital. This Recommendation reflected the core importance of skills in the European Semester for ensuring competitiveness.

The Semester was a process which guided EU policy recommendations to Member States, ensuring that reforms and investments delivered on the most pressing needs in a strategic and effective way. The EU-27 Recommendation would build on input from the Observatory and the High-Level Board. The

Observatory would pull together insights from a vast range of sources on skills intelligence. In the long list of sources, Cedefop's work was prominent. The insights would be shared with the future High-Level Board, which would advise the Commission on how to capture changes in the labour market. Data were indeed important but getting close to real-time developments, becoming more agile and quick in responding to the changing labour market needs, was equally important. To be able to respond quickly to the new emerging needs, the Commission would house the Observatory with the JRC in the lead and working closely with DG EMPL and DG EAC. As indicated in the EVP's response and the Commission's note, Cedefop's work would be key as one of several other sources on which the Observatory would draw, for example, Cedefop's work on short-term skills intelligence, sectoral analysis, STEM and the AI Skills Survey. Other elements in Cedefop's proposal were also valuable. However, they went beyond the immediate goals of the Observatory, notably those aimed to guide countries and regions to build their own skills intelligence and governance systems or to provide support and coordination to this end. The Agency's broader work was extremely useful as it helped build capacity at both EU and national levels but that was not within the scope of the Observatory. The planned activities in Cedefop's work programme were very valuable for the Commission and might be used in the longer term for future exercises. A meeting with Cedefop, the Commission and the JRC would be organised in the coming weeks for a strategic discussion on the Observatory and its cooperation with Cedefop. Regular exchanges on content would be very useful to capitalise effectively on research insights and strengths. In conclusion, although it was still early in terms of setting up the Observatory, the Commission looked forward to working constructively with Cedefop in the future.

Presentation by Cedefop

The Chairperson invited the Deputy Director to present the item.

Ms Brugia said that Cedefop welcomed the UoS and looked forward to contributing to its successful implementation. The Agency was already cooperating with DG EMPL colleagues to help shape some of the initiatives, particularly such as the VET Strategy or the Skills Portability. Cedefop's work on skills intelligence dated back 20 years, when the Agency pioneered the first ever pan-European forecast on skills needs, which until today remained the only comparable outlook of future labour market trends across country sectors and occupations for the EU. Over the years, Cedefop had gradually built what was now called 'skills intelligence', a term coined by Cedefop long before it took centre stage in policy debates and its inclusion in the European Skills Agenda in 2020. In recent years, the Agency added several new tools to its skills intelligence portfolio, such as: big data analysis, which helped understand in real time how employer and workplace needs were changing in terms of occupation and skills; the Skills OVATE online tool; new skills foresights, including a short-term anticipation tool (STAS), which complemented Cedefop's statistical analysis and surveys on VET and skills for emerging trends in labour market dynamics. The Agency also produced several composite indicators, such as the European Skills Index, to provide statistical monitoring of the performance of VET and skills systems in Europe. It was thus evident that the skills intelligence produced at Cedefop covered labour market skills demand and supply aspects comprehensively, and also

considered short, medium and long-term approaches. In generating its skills intelligence, Cedefop harnessed the full potential of its in-house data and evidence, blending them with different types of information and combining available data from Eurostat and other agencies and international organisations. Cedefop's second generation skills intelligence had become a key contributor, helping to understand and project how the labour market and learning were changing. The narrative-driven visualisations made the skills intelligence actionable, helping policymakers, social partners and other users understand trends in occupations, sectors, countries and skills. The wealth of evidence produced was easily accessible in a one-stop shop on Cedefop's website and searchable by occupation, sector, country and indicator.

It was clear that the scope and objectives of the forthcoming Observatory would most likely go beyond the production of skills intelligence per se. It was also clear that Cedefop would not lead the Observatory, which would be set up and led by the Commission, as also stated in the UoS Communication. Cedefop did not claim ownership of the skills intelligence component. However, based on its long-standing expertise of 20 years, it claimed at a minimum a seat at the table and the opportunity to contribute to the strategic discussions on what the skills intelligence part of the Observatory should look like. The Agency should play a special role in the skills intelligence component of the Observatory for several reasons: its existing skills intelligence already represented a strategic and comprehensive approach to understanding the dynamic interplay between labour market and skills; Cedefop's current skills intelligence was far more than simple data collection. It was an overarching system designed to provide the necessary insights for effective policymaking, supporting directly the objectives outlined for the centralisation of data in the Observatory and providing forecasts and early warnings. The core importance of Cedefop's work on skills intelligence lay in its ability to tackle important challenges, such as anticipating future labour and skills demand and supply and identifying skills mismatches and utilisation gaps or providing thematic analysis at sectoral, and regional levels. Thus, attributing a special role to Cedefop in the skills intelligence part of the Observatory seemed a natural choice, as this role would effectively build on Cedefop's value and long-standing expertise in this area. It would also ensure synergies and help avoid overlaps and duplication of efforts.

Cedefop had already shared its proposal for the skills intelligence component of the forthcoming Observatory with the Commission in November 2024. The starting point of the skills intelligence component would be Cedefop's existing evidence, which should be used as the first building block and could be enriched with additional activities. The rationale of Cedefop's proposal was that to enhance skills intelligence and make it effective, a coordinated approach among countries, regions and sectors was required, in terms of governance but also in terms of methodology. It would be appreciated if the Agency could receive feedback from the Commission on the reasons why it considered that supporting countries was not part of the Observatory. In conclusion, Cedefop could not be seen as just one of the contributors – rather, because of its longstanding expertise, Cedefop should play a special role in the skills intelligence component of the Observatory. To make skills intelligence effective, synergies and complementarities across Europe in countries and sectors should be reinforced with the help of Cedefop's methodological expertise.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Comments from the Employees

Mr Frising said that the group was very disappointed by the response of EVP Mînzatu and had serious concerns about how the issue had been handled by the Commission. Considering Cedefop's longstanding expertise in skills intelligence, the Agency should take a leading role in the skills intelligence part of the Observatory and not just claim a seat at the table or – even worse – be seen just as one of many contributors. The tripartite composition of the MB ensured the good use of Cedefop's data on skills intelligence. The Skills Observatory would be used to inform the High-Level Board but without Cedefop's expertise, data could be misinterpreted. The group fully trusted Cedefop as an independent research Institution for this role. The JRC would do nothing more than what Cedefop had already been doing for 20 years. This raised the question of how public funds were used in this case due to duplications and overlaps with Cedefop's existing work. The term 'skills intelligence' was quoted 68 times in the 2026-2028 SPD. Not giving Cedefop a leading role would certainly have consequences on the work programme and would go against the Agency's mandate. The Employees proposed considering a response to EVP Mînzatu's letter to express the group's dissatisfaction.

Comments from the Employers

Mr Donohoe welcomed the general framework of the UoS in terms of its contribution to competitiveness and resilience. The first piece of information on the Skills Observatory had been released over six months before. However, even after participating in two discussions on the Observatory, its purpose, function, scope, oversight structure and deliverables were still unclear. The 'one-stop shop' term sounded quite challenging, as even at national level, several such one-stop shops existed. The group had discussed the general direction of the Observatory and welcomed the idea of drawing data from varied sources and presenting them in a way that would be useful to policymakers, employers, employees and citizens. However, the Commission's presentation suggested that this might not to be the case, as it appeared that the Observatory would primarily be a support service for the High-Level Board. After a significant time period into this process, there was still very limited information on the scope of the work, the structure and data sources. Most of the members of the group had not even heard of the JRC. Its website provided no evidence of detailed work on general skills and labour market analysis. It appeared that the JRC was more scientifically oriented. Given the complexity of labour market taxonomies, occupational codes, etc. and integrating data sets that had been collected for different purposes, it was technically difficult to have a one-stop shop drawing on data from multiple sources and repackaging it in a way that was easy for users to assimilate. Eurostat had a specific role but the central resource for skills analysis and skills intelligence was Cedefop, which should have a central role in the Observatory. Mr Donohoe invited the Commission to provide more clarifications on Cedefop's role.

Comments from the Governments

Ms Stará thanked the contributors for their presentations, which outlined Cedefop's proposed role in the European Skills Intelligence Observatory, a key initiative under the UoS Communication. The group was of the opinion that Cedefop should have a much bigger role in the skills intelligence part of the Observatory, as the Agency had the expertise, tools and stakeholder trust. The aim was to accelerate the development of reliable and widely used skills intelligence across Europe and to contribute to stronger VET and skills systems through cooperation with Eurostat, Member States and social partners. EVP Mînzatu's letter stated that the JRC would lead the work of the Observatory. The group believed that this role should be given to Cedefop and asked the Commission for more information and clarifications on the Agency's proposed role. She asked if the Observatory would be approved by the Council and requested information on the funding of the Skills Observatory and the kind of input that it would require. The education sector was not sufficiently reflected in the Semester. Thus, the group expressed its dissatisfaction with the process which would follow the European Semester.

The Chairperson invited the Commission to respond.

Commission response

Ms Geleng thanked members for their comments. The UoS Communication proposed a governance structure for skills aiming to assist in better policymaking. It was the prerogative of the Commission to decide where and how to build on its expertise, and as such, there was no requirement for Council approval. The Observatory would draw on a mass of existing information and would put data together so that they would make sense by connecting the education world with employment. There was a need to look at the current labour shortages and skills mismatches in connection with how education responded to the needs. The Observatory would support the Commission. The High-Level Board would be composed of education and VET providers, business leaders and social partners, who would discuss and provide insights to the Commission, which would then prepare its proposal for the Semester Recommendation to be discussed with the Member States. The Observatory would not develop new data or indicators but would set up a platform putting together existing data. The first source for data on skills would obviously be Cedefop. The Agency would clearly remain front and centre in this area. However, the Observatory would also draw data and knowledge from the European Labor Authority, Eurofound, ETF and initiatives funded by the Commission, such as the Blueprint Alliances and the Pact for Skills, or the centres of vocational excellence. The JRC was a Commission service providing independent advice to the Commission and the EU policymakers, e.g. in the digital competence framework and the digital certificate. The JRC was thus well advanced and equipped. The Observatory would be as good as the existing data. In this context, the value of Cedefop's work and its contribution was not contested.

Ms Branch said that although the process was still in its early days, the Commission looked forward to discussions with Cedefop in the near future, before finalising the cooperation with the JRC. Regular discussions on the Observatory would be organised, as the Agency's input would be valuable. In response to the concern expressed about lack of social partner involvement,

as indicated in the UoS Communication, social partners would also be involved in the High-Level Board. Further, some of the skills intelligence sources also involved social partners, as both Cedefop and Eurofound had a tripartite Management Board. Additionally, the Blueprint Skills Alliances and the Pact for Skills, as well as the process for the Semester involved social partners.

The Chairperson invited Cedefop to respond.

Cedefop responses

Mr Siebel said that he welcomed the acknowledgement of Cedefop's expertise at the forefront of the development of skills intelligence in Europe. Not using this expertise when setting up the Observatory would be a missed opportunity. Cedefop's involvement in meetings or workshops would be necessary and should lead to a more prominent opportunity to contribute to the development of the platform. There was still not sufficient information on the Observatory. Although it was still early on in the process, clarifications on the requirements for the platform would be necessary to enable an informed exchange of views. Cedefop's extensive learning curve over 20 years gave the Agency the knowledge of what could and what could not be done in the field of skills intelligence. The capacity of the JRC was not questioned. However, it did not match Cedefop's experience in this context. The disclaimer on the first page of Cedefop's 2026-2028 SPD had been added before receiving EVP Mînzatu's response. A lot was still unknown. Pending clarifications on Cedefop's specific contributions in the context of the Observatory, it would be premature to say that there would be no impact on its work programme.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Comments from the Employers

Mr Donohoe said that it was clear that the Observatory had been established with the sole purpose of supporting the High-Level Board and the Commission in the developments of the European Semester. Having experience with developing a skills observatory proposal at national level, with a broader remit in the use of data by policymakers, Mr Donohoe asked the Commission to describe in general terms what this platform would look like. Creating a web page with hyperlinks to existing sources of skills and labour market intelligence would technically be very simple but developing a properly integrated Observatory for a broader audience was more challenging. It was necessary for members to know what the scope and extent of this platform would be.

Ms Dorn said that during her long-standing membership in the MB for 30 years, she had never seen such an approach where the Commission proposed a new structure to be used exclusively by its services in the skills policy area. Until now, initiatives and tools for the improvement of VET and skills were developed in cooperation with the agencies, the Commission, the Member States and the social partners. The proposal to develop a platform that would feed its own work into a new European High-Level Board advising the Commission on its VET policy was quite shocking; all the more so as it lacked a background of fundamental competence on education and VET at the level of Member States. The responsibility for such an initiative lay primarily with the Members States and then the Commission. The composition and responsibilities of the European Skills High-Level Board were unclear. The Commission mentioned 'business leaders, VET providers and social partners' but business leaders

were part of the social partnership structure. As a long-standing tradition, advice was provided by social partner organisations (i.e. BusinessEurope, Eurochambres, etc.) on a broad level which included all countries and represented the business community and trade unions. The group had serious concerns on the Commission's approach to seeking advice from individual business leaders, who were seldom specialists in VET and skills policy. For such advice, the Commission should rely on the input from social partner organisations representing the Member States. From a taxpayers' view, it was difficult to understand why the Commission wanted to establish the Observatory, which would duplicate expertise and data already available in Cedefop, which was already bringing together data from other agencies and EU and international organisations. The information available on the JRC website did not indicate any specific expertise on skills policy that would justify its role as a central research centre for the development of the Observatory. In general, the group was not satisfied with the whole process. Disregarding Cedefop's long-standing expertise and giving the leading role to a Commission service – the JRC – provided limited added value.

Comments from the Employees

Mr Frising said that despite the reassurance on the continuation of social dialogue, this was not the right direction. It appeared that the High-Level Board was merely an advisory body. The leading role should therefore be given to Cedefop, which had the right expertise on skills intelligence, acquired through a long learning journey of 20 years, and not start anew with the JRC.

Ms Roman said that the group shared the concerns and questions of the other two groups. It was very regretful that the aim of the Observatory was to serve solely the Commission and not the public or labour market actors. She asked the Commission to reconsider the matter and entrust Cedefop with the leading role in the skills part of the Observatory. In September, the EESC, which had a tripartite composition, had adopted its opinion on the UoS and recommended that the leading role in the Observatory should be entrusted to Cedefop. The three groups had expressed their concerns and reached out to EVP Mînzatu. Moreover, they had strongly expressed their dissatisfaction with the response of the EVP and the Commission's approach. Cedefop should be given a leading role in the process.

Comments from the Governments

Mr Meert said that while it was the prerogative of the Commission to create the High-Level Board and the Observatory, the real question was what would be done with the outcomes. If the intention was only to feed the Semester, then the Board and the Observatory should actively involve the Member States. Otherwise, it would be unacceptable for the Governments to organise actions for decisions they were not involved in. There was no need to change the current governance in the European VET area, which was working well.

The Chairperson invited the Commission to respond.

Commission responses

Ms Geleng said that the Observatory would feed information to the High-Level Board and the Commission's work in the context of the Semester. However, it would also serve as an alert mechanism when trends were heading in the wrong direction. The platform of the Observatory would be accessible to all,

although its primary purpose would be to support the Commission by providing integrated policy evidence. A meeting between the JRC and Cedefop would be organised in the coming weeks to discuss the strategic and technical aspects of the platform. Setting up a High-Level Board was not a new idea but part of the regular work of the Commission, which resorted to setting up high-level expert groups to address specific issues. This was a common practice. Skills were an enabler for competitiveness and resilience, thus, the UoS Communication set out the composition of the High-Level Board. It did not diminish the role of social partners, and included education and training providers as well as business leaders in sectors that might be particularly relevant for specific discussions. There was no duplication of already existing expertise in Cedefop, the ETF, Eurofound or the ELA and many other projects, such as the centres of vocational excellence, the Pact for Skills and skills academies. The added value of the Observatory would be the drawing together of existing data in a comprehensive way. The High-Level Board would be an advisory body supporting the Commission in its evidence-based policymaking. This would be one source of information for the Semester, as evidence for policymaking was also provided by Member States and social partners, as well as civil society. The Commission's proposal had been discussed at the Council with Member States and Social Partners as provided for by the Treaty.

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to respond.

Cedefop responses

Mr Siebel thanked members for their comments. Indeed, skills intelligence was more than data. It was making sense of these data, and this was exactly what Cedefop had been doing very well for a very long time. Ultimately, skills intelligence was only as good as the people making sense of it.

The Chairperson concluded that the three groups, which represented more than two thirds of the Management Board, deeply regretted that Cedefop would not take the leading role in the skills intelligence component of the Skills Intelligence Observatory. It was regretful that Member States and social partners had not been consulted by the Commission in early discussions. Many of the elements of the Observatory had not been clarified. If Cedefop were not to take an active leading role in the skills intelligence component of the Observatory, the Agency should also not take on any additional activities linked to the Observatory, nor bear any costs in terms of budget and work programme contributions.

Break from 17.00 to 17.20.

5. REVISED DRAFT 2026-2028 PROGRAMMING DOCUMENT, INCLUDING OPINION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION *(DISCUSSION/ADOPTION)*

The Chairperson reminded members that the draft 2026-2028 SPD had been endorsed by the MB by written procedure finalised on 28 January 2025, and, in compliance with Article 6(2) of Regulation (EU) 2019/128, sent to the European Commission, the Parliament and the Council on 29 January 2025. The Commission's formal Opinion had been received on 22 July 2025 and sent to MB members together with the MB documents.

The draft 2026-2028 SPD had been revised taking into account the developments which had occurred since January 2025, the discussions on

Cedefop's proposed role in the Union of Skills at the July EEB, and the formal Opinion of the European Commission.

For ease of reference, members received a version in tracked changes showing the changes between the final draft 2026-2028 SPD and the version endorsed by the Management Board on 28 January 2025.

Members were invited to adopt the general direction of the 2026-2028 SPD. A formal adoption was not possible at this stage as: (a) Cedefop's role in the Skills Intelligence Observatory had not yet been clarified and could not be properly reflected in the work programme for the next years; (b) the SPD would become final after the adoption of the Union Budget setting the amount of the contribution and the establishment plan, and the announcement of the 2025 salary indexation by the Commission services, which might affect the budget projections for Title 1 (staff cost). Therefore, Cedefop's budget could only be fine-tuned after that date, leading to potential adjustments within and between titles and therefore to the work programme. If such adjustments led to significant changes in core business activities, particularly concerning the 2026 work programme, the Executive Board would be consulted at its meeting in December 2025. The approval of the Management Board would be sought by written procedure before the end of the year.

The Chairperson thanked Cedefop's management and all staff for having worked around the clock to finalise the document.

He invited the Commission to present its formal opinion on the draft 2026-2028 SPD.

Opinion of the European Commission

Ms Geleng said that the Commission commended the quality of the SPD and highlighted that Cedefop's strategic objectives and priorities were aligned with the EU policy framework on VET, qualifications and skills. Following the discussion on Cedefop's role in the Union of Skills, particularly the Skills Intelligence Observatory (item 4), some revisions might be required for the final version of the SPD. The Commission further commended the importance of Cedefop's role in monitoring and analysing VET policy developments together with the European Training Foundation, for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration, as well as the Herning Declaration. Cedefop's work would be the basis for the report that would underpin the VET Strategy. The Commission welcomed the efforts to support EU tools and principles, such as the European qualifications framework, ESCO or Europass, which were particularly relevant to the Skills Portability initiative. Concerning administrative, financial and staff issues, the Commission acknowledged the resource constraints of Cedefop and other agencies but trusted that Cedefop was in a position to fulfil and prioritise its core tasks and further strengthen its unique position as *the* European centre of expertise for VET, qualifications and skills. The Commission welcomed the Cedefop@50 strategic initiative and the review of operational, administrative, and financial processes to remain relevant, innovate, and address budget pressures. It also took note that in 2026 Cedefop would publish the outcomes of its strategic foresight exercise aiming at identifying a vision for continuing skills development in the next 15 to 20 years and setting out alternative scenarios of action for achieving such a vision. It invited the Agency to involve other agencies under the remit of DG Employment in this project, as appropriate. Finally, the Commission welcomed Cedefop's commitment to

design a plan to foster staff gender and geographical balance of 2025, which would be implemented in 2026. Ms Geleng thanked Cedefop for the revised draft SPD, which reflected well the Commission's Opinion and integrated the new initiatives set out in the Union of Skills. The document was almost ready for adoption, but some further comments would be provided in writing.

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to present the changes in the document.

Mr Siebel thanked the Commission for its Opinion. A list of the main changes was presented on screen. The disclaimer on the first page would be revised to reflect the discussions under item 4. The last bullet point on page 56 (growing tasks) would be revised to reflect potential implications in the case the not-yet-fully known Skills Intelligence Observatory created new demands for Cedefop.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Comments from the Employees

Mr Frising said that the group welcomed the Commission's invitation to Cedefop to provide support in the framework of the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This was particularly important, as the post-2027 MFF did not foresee an increase of the budget allocated to social actions. As the final draft 2026-2028 SPD, as well as the first draft 2027-2029 SPD would be discussed in the next EB, the Employees' group requested an extension of the December EB meeting.

Ms Roman said that a broader discussion on Cedefop's role in the Skills Intelligence Observatory would also be required at the next EB in December. The content of the SPD foreword should be revised to reflect also the need of training for a just transition and for quality jobs. The current text appeared to be placing the responsibility of training on the individuals, workers and adults, without indicating the need to support these individuals in order to improve their skills. An overview of the EU policy documents Cedefop would contribute to through its work programme would be very useful. The impact of the Herning Declaration on Cedefop's activities was not clearly described. The sentence on page 63: '*Each year, based on the additional budget allocated for this purpose, Cedefop will carefully design and select projects that combine increased productivity, efficiency and budget savings*', should be revised to include that the selected projects should be first endorsed by the MB. The contribution agreements (paragraph 108) should be further discussed under the respective item of the MB agenda. The Employees' group requested more focused activities on social dialogue supporting VET systems. This was a long-standing request stemming from discussions on the portfolio review and the prioritisation exercise (Table 2). The references should be reinserted in the document. The group would welcome a dedicated study in the future of social dialogue in VET, the different roles and responsibilities of actors and how VET systems could improve through cooperation. Ms Roman asked how socioeconomic partners had been identified (page 77) in the respective study. A PLF on apprenticeships organised back-to-back with the next MB would be very welcome. In relation to social dialogue, the group requested the involvement of the social partner representatives of the MB in the joint seminar with Eurofound and EU-OSHA on digitalisation. Social partners were currently working on a project on skills mismatch, which could also contribute to Cedefop's work (paragraph 183). The group welcomed the planned joint

activity with the EESC on upskilling pathways foreseen in 2026. The policy supporting low-skilled adults was at the heart of the trade unions' agenda. The low participation of MB members in the previous event was regretful. This might be due to budget constraints on the reimbursement of in-person participation of members in the various events. Although on page 155 reference was made to the cooperation between Eurofound and Cedefop on the European Company Survey, it appeared that there would be no future for this very important joint project. The group looked forward to the new study on lifelong learning guidance, however, the role of social partners should be more prominent. The negative priorities were noted with regret and should be discussed in relation to the contribution agreements and SLAs. In particular, the reduction of countries concerning the work on the citizenship competence was very regretful, especially considering the increased radicalisation and far-right movements in the EU.

Comments from the Governments

Ms Stará said that the draft provided a strong and comprehensive framework for Cedefop's contribution to EU skills and VET policies. The draft SPD was well structured and clearly set out the Agency's vision, mission and objectives. Although ambitious, the document should prioritise better between core statutory tasks and new initiatives. The Governments would welcome more stress on IVET and a better balance with CVET, as well as more focus on the European Education Area. Overall, the group supported the general direction of the draft SPD.

Comments from the Employers

Mr Donohoe said that paragraph 20, listing the major trends and crises informing the landscape, begged the question of why certain conflicts had been singled out. It also prompted a general discussion on European safety, the increase in defence spending, the cyberattacks, the Russian aggression etc., in relation to the implications for the Skills Agenda.

Ms Voroņenko said that there were two aspects in the field of safety. The first related to defence systems and technologies that were currently unknown to the education frameworks. These frameworks should become more flexible in order to provide the skills required to respond to current needs. The second, was to consider skills as assets that also required resources. It was crucial for Europe to provide the corresponding financing for these needs.

Mr Donohoe said that the group welcomed the revised draft 2026-2028 SPD and the broader reorientation beyond traditional VET policy. He also pointed that in some EU Member States, for example in Germany, defence forces played a very active role in upskilling. At this stage, the emphasis on defence was a reality in Europe and, drawing particularly on the experience of Member States located in eastern regions, further consideration should be given to the implications for skills development.

Ms Dorn said that the group particularly welcomed paragraph 34 and Cedefop's initiative to broaden the view of traditional VET policy to include informal training and competences acquired within but also outside companies. It was very important to have training systems providing formal qualifications. However, most of the training offered and undertaken in companies was non-formal or informal, as was the case in Germany. The latest

survey by the Institute of German Economy in Cologne for 2023 showed that formal direct and indirect investments by German companies amounted to more than EUR 46 billion. A total of 90% of enterprises had participated in this effort. Some 80% to 90% of this investment was in informal qualifications and competences acquired in the work environment. Paragraph 34 focused on the individual learner. However, focus should also be placed on the needs and engagement of individual enterprises which combined formal qualifications in IVET and CVET with informal and non-formal training.

Mr Donohoe said that Cedefop's role and work in the talent pool, skills matching, and addressing shortages should be more explicitly described in paragraph 31. The reference to the stable core with flexible elements in paragraph 37 had its origins in the Osnabrück Declaration. This flexible approach should be retained from the point of view of adapting VET to labour market realities. In paragraph 40, the reference to the role of social partners 'at all levels' should be reinstated. The role of skills competitions helped make policy discussions more tangible (paragraph 62). He asked why this reference had been deleted.

Comments from the Commission

Ms Banczyk said that citizenship skills were very important. Cedefop's expertise could be used to reflect further on the skills needed in the defence field. This was a new area, which should be explored very quickly. Basic skills represented one of the priorities under the Union of Skills. The Commission's Basic Skills Action Plan would support Member States through a dedicated peer learning activity on innovative community learning spaces. The Commission welcomed Cedefop's input in this process and proposed adding the respective reference in the draft SPD.

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to respond.

Cedefop responses

Mr Siebel thanked members for their comments. The Skills Intelligence Observatory would be a recurring topic for discussion in the Executive Board meetings. The foreword would be amended to include sufficient reference to the support of the just transition of individuals and to reflect the Herning Declaration better. Cedefop's central role in policy monitoring with the ETF would continue. The document would be revised to include references to the respective policy documents in all activities. The endorsement of ad hoc projects by the MB (page 63) would be discussed in the context of item 6. The wording on social dialogue (Table 2) reflected the status quo of the latest portfolio review. Mr Siebel proposed revisiting this in the next reprioritising exercise. Social dialogue in VET would be better reflected in the document. The social partners' project on skills mismatch was very interesting and he looked forward to further information. Due to budgetary constraints, it was not possible to invite all MB members to the joint EESC in-person events. However, hybrid participation might be a solution. The role of social partners in lifelong guidance would be reflected better. Setting negative priorities was indeed regretful, as the only reason for doing so was the lack of funds. However, as citizenship was indeed an important topic, ways to include more countries would be explored. Indeed, CVET was more prominent in the SPD, but this reflected the post-2020 strategy and previous EU policy documents, as well as the Herning Declaration and UoS priorities. However, IVET had not

been forgotten. In the context of threats to European safety, Cedefop had recently reached out to the European Defence Agency. Although defence-related skills were not part of Cedefop's expertise, the work of the Agency in skills intelligence might also address the needs in this area. Skills should indeed be considered assets. It was thus clear that the respective investments should be made in the VET systems. The document would be revised to reflect better the flexibility of VET systems, the role of social partners and the importance of skills competitions. He thanked members for the endorsement of the general direction of the 2026-2028 SPD.

Mr Ranieri said that the cost for the European Company Survey was high, and Cedefop did unfortunately not have the necessary funds. Over the past years, the share of Title 3 (operational budget) had been reduced from 32% to 20%. This was a huge cut of about 40% without fully taking into account the effect of inflation. However, together with Eurofound, the Agency was exploring an innovative approach addressing Member States to see if crowdfunding would be possible. He thanked Ms Dorn for the information on the study of the Institute of German Economy. Mr Ranieri informed members of the November webinar on the first outcomes of the survey on training and learning, where the main point was precisely the connection between training, workplace organisation and learning. All MB members were welcome to attend.

Comments from the Employees

Ms Roman said that the Herning Declaration called upon Cedefop and the ETF to continue supporting the Commission and the Member States by monitoring and analysing the implementation. The work of the two agencies on the national implementation plans (NIPs) was highly appreciated. The Employees welcomed the VET attractiveness composite index, which reflected the Herning Declaration well. However, more work could be done on research to help social partners and Member States. Cedefop could cooperate with EIGE on the study fostering inclusiveness for all and addressing gender inequalities and stereotypes in VET. The Agency could also cooperate with EU-OSHA to ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of VET learners, teachers and trainers. She asked Cedefop to enhance dissemination activities of published studies via brief webinars the same way as the ORVF does. It was regretful that Cedefop's excellent work was not disseminated broadly enough. Cedefop should develop a policy to promote gender and geographical balance in activities and events as well. The Management Board was not only Cedefop's governing and supervisory body – it also comprised experts who could contribute to the Agency's work through closer cooperation with its researchers. A possible solution for the future could be the expression of interest from MB members in a dedicated form. This is why the group requested more clarity on inclusion and transparency concerning expert groups supporting Cedefop studies. The increase of the number of tripartite working groups was very welcome, e.g. on microcredentials, financing, adult learning and individual learning accounts (ILAs). However, the way experts for these groups were identified was unclear – independent experts were sometimes consulted but independence was subjective. There was no clear information on the website, nor consistency in providing information about the members of such expert groups. At the last EEB meeting in July, the Employees' group had requested to be more actively involved in certain events and activities by specifically informing the Management Board members on

the registration requirements for certain events. The group had also asked if any training was planned for Cedefop staff on the role of social partners and social dialogue, which the group had already requested earlier, and offered to connect Cedefop with ETUI, which might offer such training. She asked if this had been considered by the management.

Comments from the Governments

Ms Lindén said that VET was now included as one of the five priority areas in the proposed future European Education Area. It was important to strike a balance in the SPD between Union of skills and the European Education Area. Adaptation capacity in CVET upskilling and reskilling was very important. However, IVET had a broader role with dual goals in building the foundations for future learning and providing skills. A clear distinction should be made between the two. Ms Lindén also pointed out that IVET was much less visible in the SPD and pointed to the importance of continued work.

No further comments were received.

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to respond.

Mr Siebel said that EIGE and EU-OSHA were natural partners in the fields of inclusiveness and wellbeing of teachers and trainers. Further synergies would be explored. The dissemination of Cedefop's work could not be compared with that of the OECD, as the latter was a brand known all over the world. The Cedefop@50 initiative aimed precisely at engaging stakeholders early on and enhancing dissemination and recognition of the Agency's work. The gender and geographical balance for event participation could be considered but a policy might not be necessary. As a public organisation, Cedefop provided an extensive amount of data. Expert teams for advisory groups were chosen based on their expertise for each project. The expression of interest by MB members might be considered in the future. Indeed, VET was one of the five focal points for the education area, but Cedefop's work on IVET would also continue.

Mr Roncaccia said that the Cedefop@50 initiative, particularly the stakeholder engagement pillar, was aiming first at engaging MB members. Cedefop's dissemination guidelines had been recently revised. All publications would be available in the repository of the Publications Office of the European Union. The Agency's open datasets and online tools with their metadata would become available on the official portal for European Data of the Publications Office. Cedefop's presentations during events to advertise new publications or tools would be uploaded in a trusted repository of the European Union. These steps were expected to increase the Agency's outreach. The types of dissemination were currently being revised to increase effectiveness. The implementation of open science in line with the Commission guidelines was expected to increase Cedefop's visibility in the EU institutions and among the public. The results of these actions were expected in the coming months and over the course of the next year.

The Chairperson concluded that the Management Board had adopted the general direction of the 2026-2028 SPD, pending clarifications on Cedefop's specific role in the Skills Intelligence Observatory and its impact on the 2026 Work Programme and budget. The SPD would be revised taking into consideration the comments received. It would become final after adoption of

the Union budget setting the amount of the contribution and the establishment plan (expected December 2025). Moreover, after the announcement by the Commission services of the 2025 salary indexation (expected in November), potential adjustments within and between titles might be required. If such adjustments led to changes, particularly concerning the 2026 Work Programme, the Executive Board would be consulted during its meeting in December 2025. The approval of the Management Board would then be sought by written procedure. A possible extension of the EB meeting in December 2025 would be discussed under item 8 of the agenda.

7. PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE ACTION PLAN FOLLOWING THE EXTERNAL CROSS-CUTTING EVALUATION *(INFORMATION)*

The Chairperson invited the Deputy Director to present the item.

Ms Brugia said that DG EMPL had carried out an external evaluation on Cedefop, Eurofound, the ETF and EU-OSHA, assessing their efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and added value in the period 2017-2022, both individually and from a cross-agency perspective. Cedefop's assessment had been positive under all evaluation criteria. The evaluation led to 18 recommendations, four Cedefop-specific and 14 cross-agency ones. As a result, Cedefop had shaped an action plan, which had been endorsed by the MB by written procedure and then sent to DG EMPL. The document members had received indicated the progress made in each of the agreed actions. Ms Brugia highlighted that the actions identified for the 14 cross-agency recommendations had been jointly shaped with the other agencies, including the European Labour Authority (ELA), though ELA was covered by a separate external evaluation. For each of the actions, one of the agencies would take the lead. Cedefop would take the lead in two of the cross-agency recommendations: (a) the key performance indicators; and (b) the megatrends focusing on the implications of the ageing population. The implementation of all agreed actions was progressing as planned.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Commission

Ms Geleng said the Commission welcomed the action plan and the progress on the different recommendations. Recommendation 21 called for a clear orientation of agenda items towards policy rather than administrative matters. She proposed distinguishing items between 'A' for information and 'B' for discussion or decision.

Employees

Ms Roman said that the MB was Cedefop's governance body. As such, it had to decide on both administrative and operational matters. This was the reason why the group had requested the organisation of content-related events back-to-back with the MB meetings. One of the MB's core responsibilities was Cedefop's SPD, which should be discussed in every meeting – not just twice a year.

Governments

Ms Stará said that the group welcomed the focus on policy topics as well as the proposal for a reduced number of EB meetings.

Employers

Mr Donohoe said that the organisation of content events back-to-back with MB meetings had been very well received by the group. It might be worth exploring the idea of having 'A' and 'B' items to differentiate between agenda items for discussion and for noting, as the reduction of the number of EB meetings alone would not necessarily bring more focus to agendas.

The Chairperson reminded members that the current item was also an administrative one, submitted to members for information. As a proposal for future meetings, members could refrain from discussing information items, unless they had questions.

Cedefop

Ms Brugia reminded members that according to Article 5.1 of the Founding Regulation, the MB was also entrusted with administrative matters. Bearing this in mind, the text of the action agreed on Recommendation 21 was formulated to reflect that '*to the extent possible considering the functions of the MB outlined in Article 5.1 of Cedefop Founding Regulation*', the management pursued an appropriate balance in agendas between content and administrative matters. The agenda of the current meeting was a good example of this effort with discussions focusing on both the UoS and the SPD.

Mr Siebel said that the discussions on information items could be limited to questions, provided that members took the necessary time to read all documents in preparation of the meetings.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

The Chair thanked members and closed the meeting at 18.50.

Friday 3 October 2025

The Chairperson opened the meeting at 9.35 and welcomed members. He also welcomed the Internal Audit Service (IAS) colleagues who joined the meeting online.

9. THE FUTURE OF REFERNET

(a) **Alternative ways of financing** *(discussion/decision)*

The Chairperson invited the Deputy Director to present the item.

Ms Brugia said that this discussion had initiated a dialogue on alternative ways to finance and govern ReferNet to increase its cost-effectiveness. The options presented had been discussed at the March 2025 EB meeting and were developed on the basis of internal analysis, desk research, interviews with other EU agencies, consultation with DG BUDG and, more recently, a survey among ReferNet coordinators to gather feedback on how to improve ReferNet's funding model. The current ReferNet Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) were in place until 2027, thus, any new arrangement would come into effect as of 2028. This allowed sufficient time for a MB decision in autumn 2027. ReferNet comprised 29 organisations from the 27 Member States, plus Norway and Iceland. Each country had a ReferNet coordinator, representing a key institution in VET, skills and qualifications. ReferNet was undoubtedly of high importance and value for Cedefop. It had been set up more than 20 years before to meet the needs for comparative

information on VET systems, developments and policies contributing to the Copenhagen Process. It provided a platform for networking and cooperation among Member States and raised the visibility of EU priorities at national and regional levels, as well as the visibility of Cedefop's work in general. ReferNet worked based on grants, a co-financing system where Cedefop contributed up to 70% and countries covered the remaining 30%. This system created a sense of belonging, and shared ownership and deliverables. It was managed and owned by Cedefop, thus the Agency maintained full control of the network's annual work programme, ensuring the quality of the deliverables and, more importantly, addressing ad hoc requests when needed, i.e. how VET systems had addressed the COVID pandemic. However, ReferNet's status quo had the following drawbacks: (a) the direct costs for Cedefop which amounted to EUR 900 000 per year. Compared to the networks of other agencies, this cost could be considered low – it nevertheless represented a substantial share of Cedefop's core business budget (approximately 1/5 of Title 3). This was not sustainable, especially considering the constant squeezing of Title 3; (b) the indirect costs for procuring and administering 29 grants required 1.6 full time equivalent (FTEs), excluding the FTEs required for the coordination and management of the network. The recent survey across ReferNet highlighted several areas of concern. First, the need to simplify financial reporting and annual external audit, which were disproportionate with the small grant size. To avoid heavy financial reporting requirements, Sweden had decided to continue being part of ReferNet without receiving the grant. Second, grants had not increased since 2008 and did not keep pace with inflation or increasing workload, which put increasing pressure on the national institutions involved. The average ReferNet grants were EUR 30 000 per year. Compared to EUR 164 000 per year on average received by Eurydice units, it was obvious that alternative ways for financing ReferNet should be found to increase cost-effectiveness. This was also one of the recommendations of the IAS audit. The first scenario proposed by Cedefop, after analysis and consultation with DG BUDG, was a simplified form of grants, i.e. pre-fixed lump sums. The grant amounts would be fixed by Cedefop, per country, based on historical data for each beneficiary. It would be easier to administer these grants, as they would not require detailed financial reporting and auditing of the actual costs, and would substantially reduce the overheads for ReferNet coordinators, who could concentrate more on content and less on the administrative burden. Pre-fixed lump sums would lead to savings of approximately 1 FTE for Cedefop. The practical steps would have to be discussed with DG BUDG. In this scenario, the benefits of the status quo would be maintained, so it would be worth pursuing, independently of any other option. The second scenario was to set up an institutional network, with national coordinators appointed directly by the Member States, for example through the Governments' representatives in Cedefop's MB. The main challenge of this scenario was that other agencies with similar networks had the setting up of their networks included in their Founding Regulation. As this was not the case for Cedefop, the feasibility of this scenario needed to be explored. This option included two sub-scenarios: (a) an institutional network co-funded by Cedefop, in which the appointed coordinators would serve a representation role and Cedefop would finance the work on data collection, drafting reports or disseminating activities. The main benefit of this sub-scenario would be a stronger role for Cedefop at national level. However, there

would be no savings in direct or indirect costs; (b) an institutional network like Eurydice, where national governments would designate a body to carry out data collection, production of reports, dissemination of activities, etc., financed by Erasmus+ or another EU programme. The main benefit of this sub-scenario would be the substantial savings for Cedefop, as the Agency would no longer finance the grants. However, Cedefop would run the risk of losing control over the work programme and the quality of the network and its deliverables. The third scenario was 'smart financing'. Cedefop was using ReferNet to carry out policy reporting and provide input on how countries progressed towards the achievement of the EU priorities on VET. This institutional task had started at the request of the European Commission 20 years before, had been formalised in the Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration since 2020 and confirmed in the recent Herning Declaration. Cedefop provided several deliverables for the Commission, e.g. the country fiches for the Commission's Education and Training Monitor. In 2025 the Agency would also provide evidence to the Commission for the mid-term evaluation of the Council Recommendation on VET. Cedefop would like to continue the policy reporting as it provided high visibility of its work. However, the policy monitoring-related tasks consumed approximately 35% of the total ReferNet grant. To reflect the fact that this 35% concerned tasks Cedefop carried out for the Commission, under this scenario the financing of this 35% would come from the Commission, while Cedefop would continue to carry out all the work and produce the deliverables for the Commission. Cedefop and DG EMPL had extensive experience in cooperating on this model of smart financing. Examples included: the Skills Panorama, Cedefop-Eurostat joint work on the web intelligence hub; and the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The smart financing scenario was the preferred one for Cedefop, in combination with simplified grants. Under this scenario, Cedefop would save on both direct and indirect costs. The next steps would be: (a) confirmation by the Commission of the feasibility of the smart financing approach by May 2026; (b) internal analysis by Cedefop to define the pre-fixed lump sums in cooperation with ReferNet coordinators; (c) an MB decision on the way forward in October 2026; (d) the launch of the new Framework Partnership Agreement to come into effect in 2028.

The Chairperson invited Mr Verhoeven (Head of Unit – IAS) to present the ReferNet audit report.

(b) Audit report on ReferNet *(presentation by IAS)*

Following the presentation, Mr Verhoeven introduced Ms Maria Kanellopoulou and Mr Ireneusz Bartyzel, who had performed the audit. He thanked Mr Siebel, Ms Brugia and the Cedefop team for their excellent cooperation during the IAS audit. ReferNet had been identified as an audit topic following the 2024 risk assessment as part of the preparation for the 2025-2027 strategic internal audit plan for Cedefop. The audit had taken place in February 2025 and the work finalised after the summer. The audit report had been finalised at the beginning of September. The IAS had assessed whether the set of internal control processes for managing ReferNet were adequately designed and effectively implemented, by looking at the governance, the grant management process, and the monitoring and reporting of activities, as well as the communication and dissemination of ReferNet's outputs. In its report, the IAS had identified a lot of strengths and positive management of the network, which

had a strategic value in providing structured data to support EU VET policies. The report had confirmed that the process was supported by appropriate IT and data collection tools, which were very well managed. Overall, ReferNet was important for Cedefop in the process of supporting the monitoring of the implementation of VET policies across Europe. The report had led to four findings and recommendations. Two of these were rated 'important' and two 'very important'. The first finding concerned governance and planning of ReferNet (rated 'important'). While cooperation inside Cedefop between the ReferNet team and the policies and systems' teams was good, cooperation with the Communication Department was less structured. This had an impact on information flow. The risks related to ReferNet were not sufficiently taken onboard in the Agency's annual risk assessment. As a result, certain recurring issues concerning the management of the network, such as partner selection, or outputs which were not necessarily delivered, were not always systematically addressed and followed up. It was thus recommended to hold regular and more structured coordination meetings with all internal actors and to integrate ReferNet-related risks in Cedefop's annual risk assessment exercise. The second finding concerned grant management (rated 'very important'). ReferNet partners saw the process as complex and burdensome. Some of the deliverables were too demanding compared to the relatively low value of grants. The selection of coordinators lacked competition. This had an impact on the quality of the outputs. The evaluation process was well-developed but there were no detailed scoring guidelines. This was an area for improvement. Cedefop should review its funding and governance model to make it more cost-effective and sustainable in the long run. It should also streamline the internal processes to make them proportionate to the relatively low grant values. The Agency should conduct a more systematic stakeholder needs analysis to understand the partners' expectations better and to manage the model better. In terms of competition, it should promote calls with wider visibility to attract more applicants and foster competition. Internal evaluation guidelines could be strengthened and updated. The third finding concerned monitoring and reporting (rated 'very important'). Although IT tools were in place to support the monitoring process, the follow-up of certain issues was not always adequate or followed by corrective actions. This was due to the overall administrative burden of the process. ReferNet was rarely discussed at EB and MB meetings. As a result, the progress of the network and the challenges were not communicated to the MB. Cedefop had an ex-post evaluation strategy concerning its core activities. However, since 2008 there had been only one ex-post evaluation of ReferNet in 2017. Recommendations of this evaluation had only been partially implemented. The IAS recommended strengthening the monitoring tools further, focusing on follow-up and corrective actions where necessary. In addition, ReferNet's activities and challenges should be discussed in the MB meetings more often. Ex-post evaluations should be recurring and linked to the adoption of related action plans when necessary. The fourth finding (rated 'important') concerned communication and dissemination of ReferNet outputs. Although Cedefop had an overall communication strategy, ReferNet was not part of it as a separate strand. Partner organisations had to provide a number of deliverables concerning communication initiatives, but these were not systematically monitored by Cedefop. As a result, there was a lack of targeted and more proactive approach for promoting ReferNet and making its work more visible. In conclusion, Cedefop had made a lot of effort to design and implement an

internal control system to oversee, manage and monitor the implementation of ReferNet. However, two very important issues concerning the grant management, and the monitoring and implementation of the network were not included. Managing so many grants of relatively low value on an annual basis with limited resources, was indeed a challenge for Cedefop. The IAS recommendations had been accepted by Cedefop. An action plan had been proposed by the Agency and agreed by the IAS. The IAS acknowledged that Cedefop's management and staff had a strong commitment to make ReferNet work.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Verhoeven for their presentation and invited members to comment.

Employers

Mr Donohoe asked if the IAS recommendations, particularly the requirements on monitoring and reporting and the ex-post evaluations, might introduce more costs.

Employees

Mr Frising asked if in the context of the communication strategy the term 'ReferNet' could be renewed. Although the group agreed in principle with the proposed combination of scenario 1 and scenario 3, some concerns had been expressed for the reference to SLAs in scenario 3.

The Chairperson invited Mr Verhoeven to respond.

IAS

Mr Verhoeven said that the recommendation on monitoring and reporting was not about putting in place new IT systems or tools which would increase costs, but to use the existing ones better for the follow-up of issues identified. As a general practice in the public sector, projects were regularly evaluated. However, ReferNet had only been evaluated once in the past 20 years. More regular evaluations would not necessarily increase costs.

Governments

Ms Stará said that the participation of all Member States' institutions was essential for ReferNet's proper functioning. If the work was fragmented, then equality and reliability of the outputs could not be ensured. Cedefop's role remained crucial in ensuring coordination, synergy, structured dialogue and overall quality. However, reducing the administrative burden should be a priority. This could only be achieved with the establishment of a new financing system. She asked if the Commission had been consulted for scenario 3. Scenario 2 should be excluded, as grants should be increased to keep Member States engaged.

Commission

Ms Geleng thanked the IAS for its presentation. The Commission took note of the findings and trusted Cedefop with the follow-up and the implementation of the recommendations. Member States should urge their respective ReferNet partner organisations, where necessary, to deliver their contributions in time and to the expected quality standard. She thanked Cedefop for its analysis of the different scenarios. Scenarios 2a and 2b should not be further pursued due to the additional layer of complexity without obvious benefits or added value. Scenario 1 should be further pursued regardless of other options. Several

elements of scenario 3 required further analysis and clarifications. As stated in Cedefop's note, the direct annual cost of ReferNet grants was much lower compared to the cost of co-funding similar networks in other agencies, both in absolute monetary value and as a share of their operational budget. The Commission acknowledged that not all networks were created equal, so comparisons should be made with caution. She highlighted that the cost of Eurofound's network represented 20% of the Agency's Title 3. Cedefop was not the only agency experiencing a squeeze of its operational budget. For example, Eurofound's budget would remain stable at 23.8% for 2025 and 2026. Cedefop's situation was only slightly worse with 22.5% in 2025 and 21.8% in 2026. This was a marginal difference, which was not sufficient to justify different treatment. The Commission was also experiencing budget cuts. Finding the necessary funds and modality for ReferNet should be further discussed. The Commission's proposal for the multiannual financial framework 2028 to 2034 had not yet been decided. It was thus not possible at the moment to proceed with any financial commitment.

Employers

Mr Donohoe said scenarios 2a and 2b should not be further discussed. Cedefop's note showed an appropriate balance between cost savings and maintaining control of ReferNet and the quality of the outputs.

Ms Stylianou-Theodorou said that scenarios 2a and 2b were indeed not optimal for raising awareness of Cedefop's work, nor for shared ownership and deliverables. ReferNet's work at national level provided valuable insight into emerging trends, offering the opportunity to engage in national dialogue, examine ways to leverage them effectively, and above all identify areas for improvement at national level. The result of the dialogue helped disseminate Cedefop's work, steer a country's position, and match EU priorities. If ReferNet was institutionalised at national level, the benefits deriving from the EU dimension would effectively diminish. Scenario 2a was not cost-saving and scenario 2b led to the loss of control over ReferNet's annual work programme and the quality of deliverables.

Mr Donohoe said that while the group acknowledged the budget constraints, it urged Cedefop and the Commission to discuss bilaterally and try to find a solution.

The Chairperson invited the Deputy Director to respond.

Cedefop

Ms Brugia thanked members for their valuable comments. As the three groups and the Commission agreed, scenarios 2a and 2b would not be pursued further. Cedefop would pursue scenario 1 (simplified grants), which would lead to saving one FTE. However, this would have no positive impact on the workload of ReferNet coordinators. If there was no additional funding from the Commission, Cedefop would not be in a position to increase the amount of grants and the only way to balance deliverables and grants better would be to cut some ReferNet activities. Should the Commission fund the policy reporting part of the deliverables produced, then there could be an impact on the amount of grants. It was noted that the Commission could not commit to making a decision in this respect by May 2026, as requested by Cedefop. However, it would be good to know when this information was available, so that Cedefop could plan its work accordingly. She clarified that Eurofound's network did not

produce any deliverables for the Commission, only evidence to inform the agency's research. It was thus completely different from ReferNet, which produced evidence for the Commission's Education and Training Monitor (e.g. country fiches) and assessed countries' progress in implementing EU VET priorities, at the request of the Commission.

Governments

Mr Meert thanked Cedefop for its creative solutions and said that none of the scenarios provided a solution for the co-financing from Member States. That was indeed regrettable, as some were in a dire situation in terms of co-funding. If no solution could be found, some Member States might opt out of ReferNet. The lump sum financing solution was welcome and very positive for the coordinators. Finding synergies with Eurydice in the European Semester could lead to some efficiency gains. The VET policy monitoring was vital for the Governments. If ReferNet fell under DG EAC or Eurydice (scenarios 2a and 2b), some control mechanisms could be put in place to ensure that important VET topics were reflected in the work. However, scenario 2b would bring even less visibility to ReferNet. In general, ways to increase visibility should be explored. Erasmus+ funding was highly uncertain. The Governments called for a dialogue between Eurydice, DG EAC, DG EMPL and Cedefop, to find new innovative ways of funding ReferNet.

The Chairperson thanked the IAS for their presentation and concluded that Cedefop would pursue the simplification of grants. The Commission should give a timeline for confirming the possibility of funding the policy reporting component. Scenarios 2a and 2b would not be further pursued. A decision on the way forward would be taken in the next Management Board meeting in 2026.

10. Elections of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairpersons of the MB and composition of the (Extended) Executive Board *(DECISION)*

The Chairperson said that usually the Commission did not take a turn holding the chairpersonship, which should rotate among the groups in the order applied until now, i.e. next Chairpersonships: Employers, Governments, Employees.

Ms Geleng confirmed.

The Chairperson invited the Employers to nominate the next Chair.

Ms Dorn said that the Employers' group nominated Mr Tony Donohoe.

All groups agreed. The Chairperson congratulated Mr Donohoe (IE).

Ms Branch said that Ms Geleng would continue as Deputy Chairperson and Ms Banczyk would be the second Commission representative. Ms Branch would be the alternate for both.

Ms Dorn said that the Spokesperson to the Executive Board would be Mr Christos Ioannou (EL). Mr Plummer would remain the coordinator of the Employers group. The alternate members for the EB meetings would be Mr Pär Lundström (SE) and Ms Liene Voroņenko (LV).

Ms Stará (CZ) said that she would continue as Deputy Chairperson. Mr Božo Pavičin (HR) would be the coordinator of the Governments' group. The

alternates for EB meeting would be Ms Carina Lindén (SE) and Mr Aleksandar Sladojević (SI).

Ms Roman said that Mr Carlo Frising (LU) would be the Deputy Chairperson. She would remain the coordinator of the Employees' group. The alternate members for EB meetings would be Ms Tatjana Babrauskiene (LT) and Mr Mario Patuzzi (DE).

The Chairperson said that members took note of the EB composition. The additional (up-to-three) members to participate in the Extended Executive Board meetings would be announced ad hoc and should be main members of the MB.

The Chairperson thanked members for their trust over the past two years, congratulated the new Chairperson and concluded that the Management Board members took note of the Executive Board composition and the designated alternates for its meetings. Members also took note of the arrangements for participation in Extended Executive Board meetings.

8. PROPOSAL FOR A REVISED (EXTENDED) EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE *(DISCUSSION/DECISION)*

The Chairperson said that at the EB meeting of 1 October, members took note of the reduction of EB meetings to three per year. To allow more time for the preparation of the MB meeting, EB members proposed moving the preceding EB one week earlier.

Note: The schedule for the 2026 EB meetings in was presented on screen.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Employees

Ms Roman said that the group proposed extending the EB virtual meeting in December 2025, as there would be at least two strategic issues to discuss: Cedefop's role in the Skills Observatory of the UoS and Cedefop's Single Programming Document(s).

Governments

Ms Stará agreed.

Employers

Mr Donohoe also agreed.

Commission

Ms Geleng recalled that Cedefop's Founding Regulation did not provide for the extension of the EB. This was based on the continuation of past practice and regulated in the Rules of Procedure of Cedefop's EB and MB. The Commission highlighted that this option should be used with restraint and on a case-by-case basis for meetings covering strategic issues, particularly as preparation for future Management Board decisions. The draft 2027-2029 Single Programming Document, which would have to be adopted by the MB and sent to the institutions in January 2026, was indeed the most strategic item for which a decision of the MB was required. Thus, the Commission agreed to the extension of the Executive Board meeting in December 2025.

The Chairperson concluded that the Management Board members took note of the dates and format of the EB and MB meetings in 2026. Members also

decided to extend the EB virtual meeting of 1 December 2025, for the strategic discussion on Cedefop's first draft 2027-2029 SPD. A potential extension of future EB meetings would be decided on a case-by-case basis for meetings covering strategic issues, particular as preparation for MB decisions, as stated in the EB and MB rules of procedure.

6. STRATEGIC INITIATIVE CEDEFOP@50 – PROGRESS UPDATE *(INFORMATION)*

(a) State of play

(b) The MB's role in the process for approving ad hoc projects

The Chairperson invited the Executive Director to present the item.

Following the presentation, Mr Siebel said that the strategic initiative Cedefop@50 aimed to define the relevance of the Agency, which should remain unique and effective for its stakeholders. In the staff assemblies which took place in January and July 2025, staff had been presented with an overview of the progress of the discussions between the Steering Committee (Cedefop's management team) and the Sounding Board (Cedefop's Executive Board). The kick-off and planning of the 'work packages' of the five work streams had taken place in June 2025. The ad hoc projects were implemented by the Department for VET and Skills (DVS) and the Department for Communication (DCM). There were currently no deliverables mature enough for discussion. The work on the Contribution Agreement on the Skills and VET Week with DG EMPL, signed on 4 August 2025, had already started. Recruitment of the respective contract agents was in progress. The work on the Service Level Agreement on the 'VET attractiveness study' with DG EMPL, signed on 1 July 2025, was already quite advanced. Work on the Contribution Agreement 'Skills intelligence Estonia' with DG REFORM, signed on 5 December 2024, was in progress. In addition, based on a request from DG REFORM, a Contribution Agreement 'Skills intelligence Italy and Czechia' was currently under negotiation. Members had received a note with Cedefop's first insights into current ad hoc projects, which were outside the work programme and budget but remained within the scope of the Cedefop@50 initiative. Due to the constant budget squeeze of Title 3 and in an effort to find alternative ways of funding, the management had decided to try out engaging in activities that showed strong and significant synergies with work already done. Based on the first but not yet complete insights, it appeared that ad hoc projects helped Cedefop advance in terms of its stakeholder orientation, strategic relevance and innovation capabilities. These projects were demand-driven, stakeholder-led and at the forefront of developments, giving Cedefop extra visibility and enhancing its reputation. They were projects that the Agency always wanted to do but were considered negative priorities due to lack of resources. The projects also increased the quality of Cedefop's scientific work and contributed to at least two of the rooftop objectives of Cedefop's strategic initiative, namely, to be relevant and unique through innovation. However, at the same time, ad hoc projects were affecting regular operations, as they impacted the work programme and staff workload. Contract staff recruited for ad hoc projects had to be supervised by senior staff; in addition, much of the work involved was devoted to non-productive activities linked to administrative issues. It was thus already obvious that the set-up and administrative cost of ad hoc projects was quite high, involving staff in administration, procurement, finance, etc. The low amounts that could be charged to the projects for overhead were not sufficient. However, lessons could be learned by redoing

the exercise. Cedefop's management considered that the upsides were more than the downsides, and wished to continue engaging in ad hoc projects related to the negative priorities identified in the work programme, and exploit synergies, such as the ones with Estonia and the Skills and VET Week. In this context, Mr Siebel asked MB members to endorse the proposed Contribution Agreement 'Skills intelligence Italy and Czechia' with DG REFORM.

The Chairperson invited the Chair of the Staff Committee to comment.

Staff Committee comments

Mr Angelini thanked members for the opportunity to express the considerations of Cedefop staff. There was no doubt about the relevance of ad hoc projects to the Agency's work. However, the initial experiment also raised considerations about the workload. Indeed, as mentioned in the background documentation, Cedefop's expectations were met and often exceeded, in particular concerning workload. Staff had expressed their concerns on workload already in the initial discussions on the Cedefop@50 strategy. They had also expressed doubts on the proposed solution of recruiting contract agents for the work required, which so far had indeed proved largely ineffective. It was not easy to find the right person with the required experience, who would come to Thessaloniki on a short-term contract with no further career prospects. Nevertheless, the Contribution Agreement 'Skills intelligence Estonia' was a positive experience, as it built on Cedefop's long-standing expertise. It was also well-suited for replicability and for taking advantage of economies of scale, as the experience gained with one country could be applied to other Member States. Ideally, it would be good to involve 10 or 12 Member States and include the activity in Cedefop's work programme. The proposed solution of choosing ad hoc projects related to the negative priorities might seem like a good idea in pragmatic terms but further clarifications would be required for its implementation. For example, stakeholders might not be interested in financing a negative priority.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Governments

Ms Stará asked if the additional funds received for the Contribution Agreement on 'Skills intelligence Estonia' and the SLA on Skills and VET Week covered the overall costs of the projects. The group would like reassurance that Cedefop would not be asked to contribute financially, and that staff workload would not further increase with additional ad hoc projects. The Agency's work programme, agreed by the MB, should also not be affected. At the 2024 MB, members had endorsed two ad hoc projects but another two were now proposed. The workload of Cedefop staff should not increase further.

Mr Meert said that the ad hoc projects were endorsed on the condition that they would not affect Cedefop's work programme. The evidence so far proved the opposite. As indicated in the document and confirmed by the Executive Director and the Chair of the Staff Committee there was an increase in staff workload, more burdens, risks for timely delivery, and increased overhead costs. All these had affected the work programme agreed by the MB. The proposal of having a flexible budget for negative priorities seemed pragmatic and innovative. However, it should be tested in practice, as it was unclear whether resources would need to shift from the projects included in the work programme. If there was no additional workload or need for shifting resources,

perhaps the line between the core work programme and ad hoc projects could disappear. In terms of governance, it appeared rather contradictory that the stakeholder-led and demand-driven ad hoc projects related to the negative priorities identified by the MB, which comprises Cedefop key stakeholders. The steering of these projects was thus unclear.

Ms Lindén said that Cedefop should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to explore if the added value of ad hoc projects was bigger than the costs and the effect on the Agency's work programme. The work programme should be safeguarded but she remained positive about exploring further whether the drawbacks were due to the learning curve or if repeating the projects would lead to self-financing.

Employers

Mr Donohoe congratulated the Executive Director for the clear and honest assessment. Without underestimating the workload and the administrative burden, it was not yet clear if the ad hoc projects had an impact on the work programme of Cedefop. The Employers' group was very supportive of this innovative and entrepreneurial approach and proposed to further test it. The replicability was a clear benefit which should be further explored with the Contribution Agreement on Skills Intelligence for Italy and Czechia. The impact on Cedefop's visibility and reputation was a very strong argument for continuing to test ad hoc projects. Indeed, more clarifications would be required on the alignment of the projects with negative priorities, but Cedefop should continue to pursue additional projects.

Employees

Mr Frising said that staff should be more actively involved in the process. Considering the results of the recent staff engagement survey, it was clear that the decisions of the leadership should be more transparent. The group did not question the value of the ad hoc projects. However, it was still unclear why these could not be included in the Agency's work programme. Further concerns had been raised about knowledge ownership and control of the work on skills intelligence. The multiannual financial framework (MFF) was under negotiation. The Commission had requested more ad hoc projects from Cedefop. It was thus a good opportunity to ask for an increase of Cedefop's budget. As an example, it was very concerning that citizenship competence had been identified as one of the negative priorities due to staff workload. Instead of asking the MB regularly to endorse them, ad hoc projects should be included in Cedefop's work programme, and Cedefop's regular budget should be increased. Service Level Agreements should only be concluded with the Member States and the Commission's services but not with private organisations.

Ms Roman welcomed the comments from the Governments' group. As agreed at the 2024 MB, the efficiency and effectiveness of ad hoc projects should be tested further. The document clearly showed that these projects had an impact on Cedefop's work programme, as further negative priorities should be identified. Instead of increasing the number of ad hoc projects, the process should be stopped until the finalisation of the current ones. After assessing the outcomes and lessons learned, members should discuss whether the exercise had been successful and worth pursuing. The Employees' group considered

that ad hoc projects should be part of the regular work programme. For this reason, Cedefop's budget should be increased.

Commission

Ms Geleng said that the ad hoc projects did not seem to have had an impact on Cedefop's work programme, given that its implementation was on track. However, additional workload was indeed an important issue and should be carefully monitored. The exercise was a learning curve for the Commission as well. The Commission trusted Cedefop's expertise and considered that the Agency was the most suitable candidate to do the work for these ad hoc projects. The term 'negative priorities' might not be the right one, as these projects were stakeholder-led activities, with mutual benefits, which could not be done under the current – financial or institutional (SPD) – setting, as they required a more flexible response. A more positive and more open formulation would be welcome. The Contribution Agreement 'Skills intelligence Estonia' and the SLA Skills and Vocational Training Week had added value for all. The Commission agreed to pursue the two additional Contribution Agreements with DG REFORM.

The Chairperson invited Cedefop to respond.

Cedefop

Mr Ranieri said that ad hoc projects were demand driven but not demand dominated. Cedefop was not selling its products at the market. The projects were relevant to the Agency's mission and well within the strategic framework of the Agency's operations approved by the MB. Thematic country reviews and supporting countries in developing specific policy areas were indeed very relevant for Cedefop. However, Cedefop had reduced its efforts in this area because of a lack of budget and staff resources. Ad hoc projects addressed the money issue but not the staff issue. Assessing the workload created by the VET attractiveness study, for instance, was complex, as the equation should also consider the byproducts that had added value to Cedefop's work programme. There was thus a trade-off, but it would be difficult to make an exact assessment at this point in time. However, monitoring and addressing the workload issue was a common target for all.

Employees

Ms Roman said that for the next meeting, the management should prepare a document explaining why ad hoc projects could not be included in the regular work programme. Any additional projects in the form of SLAs or Contribution Agreements should be first endorsed by the MB.

The Chairperson concluded that Management Board members took note of the progress of ad hoc projects and asked Cedefop to continue in an explorative manner. Further discussions would be required to conclude if these projects should be chosen from the list of negative priorities identified and approved by the Management Board in the context of Cedefop's work programme. The Agency should not use its budget to co-finance any ad hoc projects and only cooperate with public sector partners. The additional workload created should be closely monitored. The effectiveness and feasibility of recruiting contract agents to address the workload issue should be further assessed. The management should prepare an interim review on

the lessons learned and present this item in the next Management Board meeting.

11. REPORTING FROM THE EXECUTIVE TO THE MANAGEMENT BOARD *(INFORMATION)*

No presentation.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

12. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

(a) Reporting on Internal Control (ICC) activities *(information)*

No presentation.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

(b) HR-related issues *(information)*

No presentation.

Employees

Ms Roman said that staff's geographical balance remained an issue. Attracting the right experts with a more diverse nationality distribution was very difficult due to the lack of direct flights to Thessaloniki. In addition, the Commission's implementing provisions on teleworking from abroad did not provide enough flexibility. She asked how MB members could assist Cedefop in achieving a better gender and geographical balance of its staff.

Commission

Ms Geleng welcomed Cedefop's comprehensive action plan to improve gender and geographical balance. However, the objective of having less than 50% in any given nationality was not ambitious enough. She asked if the actions to strengthen Cedefop's employer brand were already paying off, in terms of applicants. She also asked if there were any anonymous statistics available on the employee assistance programme, which could serve to improve Cedefop's attractiveness as an employer.

Cedefop

Ms Descy said that one of the actions of the HR plan was to explore how to develop hybrid work further, to provide better work-life balance for staff. However, this had to be done within the constraints of the implementing provisions adopted by the MB. Attracting non-Greeks was one of the issues but retaining non-Greek staff was also a matter of concern. In this context, the target in the HR scoreboard was to not exceed 50% in any given nationality. The MB members, especially from Member States underrepresented in Cedefop's staff list, would be asked to help improve the dissemination of vacancies to attract more applicants from these countries. It was too early to have results from improving Cedefop's employer brand. As indicated in the document, the HR action plan would assessed after the three-year implementation phase. There were no statistics available for the employee assistance programme, or the typology of problems reported due to confidentiality. However, the Commission's proposal to enquire if particular issues reported were linked to Cedefop's attractiveness was welcome.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

(c) Outcomes of the 2025 staff engagement survey

The Chairperson invited Ms Descy to present the item.

(Presentation)

Ms Descy said that MB members and staff had received the results of the 2025 staff engagement survey. The management was now moving to the implementation of the action plan stemming from the survey. The participation rate of 81% was above the average of EU agencies and provided a reliable picture of the situation in the organisation. The total favourable, which was the aggregated measure of how satisfied staff were, was 62%. This was also above average in other agencies. Every dimension of the survey included several questions, which were aggregated to provide a picture of each dimension. The template used was common across agencies, but there were a number of additional Cedefop-specific questions on workload, designed together with the Staff Committee. The workload potentially created by the ad hoc projects was not reflected in the survey. The areas of strength were the job itself, colleagues, working conditions, and flexibility, and the international and diverse work environment. The areas for improvement were transparency in decision-making and leadership, workload, staff involvement, internal cooperation, and sharing of information across departments. The follow-up would include pulse surveys on workload, in cooperation with the Staff Committee. To address the issues in the leadership dimension, small focus groups with a balanced representation of different staff categories from all departments and with different nationalities would work with an external facilitator. The outcomes of the working groups would be used to form the management action plan.

The Chairperson invited the Chair of the Staff Committee to comment.

Staff Committee comments

Mr Angelini said that it was extremely worrying that 47% of staff reported exhaustion and late working hours on a regular basis. Bearing in mind that the survey did not reflect the additional workload for the implementation of ad hoc projects, this was a warning signal that required immediate actions. The low results concerning leadership were connected to the implementation of the Cedefop@50 strategy, which remained unclear to most of the staff.

The Chairperson invited members to comment.

Employees

Mr Frising said that the action plan did not include any action concerning continuous staff training. The results of the survey should not only be compared with those of other agencies. It would be interesting to see how Cedefop's results evolved over the years in terms of the staff satisfaction rate.

Ms Roman said that the group noted with regret the lack of transparency in decision-making and the decreasing staff satisfaction with leadership. Staff should be informed of the direction of the Agency. The MB was also part of the management. The discussions of the Management Board concerning the work programme, the negative priorities identified, and the support on the workload issue should be communicated to staff in a transparent way.

Commission

Ms Geleng said that the participation rate of 81% was impressive. The Commission welcomed the strengths identified, noted the weaknesses, and looked forward to the next steps, especially concerning the participatory actions for the most problematic dimensions of leadership and transparency.

Cedefop's response

Ms Descy said that there was no specific action plan for continuous training. However, if the focus groups identified training as one of the measures, then the management would follow up. Cedefop offered regular training to staff as reported in the document on HR developments. The action plan for addressing leadership and transparency issues would be shaped in cooperation with the Staff Committee.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

(d) General implementing provisions *(if any-decision)*

No presentation.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

(e) Transfers of commitment and payment appropriations in 2025 *(information)*

No presentation.

Members took note of the information.

(f) Annual report of the Chair of Cedefop's Appeals Committee for the year 2024 and follow-up *(information/discussion)*

No presentation

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Dates of Executive Board and Management Board meetings in 2026 *(decision)*

The following dates were agreed:

Dates	**Meeting location**
Executive Board meetings in 2026	
Executive Board meeting on 23 and 24 April 2026	Thessaloniki
Executive Board meeting on 2 October 2026 (preparation for the MB)	Virtual
Executive Board meeting on 3 December 2026	Virtual
Management Board meeting 2026	
Thursday and Friday 8 and 9 October 2026 (with back-to-back event on Wednesday 7 October 2026)	Thessaloniki

The Chairperson concluded that the next Management Board meeting would take place on Thursday 8 and Friday 9 October 2026 in Thessaloniki.

(b) Outcomes of the briefing meeting of 2 September 2025 with (new) MB members and alternates *(information)*

Presented on screen.

The Chairperson concluded that members took note of the information.

The Chairperson thanked members for their participation and for their trust and cooperation over the past two years. He also thanked Cedefop's management and staff for their excellent preparation and smooth organisation of the meetings.

The Chairperson closed the meeting at 13.30.

Signed on 16 December 2025

Tony Donohoe	Jürgen Siebel
Chairperson of the Management Board	Executive Director