

9th Annual Conference of the TTnet network⁽¹⁾

‘VET teachers and trainers: key players for achieving the Education and Training 2010 objectives’

Thessaloniki, 7 and 8 December 2006

Main outcomes

The 9th Annual Conference of the TTnet network took place immediately after the adoption of the Helsinki Communiqué² on the reviewed priorities of the Copenhagen process and this gave an important policy background to the conference objectives which were set as follows:

- to take stock of TTnet’s achievements, including progress countries made in implementing the EU priorities for VET teachers and trainers;
- to define TTnet’s priority actions within the reviewed EU policy framework.

The conference attracted 50 participants from 27 countries, representing governments, social partners, training providers, VET teachers and trainers, universities and VET colleges. The European Commission’s DG Education and Culture and the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs were also represented.

The conference started by examining the place of VET teachers and trainers within EU policy. The Helsinki Communiqué confirms that ‘highly qualified teachers and trainers who undertake continuous professional development’ are necessary to achieve the reviewed priorities of the Copenhagen process as they play a key role in improving the attractiveness and quality of VET systems. This is confirmed by the fact that the main priority areas, as reviewed in Helsinki, are also at the heart of the professional development of VET teachers and trainers:

- improving the image, status and attractiveness of the VET professions;

⁽¹⁾ The Training of Trainers Network – TTnet – is a network of national networks set up by Cedefop in 1998 as a Pan-European forum for key players and decision-makers in the training and professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. Through its activities and cross-country thematic projects on commonly agreed VET priorities, TTnet contributes to the implementation of the EU policy framework for VET teachers and trainers. For more information, consult the networks’ website at: http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/TTNet/

⁽²⁾ http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/vet2006/pdf/Helsinki_Communique_en.pdf

TTnet - Training of Trainers Network

- developing and implementing common tools to increase transparency of VET teachers' and trainer's competences and qualifications;
- strengthening mutual learning by sharing experience and know-how.

TTnet's achievements: progress in implementing EU priorities for VET teachers and trainers

According to the Helsinki Communiqué, 'the diversity of European VET systems is an asset which serves as a basis for mutual learning and for inspiring reforms'; this diversity is accompanied with the development of common tools to ensure transparency and compatibility between VET systems.

Since its inception, TTnet has adopted a similar approach – building common understanding based on the diversity of national practices – with the aim to contribute to a 'European area for VET teachers and trainers'.

The themes selected for debate at the Conference were identified on the basis of how far Member States had succeeded in implementing the EU priorities set in Copenhagen, on the one hand, and the outcome of TTnet own activities on the other. These themes were:

- (a) the competence-based approach as a way to build a coherent framework for VET professions;
- (b) the continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers as lifelong learners.

From the varied practices in the Member States, some common trends nevertheless emerge:

- the way in which growing social demand and increasing labour market needs are affecting activities required from VET teachers and trainers. As Ms E. Tsambazi, MEP, mentioned, teachers and trainers are also called to play a wider social role, for instance in helping people with disabilities, among other groups, to find appropriate training and working solutions. These include assisting disadvantaged groups for an improved and equal access to training and work; helping young people to make the right professional choices; individualising training paths; developing partnerships and networking, including multidisciplinary teams; more coaching guiding and mentoring; and generally *integrating learning with working*;
- the shift towards learning outcomes requires a review of the initial and continuing training available to VET teachers and trainers;

To face the above trends, most participants suggested taking action on the following issues (especially at national level):

TTnet - Training of Trainers Network

- (a) developing competence frameworks and implementing professional standards for VET teachers and trainers;
- (b) offering real training opportunities to VET teachers and trainers to update their skills either in the enterprise, in training organisations and in society in general.

The competence-based approach has become a priority for several countries, notably the newer members of the Ttnet network (Estonia, Greece and Lithuania). This is a fundamental step in acknowledging VET teachers and trainers as fully recognised professions that are:

- based on a set of competences;
- accessible through training programmes leading to diplomas;
- supported by professional bodies.

The debate revealed the many ways of defining “competence”- a composite of knowledge, know-how and wider skills - according to social and economic circumstances. It was agreed that the value of ‘competence’ is strongly linked to professional activities. Competences are derived from action and feed into it: skills can only be assessed in performance.

In most cases, competence-based frameworks are followed by the establishment of professional standards which help raise the profile and legitimacy of VET professions . This goes hand in hand with the fact that VET teachers and trainers are becoming an integral part of the “New Public Management³” which gives emphasis to outcomes and therefore to accountability, evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms.

The “standardisation process” in which more and more Member States are setting up standards and regulatory frameworks – raises two questions:

- (a) How can this process reflect national and professional diversity while contributing to the development of an European framework of competences?
- (b) How can professional standards ensure the value of learning outcomes and thus generate trust?

³ New Public Management (NPM) is a management philosophy used by Governments since the 1980s to modernise the Public Sector. NPM seeks to enhance the efficiency of the public sector and the control that government has over it. The main hypothesis is that more market orientation in the public sector will lead to greater cost-efficiency for governments. The orientation is towards outcomes and efficiency through better management of the public budget. Among the means to achieve this are competition, better organisation of the public sector and emphasis on economic and leadership principles.

Conclusions: TTnet's priority actions within the reviewed EU policy framework and proposed actions

The scale and representative nature of TTnet's membership, its responsiveness and the topicality of the themes on which it is working means that it shall continue to be regarded as a privileged tool for the implementation of the EU priorities for VET teachers and trainers.

The outcomes of the working group discussions highlighted the following priorities and activities in the years to come:

1. Use TTnet's expertise to support and inspire national and EU policy-making

The development of a European framework of competences and qualifications for VET teachers and trainers, in connection with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), is expected to operate as an 'observatory of VET professions'. It will allow the changing roles of VET teachers and trainers in the changing environment of classes and workshops to be studied; it will also allow a better understanding of VET professions.

2. Use TTnet's expertise to promote mutual learning

TTnet should provide the community of VET professionals examples of national/regional practices in VET training for teachers and trainers, presented in a easy-to-read way. In this way, experiences in one country can more easily be applied to another, and TTnet can develop even more as a learning community. Moreover, working methods allowing closer links between clusters of national networks, such as peer learning activities on shared objectives and policy priorities, should be preferred.

3. Focusing TTnet's activity on providing new answers to current challenges facing the VET professions

The thematic projects developed by TTnet, and national practices presented during the Conference, confirmed that policy makers are taking seriously the professional development of VET teachers and trainers as a key factor ensuring quality and attractiveness of the VET systems.

All representatives of the national networks stated that the coherence between the new requirements of the VET professions and the type of teacher/trainer training remains a key issue on the TTnet agenda. If new skills are wanted for the future, if the social responsiveness of VET teachers and trainers has to increase, if closer links between practice in company and theory in VET schools have to be developed, then the question of how to address these challenges in training remains crucial. Focus should no longer be placed only on the educational background and pedagogical requirements of VET teachers and trainers, but also on the new skills needed in relation to social and economic changes. In this connection, mentoring was seen as a means of developing both the initial and the continuing training of VET teachers and trainers. Experienced teachers/trainers,

acting as mentors to new entrants to the profession, could make a valuable contribution to that development. Their involvement would also enable the mentor to reflect on his/her own practice for personal professional development (Action learning Facilitation).

VET teachers and trainers should be considered lifelong learners, and their professional development perceived as a continuum, linking initial and continuous training throughout their careers. For this they must receive the appropriate support.