

**BRIEFING NOTE**

At the interface of learning for employability

Cedefop's achievements in 2013 and plans for 2014

High quality vocational education and training (VET) relevant to labour market needs is a policy priority for the European Union (EU). The economic slowdown has led to worryingly high levels of unemployment and underemployment particularly among young people. Skills, qualifications and employability are central to Europe's economic recovery.

Improving employment prospects for young people and adults through better VET is central to Cedefop's work which focuses on supporting reform of VET systems, empowerment of individuals and understanding better skill demand and supply on the labour market.

Cedefop's role in supporting European VET policy-makers between 2007 and 2012 has recently been evaluated for the European Commission (Box 1). In October 2013 James Calleja was appointed Cedefop Director. In shaping Cedefop's 2014 work programme he has ensured continuity while strengthening support for European and national VET policy-makers.

Modernising VET systems

To provide people with the skills they need VET systems must be attractive, inclusive, accessible and flexible. Under the Copenhagen process for enhanced cooperation in VET and lifelong learning, all 28 EU Member States plus Iceland and Norway have agreed objectives to improve their VET systems. Countries are currently working to meet objectives for the period 2011-14 set out in the Bruges communiqué.

Cedefop has been invited to monitor developments and is currently reviewing countries' progress. In 2013, Cedefop collected and analysed information from countries and will publish a comprehensive **VET policy monitoring report** accompanied by an analysis for each country in 2014 ⁽¹⁾. The report will look at measures countries have taken, for example, to reduce early leaving from education and training, improve systems to validate non-formal and informal learning and to develop apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning. The report will help

policy-makers decide on the next phase of the Copenhagen process.

Box 1: About Cedefop

Cedefop is an EU agency helping design vocational education and training (VET) policies that promote excellence and social inclusion and to strengthen European cooperation in VET. For 2012-14 Cedefop has three priorities:

- supporting modernisation of VET systems;
- careers and transitions, including issues such as continuing VET, adult and work-based learning;
- analysing skills and competence needs.

Cedefop supports the European Commission, Member States and social partners by providing expertise in research, policy analysis and networking. It disseminates information through its website, publications, social media, conferences and seminars.

Cedefop evaluation, 2013

Every five years or so, Cedefop is evaluated on behalf of the European Commission. This latest evaluation covered the period 2007-12. Its main findings are:

- Cedefop was highly successful in implementing the objectives in its founding Regulation.
- Cedefop's work on modernising VET systems and analysing skills is highly esteemed. Cedefop is recognised as a leading centre of expertise worldwide on qualifications frameworks and skills.
- The thematic expertise of its staff is Cedefop's key source of added value.
- Cedefop's impact was mostly evident in its support for the open method of coordination in VET policy.
- Cedefop also had an important impact on strengthening the cooperation between VET policy stakeholders in Europe.
- Cedefop's work did not duplicate the activities of any other actors at European, national or international level.
- Popularity of Cedefop's outputs and download content increased significantly, helped by Cedefop's new web portal launched in 2010.
- Cedefop's events were of high quality and satisfaction of participants was very high.
- Cedefop's operations were cost-effective.

⁽¹⁾ ETF will contribute to the report with the data and analysis of candidate countries (except Iceland).

Common European tools and principles are designed to help make national VET systems more flexible. They aim to improve recognition and transparency of qualifications and make it easier for people to move between different parts of the education and training system (for example between general and vocational education) and across borders. European tools and principles also aim to make all types of learning more visible so, when applying for jobs, people can present all of their skills, including those acquired at work and not just their formal qualifications. Cedefop has worked with the European Commission, Member States and social partners to develop European tools and principles from the outset. Now Cedefop is supporting their implementation at national level.

The **European qualifications framework (EQF)**, established by a European Parliament and Council recommendation in 2008, makes it easier to compare different countries' qualifications. Cedefop is supporting 36 countries that are using national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) to link or 'reference' their qualifications to the EQF. So far, 21 countries have completed the process and the rest plan to do so by 2015.

Interest in NQFs is worldwide. Cedefop's inventory on NQFs, compiled with the European Training Foundation (ETF) and UNESCO in 2013, shows that 142 countries either have or are developing NQFs. Many EU countries have used NQFs to reform their education and training systems. NQFs are based on learning outcomes which assess what someone is able to do at the end of any learning period. This is a more flexible approach than traditional 'learning inputs' where more emphasis is put on where the learning took place and its duration. Consequently, in 2014 Cedefop will examine how NQFs' impact on national policies.

Record numbers of people continue to use **Europass**, a portfolio of documents enabling them to present all of their knowledge, skills and competences in a standard European format and available in 27 languages. Some 75 million people have visited the website (<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu>), since its launch in 2005. The site was renovated in 2013 and had 20.8 million visits. Since 2005, 32 million CVs have been generated online, 8.7 million in 2013. Cedefop, in 2014, will work to link Europass to other job portals and to integrate into the Europass CV a tool for people to self-assess their ICT skills.

Other European tools such as the **European credit system for VET (ECVET)**, which enables training abroad to count towards a qualification in the home country and the **European quality assurance in VET (EQAVET)**, which helps establish confidence between countries in the quality of their different qualifications are being implemented in Member States. Both tools were set up by European Parliament and Council recommendations. Cedefop has been and will continue to monitor progress and provide technical advice on their implementation.

Validating non-formal and informal learning provides people with another route to qualifications. In 2013, the European Commission asked Cedefop to take over updating the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Cedefop will publish the new inventory in 2014 and help update European guidelines on validation. Following its mandate to support implementation of the European Parliament and Council Recommendation on validation, Cedefop will examine validation systems in 33 countries.

In 2014, Cedefop will continue to support the **European multilingual classification of skills, competences, occupations and qualifications (ESCO)**. Cedefop will develop ESCO reference to VET qualifications and improve its coverage of international and sectoral qualifications. Cedefop's support for ESCO is partly based on its work on **learning outcomes** and work to link ESCO and learning outcomes terminology will continue. In 2014, Cedefop will publish its study on how learning outcomes are applied and have influenced education and training policies in 33 countries.

Coherence between European tools, principles and other initiatives is critical to their success. Cedefop will use its extensive expertise of all of these instruments to examine existing and potential links between them. In 2014, Cedefop will prepare several short reports to see how various separate initiatives, for example, the European credit transfer scheme and ECVET can be better linked or combined. Cedefop plans a conference in 2014 to debate its findings. The work will also support the European Commission, which is considering launching a European area of skills and qualifications to clarify the next steps for the European tools and principles between 2015 and 2020.

To make **lifelong guidance** more effective, in 2014, Cedefop will analyse national guidance systems. It will also publish its findings on the role of guidance in

employers' age-management strategies and in supporting labour market integration of immigrants.

Cedefop already publishes **descriptions of national VET systems** for all Member States and, in 2013, produced summary 'Spotlight' versions for several countries. But the process of VET reform has increased demands for country specific data.

Cedefop has responded by developing **statistical indicators** for policy objectives for VET and lifelong learning. Country statistical overviews present the data for each country compared to the EU average, while indicator overviews compare each country's performance for each indicator. In 2014, Cedefop will update the indicators and reinforce other analyses of national VET systems and developments.

Underpinning efforts to improve VET systems Cedefop works with Eurostat and OECD to improve availability and quality of comparable **European and international data on VET**. Being much more diverse than general education in content and organisation collecting reliable and comparable data on VET is more difficult. But data are available. To support the policy process, in 2014, Cedefop will publish results of the latest continuing vocational training survey and adult education survey. Cedefop will also continue to analyse data from the OECD survey of adult skills (PIAAC).

For many years Cedefop successfully managed and coordinated exchanges in the **study visits** programme, which will end in June 2014 as the EU's lifelong learning programme 2007-13 closes. Overall, some 2 513 participants from 34 countries participated and 97% were very satisfied or satisfied with their visit. About 160 study visits will take place between January and June 2014.

Careers and transitions

Systems can be improved, but people must have opportunities to use them. Cedefop's work on careers and transitions looks to empower both adults and young people. As part of the follow up to the Bruges communiqué, in 2014, Cedefop will take stock of **adult and work-based learning and continuing VET** and draft a policy handbook on access to and participation in continuing VET. Cedefop will also publish its findings on how lifelong learning can support adults' career and working life transitions.

Cedefop's study on **professional development of in-company trainers** will feed into guiding principles on the competence requirements and opportunities for

the continuing professional development of VET trainers.

Apprenticeship-type work-based learning can help young people's transition to work. Cedefop supports the **European alliance for apprenticeships**, launched in 2013. Some countries have established apprenticeships, but standards and programmes need to be continuously updated. Other countries are looking to establish apprenticeships, drawing from the experience and good practice of others. In 2014 a conference is planned to 'match' those seeking and those able to provide examples of good practice in apprenticeship.

Analysing skills and competences

Improvements to VET can be better targeted and more effective if there is a clear understanding of labour market trends. Cedefop contributes to the Agenda for new skills and jobs, by monitoring skill needs to improve the match between skill supply and demand.

Cedefop's **skill supply and demand forecasts** allow comparisons across 31 European countries and provide a pan-European picture for the medium term. Data for the latest forecasts are online and extend the time horizon from 2020 to 2025. They foresee a gradual return to job growth in the EU. The key message is that even if economic recovery is robust, Europe still needs to change how it develops and uses skills. In 2014, Cedefop will produce a new forecast that takes a special look at future imbalances in skill supply and demand in the EU. Also in 2014, Cedefop will carry out a **skill mismatch survey** in all EU countries to measure the incidence and causes of skill mismatch.

In 2013, Cedefop incorporated its skill forecasts results into the **EU Skills Panorama**, which provides a central access point for information on skill needs in Europe and includes references to national data. From 2014, working closely with the European Commission, Cedefop will be responsible for both the skills panorama's web development and its content.

In **Skills for a low carbon Europe**, published in 2013, Cedefop discussed how moving to a low-carbon economy can create jobs. To raise awareness of the skill challenges of a greener economy, Cedefop and the OECD will organise the second green skills forum.

In 2012, ETF, the International Labour Organisation, and Cedefop pooled their expertise to prepare a series of **guides on methods to anticipate skill**

needs to help countries develop sound evidence on labour market skill supply and demand. Cedefop will continue this work in 2014. Guides are planned on sectoral approaches to skill needs anticipation, skill mismatch, and surveying employers and enterprises. Cedefop is also looking at ways of using Eurofound's employer survey to collect information on skills. In its home town, Cedefop will continue to support the Municipality of Thessaloniki, in setting up a regional skills anticipation monitoring system.

An efficient European agency

Cedefop's expertise in 2013 was widely used (Box 2). For 2014, Cedefop's work has been carefully planned with its Governing Board, comprising Member State's governments, the European Commission and the social partners to ensure that it continues to provide the expertise and information they need.

Cedefop monitors carefully its resources, using activity-based budgeting and a performance measurement system with indicators on its impact, efficiency, effectiveness and relevance. In 2013, Cedefop's budget execution was, again, above 99.5%. Audits confirmed that Cedefop's procedures and controls were regular and work well.

However, between 2009 and 2013 Cedefop has experienced horizontal cuts and zero-growth budgets. Further cuts in budget and personnel have been requested over the period 2013-17. Cedefop has already cut activities, but reductions have been more than compensated by new demands as for instance regarding the skills panorama or the European validation inventory. Many ongoing tasks have also grown, notably policy reporting and support for European tools and principles. These are substantial tasks requiring medium-term resource commitments. Cedefop's size and the nature of its work leave little room for significant efficiency gains. Financial and human resource constraints in consequence increase the risk that Cedefop will be unable to meet its various requests.

Following the external evaluation, Cedefop's founding regulation is likely to be revised to account for important changes in its work since its foundation in 1975. This reflects the high political priority of VET and the new tasks which indicate that Cedefop is not an agency that is cruising, but one facing growing demands for its expertise.

Box 2: Using Cedefop's expertise

- EU policy documents citing Cedefop's work increased from 169 in 2012 to 173 in 2013. Several expressly acknowledge Cedefop's work and some recommending further use of its expertise.
- Demand for Cedefop's online and hard-copy publications has also increased. Published in nine languages, 69 000 Cedefop briefing notes were downloaded in 2013, an increase of 13% over 2012. Of 857 000 downloads from Cedefop's web portal 636 000 were publications, up 12% compared to 2012.
- Cedefop's social media activities grew rapidly. By the end of 2013 more than 4 300 people followed Cedefop on Facebook (compared to 2 700 at the end of 2012) and more than 2 000 on Twitter (1 300 at the end of 2012) where live tweeting from events was introduced.
- In 2013, Cedefop organised 135 conferences and events attended by 2 578 participants. The quality of Cedefop's events remained on a high level with 94% of participants rating them as good or very good.
- The flagship conference on *Renewing VET to tackle skill mismatch – work-based learning and apprenticeship for all*, which Commissioner Vassiliou attended, was very well received.
- In September 2013 Cedefop organised jointly with the European Parliament and EU agencies ETF, Eurofound and EU-OSHA a seminar on *The European social model – A key driver for competitiveness*.