Outcomes of the seminar on Learning Providers and the Quality of Learning delivery

General conclusions

"Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching" is not exclusively "the main mission of EHEA"[1] as it is also shared by VET

Pedagogical innovation, student-centred approaches, blended teaching and flexible learning pathways are shared priorities by Higher Education (HE) and VET

Learning providers consider quality of education/training as leverage for excellence and permeability between VET and HE ultimately leading to increased employability

Quality is considered time, money and effort-demanding objective requiring long term commitment at policy and providers' level

Common needs and challenges

Renewed importance of the socialization/integration missions of education, training and employment in view of persisting unemployment and the rise of fundamentalism/intolerance. Action and research on training and its links to employment are needed for reinforcing EU cohesion; the world of education, training and work should come together to prepare people for life with active citizenship and shared democratic values (follow up of Paris Declaration)

Serious teacher shortages are a common problem in MS characterised by an ageing work force, degraded social status, increased workload and stagnated (if not lower) remuneration

More evidence on the usefulness of international qualifications, ECTS, ECVET, LOs is needed for a better insight, a shared understanding and a common language

Need to render EU VET Tools better known at grassroots level

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[1] Yerevan Communiqué, May 2015

Need to promote cooperation on the delivery side of VET (i.e. closer cooperation with employers and community whether urban, rural or remote, for greater employability and programme cost/effectiveness; delivery of joint VET+HE diplomas for greater permeability) rather than on the input side as it is currently the case. This cooperation should take place at EU and beyond it levels (i.e. including other continents) and CEDEFOP could support it

Identify and show case good practices on QA and create forums and networks with CEDEFOP support

Need to simplify Erasmus+ procedures judged as complicated and bureaucratic by many providers

Quality assurance-related needs

Importance of defining integrated (quality) frameworks covering both education and training for policy coherence, permeability and mobility between education and training sub-systems building on the work of ESG and EQAVET

Need for devising differentiated quality systems adapted to different types of knowledge transmitted and accommodating different groups of learners including disadvantaged (unemployed, under-skilled, NEETS, migrants and people with a disability)

Need for more inclusive quality approaches that take on board all actors involved: providers, school leaders and teaching staff as well as local stakeholders

Urgent need to address (also) through quality the increasing drop-out phenomenon rethinking suitable learning pathways (included in general education) and pedagogies

Learning providers and internal quality management

Quality assurance to be considered also as management tool for introducing change, innovation and further professionalization and for guaranteeing sustainability within the organization

Quality management applied to all activities in the training process requires the mobilisation of all actors involved in the training chain

Quality in education/training to be linked to improvement and effective improvement plans to be implemented

Leadership/management of schools and freedom of teachers should go hand in hand

Importance of self-assessment/evaluation as a reflective process in which professionals take responsibility of their own assessment and of the evaluation of their organization

Student voice to be sought after and staff to be involved at different levels but with designated responsibility

Promoting consensus from bottom up and not only from top down

In relation to the education/training of people with a disability, their active involvement is necessary and their participation in society is only possible when society has been prepared to accept them; therefore learning providers have to work at both levels: with their learners and their families on one hand and with society/local authorities on the other hand

Providers' accreditation and learning quality

Emphasis on building a quality culture rather than on simply complying with quality guidelines with the active participation of all actors involved (including staff and learners) and all stakeholders (including social partners and enterprises)

Importance of internationalising (also) VET qualifications through cooperation between VET and HE (more exposed to internationalization already) and through "the recognition of European quality assurance mechanisms at international level"[2]

Accreditation is the aspect of quality on which cooperation between VET and HE is developing and the field in which mutual recognition of accreditation decisions among HE institutions is consolidated; in other words accreditation is an appropriate terrain for cooperation and mutual learning between VET and higher education sub-systems and providers

Mutual recognition of accreditation decisions referring to programmes and/or institutions attracts internationally-oriented learners in HE

Joint programmes coordinated and offered by different HEIs necessitate a shared quality assurance approach which leads to their further coherence and integration

The awarding of quality labels could be a significant lever of stimulating internationalization of the EU education offer facing, at the same time, EU's main competitors in this field (Maastricht objective)

Quality in the new forms and contexts of teaching and learning

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[2] VET4EU2 Declaration on the medium-term deliverables of the Riga Conclusions

TEL is already a reality that in the near future will characterize all our learning provision systems

E-learning may be considered an answer to the problem of mass education because of its low cost and world-wide distribution; however the issue of customizing uniform learning material to local audiences' needs and at affordable price, remains a challenge

Blended learning, which is a learning experience that combines face-to-face aspects with on line learning components, necessitates changes in the organizational culture of the provider to cope with specific procedures, on one hand and changes in the design, structure and content of knowledge to be transmitted, on the other hand

Technology can enhance learning but it should not become substitute to the essential actors of teaching and learning, namely the teachers and learners themselves and their live (face-to-face) interaction

Technology should be used as an instrument rather to assist teachers than to replace them. However, the massive use of TEL for (mainly) cost savings purposes, results in teachers' precariat, deskilling, increased workload (20/30 minutes extra per class not remunerated/acknowledged) and in distancing teaching from research while it raises issues of plagiarism, intellectual property and ownership

Technology is a learning tool not a substitute to learning, motivation and personal involvement

Learners need guidance on how to use online learning environments effectively (technological skills), how to regulate their own learning and how to achieve increased maturity and self-regulation (personal attitudes)

E-learning as unique/predominant learning mode impacts negatively on participation, communication and interaction with others, causes dumbing down, further segmentation of training and learning systems limiting their scope to narrow, goal-based information as opposed to deeper and wider knowledge

Peer to peer learning, coaching and mentoring among teachers are effective ways for their further professional development and for updating their ICT-skills

Need to debate on existing approaches to quality assurance in TEL and to redefine as necessary a quality assurance framework specifically conceived for the needs of teachers/tutors/learners and for blended learning environments

Need to show case and define the real added value of blended learning in VET contexts