

Report from the 'Discovering Flexible Pathways between VET and PHE' workshop

Between 5 and 9 December, the European Commission has organised the first European Vocational Skills Week dedicated to improve the attractiveness and image of vocational education and training. As part of the week, EURASHE with colleagues of eucen organised a workshop on the permeability between vocational education and training (VET) and professional higher education (PHE). The workshop especially focused on the challenges and opportunities for students' progressions from VET to professional higher education (PHE). Following are the conclusions from the event, prepared by Alan Sherry, board member of EURASHE and Principal at Glasgow Kelvin College in Scotland (United Kingdom).

1. Key issues/challenges identified

- The importance of developing skills for life, work and learning through VET and HE was highlighted. These were seen as transferable skills to support upskilling/lifelong learning.
- VET and HE programmes should reflect the needs of society not only the market.
- There is a need to increase the number of VET and HE programmes which include sustained work experience as a key component. This would include building periods of 'hands-on' industrial/business placements in courses, shorter programmes linked to work related activities and specific upskilling courses for employees.
- There is a need for new approaches to learning to reflect how young learners learn and how the labour market has changed with a greater emphasis on blended and personalised learning.
- Effective partnerships/collaborative platforms with providers, learners, employers (including SMEs) and civil society are required in order to inform programme design at local, regional and national levels. Strategic direction on the role of these platforms could be provided by the European Commission.
- Collaboration on joint practical projects across providers and employers motivates learners to develop skills, supports permeability and promotes lifelong learning.
- The lack of communication across VET and HE sectors and with employers limited the effectiveness of learning programmes.
- The diversity of the VET and HE sectors can be a barrier to understanding by employers.
- Many teachers do not have sufficient up to date knowledge/experience of the world of work which limits the effectiveness of VET and HE programmes.

2. Summary of solutions and good practices

- Create local, regional and national fora where learners/employers/providers/civic society can work to design qualifications to meet current and future needs.
- Employers should be involved in the design of teacher training qualifications and all teachers should be required to undertake regular work placements throughout their career. This requirement could be included in quality frameworks and teachers' professional standards.
- Collaboration across VET and HE providers, with employers, on joint practical projects motivates learners and supports permeability.

3. Recommendations - main policy responses / actions required and issues that need further attention

- A payroll tax which would be used to support VET and HE programmes;
- Work Based Learning components should be included in all learner programmes;
- Research on how to personalise learning to meet the needs of the individual, employer and society;
- Support local, regional and national fora to design VET and HE programmes to meet the needs of individuals, employers and society.

4. Follow-up:

One/more things on which the participants could engage themselves:

- Developing partnerships which support permeability in collaboration with employers.

One/more things on which participants ask the European Commission to act on:

- Continued support for the key role of VET and HE in creating a fairer and more inclusive society.
- Support for transnational seminars bringing VET and HE providers, employers and policy makers together to influence policy development across Europe.