



CEEMET POSITION PAPER ON THE NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE

On Friday 10th June 2016, the European Commission launched their New Skills Agenda for Europe. The aim of this initiative is to deal with the skills shortages in Europe and the following priority areas from the proposal have specific interest for the MET Sector:

Council Recommendation on **Upskilling Pathways – New opportunities for adults**
The review of the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**
The **Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition**
The **Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills**
Making **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** a first choice

MAIN POINTS

- CEEMET welcomes the objectives of the New Skills Agenda for Europe to ensure that the right skills are available within the EU labour force. We share the Commission's view that there is a need to increase the level of basic skills in Europe, that VET should be a first choice and that digital skills are of crucial importance. However, we have reservations with some of the tools proposed to attain these objectives, e.g. Upskilling pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, formerly known as the Skills Guarantee.
- CEEMET promotes excellence in VET, the increased focus on Science Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) in education, and the acquisition of practical digital skills. STEM is not adequately highlighted in this Communication, which is unfortunate particularly when there is a need for more ICT specialists and for students to acquire better digital skills. Digital learning must be significantly improved in primary and in secondary schools and this requires a good basic STEM knowledge, particularly in mathematics.
- CEEMET welcomes the objective to make VET a first choice for learners, and a choice which leads to prestigious employment. Making VET a first choice must be demand-led through the participation of employers in the design and delivery of VET courses. These are important measures to ensure sufficient and qualified employees for the future.
- While Education and Training is not an area of regulatory competence for the European Union, it is important to share best practice at an EU level and develop new methods of education apart from the status quo.
- The level of basic skills in Europe must be increased and this requires public investment, which is a national responsibility.
- We must ensure flexibility in terms of learning paths and agility in education and training systems to provide for a better match with labour market needs. Proper career guidance at school level, should



help young people to make informed choices about the career paths available to them and how they comply with the needs of companies and the labour market.

- The EQF, in its current form, is not mature enough neither for further expansions and integration with other EU tools, nor for interactions with third countries. The EQF still needs to be further developed and quality assured between the participating countries.

PRIORITY AREAS

The proposed Council Recommendation on Upskilling pathways: New Opportunities for Adults

- CEEMET agrees that action is needed to ensure that people obtain the right basic skills.
- We can see the value of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways - New opportunities for adults. This initiative was formerly known as the Skills Guarantee, during this time we question the term 'guarantee' as it seems to create an expectation on behalf of the citizens which is unsustainable.
- Even though it has been renamed at a meeting of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on 21 November 2016, and a Council Recommendation adopted on 19 December 2016, it seems that the core elements of this initiative remain. Therefore, we stress that learning is a shared responsibility, where the individual responsibility of the employee is fundamental to its success.
- Basic skills are a prerequisite to being able to gain employment, and they should be learned as early as possible, in public state education structures. Member States should investigate the possibility of having particular programmes for teaching basic skills to adults, should they not already be available.
- Moreover, employers' role within this process needs to be further clarified. It is not primarily an issue for employers to provide training for basic skills. On the contrary, it can only be the role of employers to upgrade skills, which needs to be seen as a joint responsibility between public authorities, employees and companies.
- It must be made clear that the financing and responsibility of this initiative must rest with national education systems.
- To obtain employability is more important than to obtain formal qualifications. Trying to equate basic skills to an EQF level, in the case of this initiative EQF level four, is not appropriate, nor in accordance with the needs of the labour market. At EQF level three there are many skills which ensure proper employability of citizens.
- The Upskilling Pathways initiative aims to provide a minimum skills level equivalent to level four of the EQF. In our opinion this is misleading since there are many two years' occupations, in Germany for instance, that are linked to EQF level three such as specialist for metal technology with a specialisation in design engineering, assembly technology or machining technology.
- This initiative is targeted at low skilled workers but the demand for mid-level skilled workers remains broadly stable in comparison with an increased demand for highly-skilled workers and a decline in the demand for low-skilled workers according to CEDEFOP.
- Member States need to be able to upskill adults with low basic skills through existing national structures, e.g. public employment services.
- The Council Recommendation consistently refers to the terms 'acquiring a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills'. There are long standing traditional definitions of what basic skills in



literacy and numeracy are. Similarly, a commonly recognised definition of basic digital skills must be developed in all Member States.

- Acknowledging the fact that many of the low skilled in our societies are at risk of becoming long term unemployed, we should be cognisant of and try to work within the confines of the 2016 Council Recommendation on the Integration of the Long Term Unemployed into the Labour Market. This recommendation, and similar avenues, should be fully explored before we start any new initiatives.

The review of the European Qualifications Framework

- The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is widely accepted as a reference point for developing qualifications frameworks, for implementing the learning outcomes approach, and for improving the transparency and recognition of skills and competences. However, in its current form it is too rigid and needs to be further developed in order to make qualifications more transparent and comparable.
- CEEMET welcomes the continued focus on learning outcomes in the EQF, but it needs to be further strengthened. Learning outcomes should become key indicators for education and training providers and employers in determining the level and content of learning acquired and this information should be easily accessible and transparent. The learning outcomes approach promoted through various European initiatives (e.g. EQF and ECVET) needs to be associated with the development of tools allowing assessment of learning outcomes at all levels of education and training.
- International sectoral qualifications play an increasing role for companies. It is important to ensure transparency and referencing of international sectoral qualifications to the EQF, without having to reference them to each National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
- CEEMET supports proposals by the Commission in the area of updating of national qualification systems to ensure that those qualifications with an EQF level are underpinned by common principles for quality assurance.
- A possible joint governance of the EQF and European Classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) and possibly also the EUROPASS is not supported by CEEMET. These instruments are at very different levels of development and far from ready for such integration.
- While CEEMET supports the promotion of the comparability of qualifications between the countries covered by the EQF and third countries, the EQF is however far from sufficiently mature for such an exercise. Focus and resources should concentrate on getting the comparability right at an EU level first, where many improvements are still needed, before interactions with the NQFs of third countries should be commenced.
- Not all Member States have properly referenced their NQFs to the EQF, and there are substantial variations from Member State to Member State in the referencing of similar qualifications. Through regular updates of NQFs, strengthening of the referencing process and improving the comparability, a better alignment to the EQF will hopefully be facilitated.

The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition

- CEEMET welcomes the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, which is a follow-on from the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs. We particularly welcome the initiative by the European Commission to involve social



partners, and others, in discussions at a national and European level on digital skills and their inclusion in all levels of education and training.

- By 2025, 90% of all jobs are going to require some level of digital skills, so this initiative from the Commission is timely. Member States are invited to develop comprehensive national digital skills strategies by mid-2017 on the basis of targets set by end-2016. However, there are many already existing examples from Member States that can serve as good practice. Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Italy, the UK, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia among others have projects where they are looking into digital skills and curricula development.
- The need for both soft and hard digital skills in Europe is clear, and there is a need to produce more ICT specialists to fill the gap in the labour market. For a start, basic coding should be introduced in every classroom across the EU as well as logical and critical thinking which are also key elements required to ensure a European digital workforce in the future. CEEMET has produced a separate report on digital skills, further reference material is available in this paper.¹
- One way of increasing digital skills in Europe would be through the introduction of Chief Digital Officers in schools. This would give schools the opportunity to stay ahead of the digital curve in relation to the digital education of young Europeans.
- CEEMET feels that a key issue in this area is matching digital skills to the labour market and curricula from professional schools needs to be regularly updated to reflect this. Building coalitions in the Member States to come forward with proposals on skills, funded by the European Union, is a commendable initiative by the European Commission and a first step in this direction. At a national level, our members are well placed to feed into the discussion on national digital skills strategies. E.g. in France there are many studies being carried out in the framework of their project “Industry of the future”, adapting curricula to the expected new competencies needed. A further example is 4CHANGE “Industry 4.0 Challenge: Empowering Metalworkers For Smart Factories Of The Future” where 11 partners from Lithuania, Germany, Latvia and Estonia with expertise in the area of VET and its curricula aim to match skills and labour market needs. The goal is to achieve learning outcome-oriented VET curriculum, applying ECVET, that will cover many areas including the development of digital and entrepreneurial skills.

The Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills

- The Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills has been launched to improve skills intelligence and identify and address skills shortages and support, where relevant, agreements on the recognition of sectoral qualifications and certifications. This will happen in particular economic sectors, specifically in six sectors automotive, maritime, technology, space, defence, textile and tourism. These are sectors who have already participated in the Sectoral Skills Councils and Sectoral Skills Alliance.
- While CEEMET supports the coordination of funding at an EU level, it needs to take into account the different needs of national labour markets and training systems.
- We welcome this initiative by the European Commission which now proposes to involve social partners, and others, in discussions on skills for various sectors. In our opinion, the provision of sectoral training by the social partners and employers’ representation on VET boards could be key elements of this proposal. As mentioned previously, our members are carrying out initiatives at a national level, in their capacity as social partners, to create a framework of skills and training

¹ <http://www.ceemet.org/news/digitalisation-world-work-report>



programs to train people to minimum required skills in writing, reading and digital. E.g. The CLÉA program in France.

Making Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice

- CEEMET welcomes the objective to make Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice. Education and Training in Europe has to change. A total rebranding of VET in Europe is necessary, with adequate investment, and the right leaders in place, ensuring its link to the labour market. VET must be redefined so as to ensure that the future of education is not only seen through the prism of academic Higher Education.
- To ensure a good outcome, it is important to make VET demand-led through the participation of employers in the design and delivery of VET courses. This will thereby enhance its labour market relevance, and contribute to make VET a first choice for young Europeans. However, a lot of the success of such initiatives is linked to the culture and spirit of the training institution and to ensuring the connection with industry and future employers.
- Apprenticeships are an important means in VET, and key to ensuring high levels of employability, but employers must not lose out by training apprentices. This being said, employers recognise that investment can be recovered through semi-productive apprentices during the apprenticeship and fully productive employees, should they be hired directly after.
- The announcement of the first VET Skills Week in December 2016 and the increased cooperation with the World Skills Organisation has helped to showcase vocational studies as a first-class option and increase the visibility and attractiveness of VET. Furthermore, at a national level, as providers of education and training, our membership welcomes this ongoing initiative and will participate actively in it.

About CEEMET:

CEEMET (Council of European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-Based Industries) is the European employers' organisation representing the interests of the metal, engineering and technology-based industries. Through its national member organisations, it represents 200 000 companies across Europe. The vast majority of them are SMEs, providing over 13 million jobs.

