



European  
Commission



# A quick guide to EU action on **vocational education and training (VET)**

*Vocational  
education  
and training*

Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of the following information.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018

© European Union, 2018

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

All images © Shutterstock unless otherwise indicated.

PDF	ISBN 978-92-79-81405-1	doi:10.2767/334449	KE-04-18-279-EN-N
PRINT	ISBN 978-92-79-81418-1	doi:10.2767/464839	KE-04-18-279-EN-C

# A quick guide to EU action on **vocational education and training (VET)**



## The EU and VET

The European Commission works with national governments, employers, trade unions and countries outside the EU to:

- improve the quality of VET training;
- improve teaching and training in the sector;
- make courses more relevant to the labour market.

This role was enshrined in the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration, when EU Member States agreed shared priorities and strategies to promote Europe-wide systems for recognising skills and qualifications.

In delivering on its commitments, the Commission strives to create opportunities for all citizens to gain new skills – whether in school, college, university or training centre settings; as part of apprenticeships and work based learning; or through non-formal or informal learning in or outside of the workplace. This means developing and strengthening the ‘pathways’ to VET. Some of the main VET pathways are presented on the following page.



“At a time when 40 % of Europe’s employers can’t find people with the right skills to fill their vacancies, vocational skills have become one of the best ways to mould one’s career. VET should become a first choice for the young and allow adults to continuously upskill and reskill in line with the needs of the labour market.”

**Marianne Thyssen**

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs,  
Skills and Labour Mobility

## VET pathways explained

### Initial VET

Normally undertaken in school, before entering working life

### Continuing VET

VET after finishing initial education and training – or after entering employment

### Apprenticeships

Formal VET schemes combining learning in education or training institutions with substantial work-based learning in a company, leading to a nationally recognised qualification, based on an agreement between the apprentice and the employer (and eventually with the VET institution), and with the apprentice being paid or compensated

### Non-formal and informal vocational learning

Encompasses the entire range of non-formal and informal learning activities – both more general and vocational

## The EU priorities for VET to 2020

In the Riga Conclusions (June 2015), the EU, candidate countries, EEA countries, EU social partners, the Commission and European VET providers agreed on a set of deliverables for the period 2015-2020:

- Promote **work-based learning** in all its forms, with special attention paid to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous information and feedback loops in initial and continuing VET systems based on learning outcomes.
- Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all** through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making the validation of non-formal and informal learning available.
- Further **strengthen key competences** in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through initial or continuing VET.
- Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school- and work-based settings.**



# New Skills Agenda for Europe

The New Skills Agenda for Europe (2016) puts forward ten key actions in three priority areas.

## 1. Improving skills quality and relevance across Europe:

- Upskilling pathways;
- Key competences framework;
- VET as a first choice;
- Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition.

## 2. Making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable

- Revision of European Qualifications Framework (EQF);
- EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals.

## 3. Improving skills intelligence and information to enable better career choices:

- Revision of Europass;
- Analysis of brain drain;
- Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills;
- Initiative on graduate tracking.

# Today's skills challenges and solutions

## Skills mismatches

40 %

of Europe's employers can't find people with the right skills to fill their vacancies

Europe's highly skilled workforce provides a foundation for our social model and for economic growth. To maintain and improve Europe's skills base, policymakers and employers continually strive to eliminate skills gaps and mismatches, which occur when too many (or too few) people hold the necessary skills to pursue an occupation. Central to the EU response is an online **Skills Panorama** platform, which transforms data into useful, accurate and timely intelligence to help policymakers reach informed decisions on skills. In 2016, the Commission also launched a **Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills**, which gives industrial stakeholders the evidence-based guidance they need to close skills gaps.

## Basic skills

25 %

of European adults struggle with reading and writing, numeracy or basic digital skills

People need basic numeracy, literacy and digital skills in order to find, keep or move to better jobs and play their part in society. In 2016, the European Council adopted the Upskilling Pathways initiative to give citizens who struggle with basic skills an opportunity to strengthen and accredit those skills. Member States will deliver **Upskilling Pathways** including skills assessment, tailored training and recognition of skills through local outreach, guidance and support services.



### *Apprenticeships and work-based learning*

**860 000**

apprenticeships have been offered by stakeholders of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships since its launch in 2013

Apprenticeships and work-based learning are one of the engines for jobs and growth, but too few people are benefitting from these opportunities. That is why the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** aims to boost the supply, quality and image of apprenticeships and mobility opportunities for apprentices. The Commission is also improving the attractiveness of apprenticeships and work-based learning through communications campaigns, e.g. the **European Vocational Skills Week**. In addition, the Commission is introducing new ways to train abroad through the long-term mobility opportunity **Erasmus Pro** (part of the Erasmus+ programme). Finally, through the **Youth Guarantee**, Member States are making efforts to increase the numbers of apprenticeship offers.

### *Job-specific skills*

**46 %**

of companies indicate that vocational skills are most important for future development

Companies need a variety of skills to ensure business continuity and growth. The three skills reported by companies to be most important for their future business development are vocational skills (technical, practical or job-specific skills), customer handling skills and teamwork skills.

## VET is the smart choice for citizens

VET graduates find work more quickly than their peers from general education (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary level) do. They also earn more than people with general qualifications do. So if you, like many people, perceive VET as the ‘poor neighbour’ to other forms of learning, it’s time to think again.

### What’s in it for learners?

Gaining a vocational qualification is one of the best ways to fast-track your career. Not only do the vast majority of vocational students find a job soon after graduating, but their training also has a significant positive impact on how much they earn. In addition, the unrelenting pace of innovation means that upgrading your skills throughout life is all the more vital – as some occupations give way to automation, while others change with new technology.

### Why is now a good time to train?

Those who take advantage of VET stand to benefit from improved career satisfaction by staying ahead of the competition when it comes to technological change. They will also gain access to a growing number of exciting new career openings for high-skilled workers.

### What is the EU doing to boost VET and lifelong learning?

EU programmes and initiatives have supported hundreds of thousands of European citizens to access high quality VET, from Erasmus+ training placements, through European Social Fund projects to Youth Guarantee-backed apprenticeships.



# 60 %

of VET graduates find their first long-term job within a month of finishing their studies (rising to 80 % after six months)

# 85 %

of vocational education and training students are happy with the skills they have acquired

**Job openings for high-skilled people are expected to increase by**

# +21 %

during 2015-2025, while there will be 17 % fewer opportunities for low-skilled workers

**More than**

# 120 000

vocational learners and apprentices and around 20 000 staff benefit from European mobility opportunities each year

**The European Social Fund is investing**

# €6.7 billion

in VET and €7.2 billion in lifelong learning (2014-2020)

One of the European Commission's key priorities for 2015-2020 is to promote and develop VET within Europe. This brochure provides a broad overview of Europe's current VET landscape and how the EU is working to strengthen it. It highlights the importance of VET, the benefits for both individuals and businesses, and the achievements of EU programmes and initiatives within the sector so far.

You can download our publications or subscribe for free at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/publications>

If you would like to receive regular updates about the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion sign up to receive the free Social Europe e-newsletter at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/e-newsletter>



[www.facebook.com/socialeurope](http://www.facebook.com/socialeurope)



[https://twitter.com/EU\\_Social](https://twitter.com/EU_Social)

**#EUVocationalSkills**

**#DiscoverYourTalent**

