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CEDEFOP

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MAIN STORY:

**CEDEFOP'S EUROPEAN
VET OPINION SURVEY**

INTERVIEW:

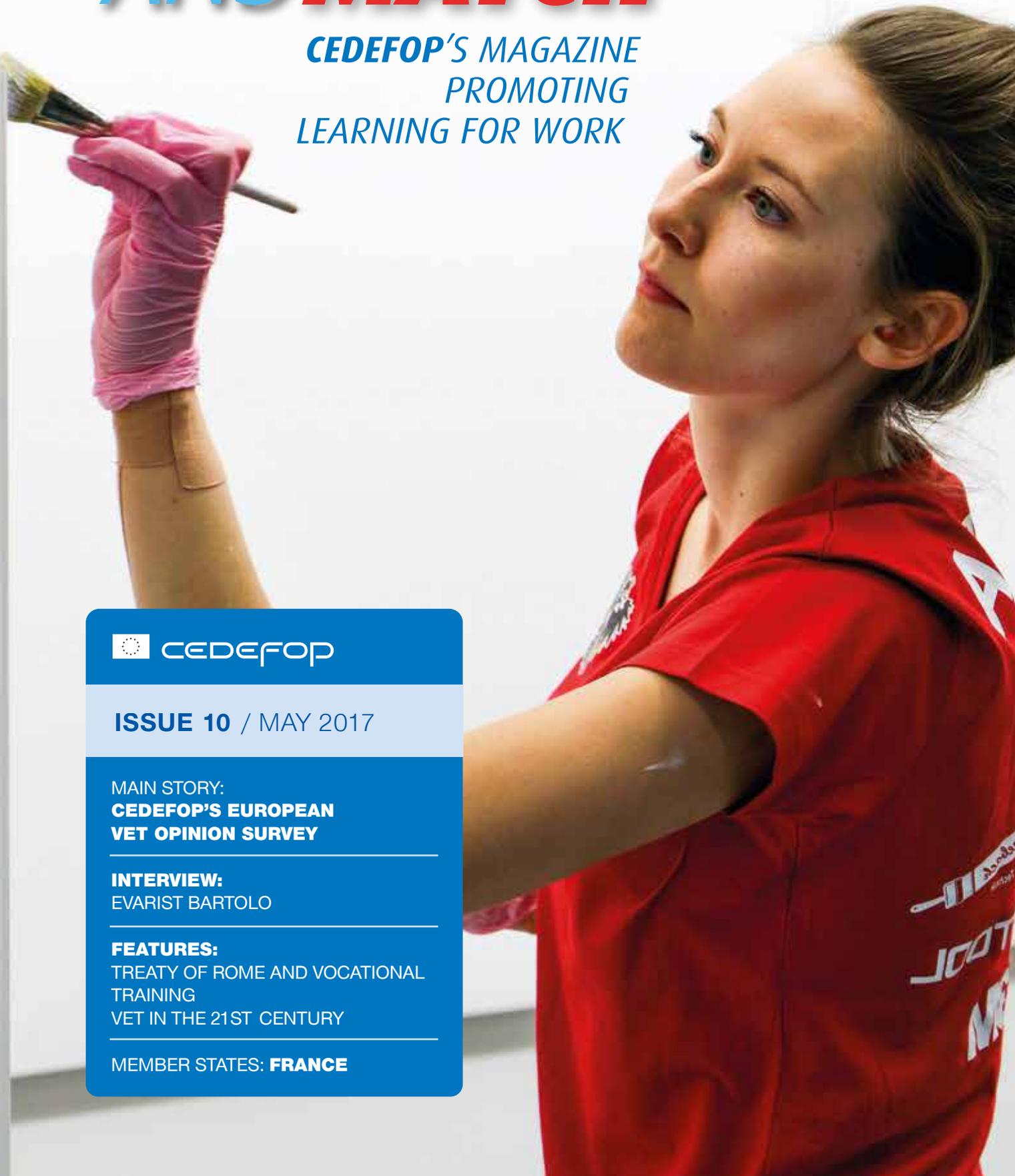
EVARIST BARTOLO

FEATURES:

TREATY OF ROME AND VOCATIONAL
TRAINING

VET IN THE 21ST CENTURY

MEMBER STATES: **FRANCE**



**CEDEFOP**

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training.

We provide information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice.

Cedefop was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75.

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VET: preferred learning experience of the future

JAMES CALLEJA

CEDEFOP DIRECTOR



When your goal is to change mindsets, progress can be a painful exercise



Umair Haque, media guru and innovation strategist, wrote that ‘the purpose of pain is transformation; the price of transformation is pain!’ When your goal is to change mindsets, progress can be a painful exercise.

On the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, it is pertinent to recall that Article 128 triggered a transformation process to create a common European vocational training policy. Cedefop has been a catalyst for change in vocational education and training (VET) for over four decades. Our core business is to prompt individuals to make VET a first choice.

Transformation has its anchor in the past while aspiring to move into a better future. It can be painful when it involves change. Transformation cannot come from simply repeating the same actions; indeed, Albert Einstein believed it a sign of insanity to do the same things over and over but expect different results.

Cedefop’s project on the changing nature and role of VET in Europe is prompting reflection on its future beyond conventional political discourse. It aspires to support different mindsets for VET. It frames VET in a dimension compatible with the challenges of a 21st century labour market and modern modes of learning. Knowledge and skills need to be seen as a bridge to quality of life.

Backed by the results of our opinion survey, we know that VET has a positive image in many Member States. In others, more work needs to be done. But we are on the right track to position VET a step higher in the esteem of employers, policy-makers, social partners and stakeholders who need to attract the right skills for jobs.

European initiatives, such as those on validation, apprenticeships and work-based learning, and skill mismatch, are among Cedefop work themes; it shares findings and evidence with the Commission, Member States and social partners. In doing this, Cedefop is spearheading action in countries that seek to transform VET into the preferred learning experience of the future. ■

Education: investment in human capital



EVARIST BARTOLO

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT, MALTA

”

We pay lip service to the concept of education as an investment and not simply as a cost but do we really believe this? I think not.

A prolific writer with a background in teaching and communication, Malta's Education Minister has 'moderate but deeply held' views, as the biography on his own website states. **Evarist Bartolo** is certainly firm in his vision for education in the modern world, a useful asset while his country holds the rotating EU Presidency in the first semester of 2017. He explains all to *Skillset and match*.

What do you think are the biggest challenges education in Europe faces and what are you doing to address them during Malta's EU Presidency?

We need to do all we can to make education as relevant as possible, to help equip our people with the skills necessary for life and

employability. We need to contaminate education with as much reality as possible. It should be obvious that learning takes place not only in buildings called schools or educational institutions, but also beyond the confines of these buildings. We should open up the formal education experience to real situations in society and at the workplace: schooling and education closed within themselves become sick, feeble, obsolete and irrelevant. The biggest challenge facing formal education at every level is to create a world, where we no longer believe that its role is to drill students to pass tests and exams so that they end up with certifications and qualifications; what really matters is whether our educational experience is built on empowering our students with knowledge, skills, competences, character and the ability to continue learning. Member States and the European Commission

need a paradigm shift in how we look at education and develop skills and talent. We pay lip service to the concept of education as an investment and not simply as a cost but do we really believe this? I think not. We have developed tools to consider as strategic investment what we spend on physical infrastructure, but then we fail to consider as strategic investment the human software to operate this hardware: the money we need to spend on the development of skills and talents. How are we going to translate the *New skills agenda for Europe* and the Council decision on upskilling pathways if funds are available to build state-of-the-art infrastructures with much less importance on investing in the people to run and operate these infrastructures?

How important is vocational education in the current ever-

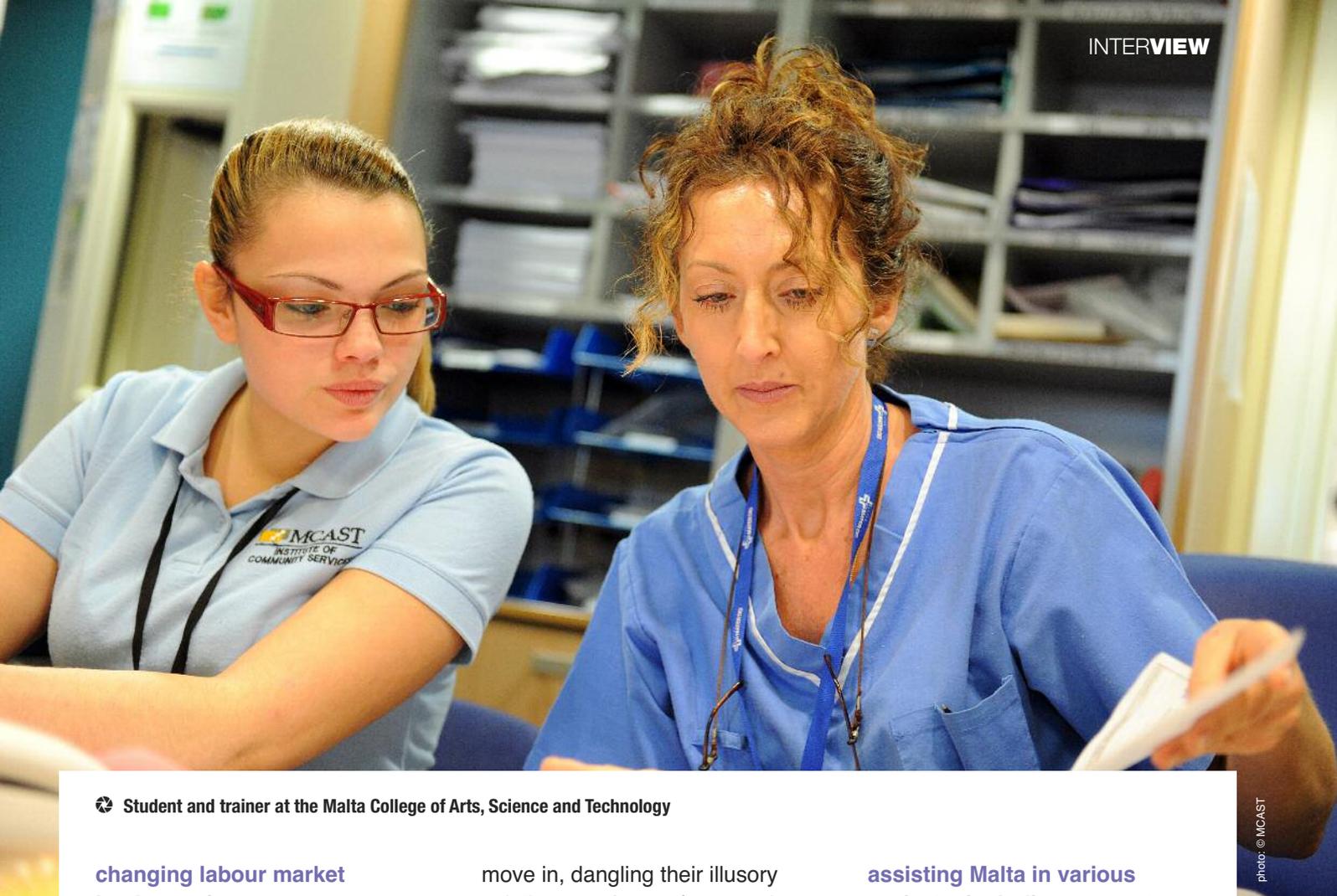


photo: ©MCAST

Student and trainer at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology

changing labour market landscape?

I dislike intensely classifying education as academic or vocational. I prefer to talk about good quality education or mediocre education. We need good quality education that develops the skills and competences of people where they not only acquire knowledge about a particular area but also know how to apply and what to do with that knowledge. So let us have education that is relevant for today's and tomorrow's economy and society, where people will be expected to have new skills and to have the resilience to learn them. Democracy and prosperity depend on our ability to provide lifelong learning to our citizens. When skills become obsolete and jobs die, whole communities go into decline and thousands of people are pushed into social exclusion. If mainstream politicians and parties are not able to engage with these citizens and address their concerns and needs, populists

move in, dangling their illusory solutions made up of economic nostalgia and economic patriotism.

In a recent newspaper article you referred to Cedefop as a success story. What, in your opinion, is its biggest success?

The work being done by Cedefop is precious, as it is evidence-based and open to the diverse realities of Member States. The emphasis on the need to address the skills deficits and to forecast skills mismatches should help formulate realistic policies. For many years we have been stating that spending more on education, attracting more students to universities is intrinsically right. We should go beyond this and demand not simply more education but education of the right kind, relevant for life and employment in the 21st century. Cedefop helps us policy-makers to ground in this complex reality.

In its supporting for Member States, Cedefop has been

assisting Malta in various projects, including a recent review of its apprenticeship system. Has that support been fruitful and are there other areas where Cedefop can help?

This review has been very useful and Cedefop has been an excellent critical friend. We need such collaboration, where Cedefop helps Member States to face our challenges. This is useful for Cedefop as well to ground itself in the different realities of the Member States, instead of being aloof, prescribing abstract approaches and policies. I look forward to having Cedefop producing more practical research on the realities of the Member States, the state of the skills and talent pools in our countries, and the mismatches that we have, helping us forecast the skills we need for the coming years and how to address them. Every country has to find its own way but we can learn from each other with Cedefop playing a coordinating role. ■

TREATY OF ROME:

the roots of today's European VET policy



by **MARA BRUGIA**

CEDEFOP DEPUTY DIRECTOR



'Since the start of my mandate, I have made clear that I wanted a more social Europe,' President Juncker stressed in his 2016 state of the union address. Following a period that centred on addressing economic and employment challenges, current European Union (EU) policy aims to counteract growing social inequalities, the negative impacts of globalisation and technological change, and rising nationalistic trends.

An EU social rights pillar is being prepared to help understand better Member States' employment and social performance. Its skills, education and lifelong learning policy domain complements recent EU initiatives to reduce unemployment and help citizens adapt to changing skill requirements. Vocational education and training's (VET's) excellence and inclusive approach remain important building blocks in this policy agenda.

TIMELESS GOALS

One of the objectives set out in the 1963 Council Decision on a common vocational training policy, reads: 'To broaden vocational training on the basis of a general education, to an extent sufficient to encourage the harmonious development of the personality and to meet requirements arising from technical progress, new methods of production and social and economic developments.' This is echoed in calls in current EU

policy documents, showing how consistent this policy focus has been over the years.

The legal basis of these stated objectives is the Treaty of Rome, which, in 1957, laid the foundation of today's European Union. Among the aims of the Treaty was establishing a common market and free movement of workers. It explicitly included VET, preparing the grounds for a common European vocational training policy (Article 128). The Commission was assigned the task to promote close cooperation between Member States in 'basic and advanced

2017 MARKS:

-  the EU's 60th anniversary: Treaty of Rome, signed by Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands on 25 March 1957, and the commitment to a common VET policy since its very beginning;
-  30 years of Erasmus, now Erasmus+, originally launched as mobility programme for higher education students, it now also builds on other EU programmes and offers various VET and adult learning opportunities;
-  the year of adult learning.





The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market.

Article 128, Treaty of Rome

vocational training' (Article 118). A newly created European Social Fund provided financial support to retrain unemployed people, albeit to a limited extent.

A BROAD TERM

Although the term 'vocational training' was not defined, evidence suggests it was understood in a broader sense than may be thought: *formation professionnelle* comprised initial training, skills updating and retraining, and addressed youth, adult workers and people in 'supervisory positions'.

VET's integration as social policy lever in the Treaty was driven by France and Italy. Italy was strongly interested in a common VET policy to help address its substantial structural unemployment. France's proposal to involve social partners in the negotiations eventually led to the establishment of an economic and social committee under the provision of the Treaty; this institution later proposed setting up a European centre for VET, i.e. Cedefop.

VET had already featured in the European Coal and Steel Community. Its 1952/53 activity report included measures still topical today: anticipating skill supply and demand to inform decision making; removing mobility obstacles; better matching skill supply and demand; and information on VET benefits. While the proposal to harmonise training to ease mobility was later ruled out, the recognition directive and the European qualifications framework make qualifications more comparable. The principles endorsed in 1963 went further, also ensuring transition from general education to VET, progression to 'higher level activities' or career information and guidance.

EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Sixty years after the Treaty of Rome, Europe's challenges resemble those of the past, as do some of

the proposed policy responses. However, in today's globalised and technology-driven economies, change happens much faster. Push and pull factors are becoming ever more complex. Having 28 instead of six Member States allows for shared principles but not for one-size-fits-all solutions. Policy measures and tools have developed further; so has VET that can lead to nearly all qualification levels.

Following a long period within the Commission's education portfolio, VET is again part of its employment and social policy branch. It is seen as powerful lever to help raise citizens' skill levels and boost economic growth. To tap VET's inclusive and excellence potential requires the cooperation of all actors and the right policy mix: education and training, industry, economic, employment and social policies need to complement each other.

On the occasion of the Treaty of Rome's 60th anniversary, the Commission intends to check if today's VET is fit for the 21st century and develop a vision for the next decade. To do so, requires understanding the different concepts that underpin Member States' VET systems and how they have evolved over time. With its analysis of the changing nature and role of VET, Cedefop will contribute to these reflections (see pp. 8-9).

Council Decision of 2 April 1963
laying down general principles for
implementing a common
vocational training policy



The Treaty of Rome, 25
March 1957



Vocational education and training in the 21st century



It's always healthy to examine your old habits and see if they still apply to the society you live in today

Rapid technological advancements occurring around the world are currently transforming the labour market, creating new learning environments in the process. Above all, increased focus on digitalisation is modifying traditional employment, rendering certain jobs obsolete and creating new ones.

Cedefop has brought together a diverse array of researchers and policy-makers to collaborate in a project aiming to offer valuable insights into tackling upcoming

challenges in vocational education and training (VET). The three-year study on the changing nature and role of VET in Europe is expected to conclude in 2018. Initial findings were discussed at a Cedefop workshop in Thessaloniki.

At the helm of the project is Cedefop expert Jens Bjornavold who argues that 'to provide targeted and timely advice at national and European levels, one must take a step back and allow for a historic perspective of VET to take shape.'

VET VS HIGHER EDUCATION

From an organisational standpoint, 3s Unternehmensberatung project coordinator Jörg Markowitsch has found associating the diverse input of an international consortium of five major institutions and more than 100 researchers a demanding task. He notes that the questions emerging from these complex synergies concern the conceptualisation of VET: 'Will VET survive as a concept in the next 20 or 30 years? Or will the line between

VET and higher education get so blurred that there will be no sense in distinguishing between them at all?'

The point is crucial, since vocational-oriented education and training encompasses many different inter-sectoral institutions. This explains why countries not only use different national terms when referring to VET but also have different understandings of its content.

VET is constantly expanding and being integrated in higher learning institutions, a shift which has many fearing it could alter its fundamental characteristics. Mr Bjornavold maintains that the study's preliminary findings indicate the existence of a vocational drift instead, brought about by many higher education institutions adopting VET methods and approaches to develop a closer link with the labour market. 'For example, they use apprenticeships and heighten their focus on practice-based training,' he says, adding that 'notwithstanding convergence tendencies, universities and



photo: © Euroskills 2016

photo: © Euroskills 2016



advanced vocational education will ultimately achieve the balance needed to coexist.'

Demography and socioeconomic fluctuations in Europe are also reshaping the VET sector. Jon Erik Dølvik, from Norway's FAFO Institute for Labour and Social Research, remarks that 'owing to labour migration, one of the most important trends today, the European labour market is undergoing transference of skills and trades.' As VET also concerns equal citizenship, the sector faces the occupational change of integrating a rising number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe, into VET systems (see p. 11).

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome which officially established the European Economic Community. Vocational education and training was featured prominently in this historic agreement (see pp. 6-7). Over the last decade, the European Commission has progressively showcased VET in a

political context. The 2010 Bruges Communiqué had European ministers agreeing with strategic social partners on the adoption of a common approach to maximise VET's quality and status in the Union. This understanding was reinforced five years later with the endorsement of several key medium-term deliverables, known as the Riga conclusions.

'Cedefop's new study is timely from a governance perspective, since at the European level we are starting to think about the post-Bruges framework for EU-VET cooperation,' affirms Joao Santos, Deputy Head of Unit at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Mr Santos expects that evaluation of the intelligence provided by Cedefop's study will be taken into account when defining a new action plan post 2020.

The changing nature and role of VET in Europe is an interdisciplinary project which feeds into and builds on existing Cedefop work, such as the European VET opinion survey and

forecasting skill supply and demand. Cedefop expert Hanne Christensen sees the project as 'a unique opportunity for interaction' and encourages more policy-makers and social partners to 'offer their input into this process, so that all pedagogical, epistemological and socioeconomic outlooks are taken into consideration.'

Cedefop Director James Calleja doesn't shy away from the fact that 'the road to diversification is long,' albeit decidedly 'rewarding'. When it comes to weighing in on the project's usefulness, the Danish Technological Institute's Tine Andersen takes into account her country's century-old expertise regarding VET and observes that 'systems get into habits, the same way humans do; so, it's always healthy to examine your old habits and see if they still apply to the society you live in today.'

The changing nature and role of VET in Europe



Creating collaborative training networks



Some countries, such as Austria, Germany and Switzerland, have developed good alternative and complementary models through collaborative training



coach Italian (Centoform) and Belgian partners (IFAPME and CEFA) to build collaborative training pilots. All participate in developing the system in our countries and also collaborate to produce a methodology guide and a didactic video. These tools will be available by spring 2019.

Now in the diagnosis phase, CoTraiN is trying to formulate its models and needs, in order to carry out tests, in September 2017, in four selected sectors: metal industry, catering trade, administration area and wood industry.

This project has been possible thanks to the Erasmus+ programme and, mainly, to Cedefop, which, in autumn 2015, organised a conference on engaging SMEs in apprenticeship. This provided the opportunity to build such an ambitious partnership. ■

Tackling skills gaps is one of the main objectives of current vocational education and training (VET) policy. Even after dual training, apprentices who apply to different employers from their apprenticeship can have skills that may not fit with the requirements of the new context. Why is this? Mainly because the 'training' company activities and/or its labour organisation do not cover all the activities or skills of the occupational profiles, especially where there are many SMEs.

There are several issues:

- employers cannot find the skills they need to develop their company;
- the young are not fully trained and cannot offer the required skills even though their vocational training is completed;

- training centre staff face difficulties in finding companies fit for dual training and have to compensate;
- policy-makers find it difficult making lifelong learning a fact and driving economic development.

The problem often lies in the 'classic' dual training model: one youth, one company.

Some countries, such as Austria, Germany and Switzerland, have developed good alternative and complementary models by implementing collaborative training, where a company provides vocational training together with one or more firm(s).

The education centre Cepag (Belgium) took on the challenge to bring together German (inab) and Austrian (öibf) partners which will

More information about the project on www.cepag.be (in French).
Click on the CoTraiN logo.



Skills and employment

for refugees and asylum seekers



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Since 2014, the European Union (EU) has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of asylum applications by third country citizens. This is mainly due to the civil war in Syria, which has displaced over 7.5 million people and pushed 5.9 million to become refugees, according to UNHCR estimates. Adding to this flow, large numbers of Iraqi, Somali and Afghan citizens have been forcedly displaced and joined the ranks of people seeking safety along the Eastern Mediterranean migration route. Refugees are also risking dangerous boat crossings to arrive on the shores of Italy from Libya and, increasingly, from Egypt.

Almost 52% of requests processed received a positive response, granting protection status either under the Geneva Convention or equivalent national humanitarian protection. Humanitarian migrants have lower employment levels than third country citizens who have migrated

for different reasons. For example, in Belgium, 47% of humanitarian migrants are employed, compared to an average of 53.9% for all third country immigrants. Similar differences can be found in other host countries, such as Germany (57.6% against 67.7%) or Austria (60.2% against 64.9%).

In October 2016 a joint Cedefop/OECD meeting on upskilling, reskilling and employing adult refugees gathered representatives of the European vocational education and training (VET) community, the UNHCR and the ILO. They discussed how learning could help humanitarian migrants quickly integrate into the EU labour market, while addressing identified national labour needs. The meeting was followed by a survey, jointly implemented by Cedefop and the OECD, on reskilling and upskilling strategies for refugee and asylum seeker labour market integration.

Evidence shows that humanitarian migrants have a structural disadvantage accessing VET tools which could help them integrate more effectively. To address this issue, countries need not only to adapt existing systems and regulations: they have to create new services.

Early, flexible and simplified support is needed, on tailoring courses, language development, guidance, recognition and validation. Fast track procedures can be put into place for quicker integration of individuals with high integration potential. Higher stakeholder engagement and integrating regional networks of employers and third sector associations must also be stimulated. New support programmes should be piloted, monitored and evaluated to assure quality and success. Funding sources should be combined and exploited to ensure appropriate initiative scope and stability. Harmonising and sharing information about humanitarian migrants between countries is also essential to stimulate secondary mobility in the EU.

Cedefop will continue to develop its research activities on this topic and to support the development of Member State and EU capacity to resettle and relocate humanitarian migrants.

EUROPEAN CITIZENS'

opinions

matter



ANTONIO RANIERI

CEDEFOP HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
FOR LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY

In many cases the opinions we collected meet or even exceed our expectations

The first Cedefop opinion survey on vocational education and training (VET) in Europe provides unique new data on how European citizens perceive its attractiveness and effectiveness. We see, for example, that most Europeans (71%) know what VET is and two in three (68%) have a positive opinion of it; finding a job is the number one reason for choosing a VET path. **Antonio Ranieri** heads Cedefop's Department for Learning and Employability, which was in charge of the survey. He speaks of the important role people's opinions can play in designing future VET policies.

Why an opinion survey on VET?

Opinions are no less important than facts or statistics in Cedefop's work, especially when we try to understand economic or social behaviour relevant to VET, or when we try to shape European policies in this area. And yet the opinions of citizens, of end-users of VET policies, currently receive little attention at the European level.

Does this mean that European VET policies do not take citizens' opinions into account?

We honestly believe that VET has improved across EU countries over the past decades, with EU policies to make VET provision more responsive to the labour market or to place VET in a lifelong learning perspective. However, we are aware that

uncertainty and complexity will continue to shape our economic and social environment in the years to come. This is both because of internal education and training systems factors, and external matters largely out of our control: structural megatrends (demographic changes, so-called globalisation, technological advances, digitalisation); and political challenges such as the greening of the economy or the current refugee crisis. If the 'challenge of all challenges' is continuous and accelerated transformation of the economy, VET policies and provision also need to adapt, change, and continuously innovate. In this scenario, ready-made answers do not work. If we want to explore new avenues and understand how European initiatives can support national VET policies, listening to the voice of the

citizens is as important as analysing facts and figures.

What is the scope of the survey?

The survey addressed European citizens aged over 15, resident in the EU. All Member States are covered. The survey focuses on initial VET (IVET), more specifically on IVET at upper secondary education and training, and addresses a wide range of topics in four main areas: citizens' awareness and knowledge of VET; attractiveness of and access to VET; satisfaction and experience of VET users; perceived outcomes and effectiveness of VET.

So, what do Europeans think of vocational education and training?

In many cases the opinions we collected meet or even exceed our expectations. Most of those surveyed have a positive opinion of VET; more specifically, they value VET at upper secondary level as a way to strengthen the

economy, help reduce unemployment, and tackle social inclusion. Almost nine in 10 VET graduates at upper secondary level are happy with the work-related skills they acquired during their studies, and eight out of 10 consider VET in general a good choice both for personal and professional development.

Finding a job is the number one reason for choosing a VET programme. However, there are also cases where the citizens' voice is less clear and rather contradictory. For instance, in spite of the positive opinions on many of the aspects addressed in the survey, most of the respondents still continue to →

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Cedefop's first opinion survey on vocational education and training (VET), produced in partnership with Kantar Public, explores European citizens' perceptions of VET in the EU-28 Member States.



THE SURVEY IN NUMBERS



120 COGNITIVE INTERVIEWS
in **6** EU COUNTRIES to test and improve the questionnaire



30 INTERVIEWS conducted in each EU Member State to pilot the survey

35 646 INTERVIEWS conducted in total –
with up to **2 200** INTERVIEWS in a single country

see VET as a second choice for second-rate students.

How can survey results help to shape VET policies?

As an example, one of the findings from the survey is that one in two people who opted for general education at upper secondary level stated they had little information about VET options. VET is also often perceived to offer few progression opportunities to higher education, while we know that this is not really the case in EU Member States due to reforms in recent decades. In many countries there is still a need to address negative public discourse on VET which tends to reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions. When we look at survey results across countries, we see a strong correlation between the level of information people receive and their participation in VET programmes. The potential of lifelong guidance is not fully used, which suggests that this is an area for further policy developments in the immediate future. ■

photo: © Euroskills 2016



WHAT DO EUROPEAN CITIZENS THINK OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING?



THE POSITIVE



7 in 10 EUROPEANS know what VET is

Finding a job is the **No 1** REASON among Europeans for choosing VET

2 in 3 EU CITIZENS (**68%**) have a positive opinion of VET

87% of VET STUDENTS are happy with the work-related skills they developed

60% of VET STUDENTS found their first long-term job before or within a month of finishing their studies

40% of RESPONDENTS would recommend VET to young people, while only **27%** would recommend general education



THE NOT-SO-POSITIVE



84% of EU CITIZENS agree that general education has a more positive image than vocational education in their country

3 in 4 EUROPEANS think that students with low grades are directed towards vocational education in their countries

1 in 3 EU CITIZENS do not think that VET leads to well-paid or highly regarded jobs

40% of EU CITIZENS were not given information about VET when making a decision about their upper secondary education

1 in 4 GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS were advised against taking VET when making a decision about their education



More power to the individual: career development in

France is pushing ahead with its vocational training strategy to make individuals the main protagonists of their career development.

January 2017 saw the entry into force of the personal activity account (CPA, *Compte personnel d'activité*) as a complement to existing training access measures (training plans, individual training leave, individual *stages*, etc.).



The new CPA groups together three individual accounts allowing for accruing rights:

- the personal training account (CPF, *Compte personnel de formation*);
- the personal account for the prevention of arduous working conditions (C3P, *Compte personnel de prévention de la pénibilité*);
- the citizen's commitment account (CEC, *Compte d'engagement citoyen*) for volunteer activities.

This portfolio of individual accounts is an innovative scheme for employment and training. The accounts it brings together remain independent, but rights accumulated in each of them can now be added to each other through the whole career and converted into hours of training.

Both CPA and CPF are presented as 'universal rights', as they are open to every individual regardless of status – employee, civil servant, job seeker, self-employed (from 2018) – from the outset of working life until death. Individuals can also now decide to start a training course at any moment, using the rights accumulated in all three accounts whatever their status.

An important feature of the CPA is its online services, through which citizens become aware of their training rights and can shape their own learning project. The new tool has been promoted widely by the government in the press and through TV. Its impact will be assessed annually.

Training is a potential response to arduous conditions in the workplace in that it encourages mobility between occupations. It is also a means for holders to build up their skills by doing volunteer work. Through its universal dimension, the CPA becomes one of the main tools for building a 'learning citizen's life'.

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CPA online services



by REFERNET FRANCE
www.centre-info.fr

Shedding light on

Skill

mismatch

in the European
labour market

KONSTANTINOS POULIAKAS

CEDEFOP EXPERT

”

To achieve sustainable skills matching in jobs, both workers and firms must ‘break sweat’

Cedefop’s skill mismatch research and European skills and jobs (ESJ) survey show that European Union (EU) countries with more responsive education and training systems are likely to experience fewer skill shortages and mismatches. Vocational education and training (VET) plays a key role when adult workers find themselves out of work or in search of alternative career options, but education and training systems alone cannot solve the skill mismatch problem. The way labour market institutions work and the overall economic context matter. The role of employers is also crucial, as better managed firms tend to have lower skill shortages. Cedefop expert **Konstantinos Pouliakas** gives an insight into the agency’s work on skill mismatch.

Many have suggested that Europe suffers from skill mismatch. But is it a major problem?

All economies have some form of ‘natural’ skill mismatch: companies’ skill needs change dynamically, existing employees’ skills become obsolete, and many young workers accumulate work-related skills during their transition to the labour market. Countries have varying degrees of skill mismatch, depending on how responsive their education and training systems are and the flexibility and quality of their labour market institutions. What we also see from Cedefop’s ESJ survey is that skill mismatch is often persistent, especially when people’s skills are not effectively used at work. About eight in 10 people who started their job as overskilled workers have remained so over time. This is important because people whose

skills are underutilised tend to have lower wages and less job satisfaction, relative to their well-matched peers. And while fewer employees in jobs suffer from sustained skill gaps over time, there is a strong negative relationship between skill gaps and individual productivity.

Why is it difficult for companies to find employees with the right skills?

Around 39% of EU companies said in a 2013 European company survey that they cannot find candidates with the right skills. But Cedefop’s analysis shows that, for many firms, such difficulties do not necessarily arise because of skills deficits among job candidates. Hiring difficulties are often related to the offer of unattractive jobs or because some firms deploy inefficient recruitment and retention strategies. For example, we know from the UK employer

skills survey, the biggest of its kind, that about a fifth of all vacancies arise due to the inability of firms to find appropriately skilled applicants. The right policy remedy may then lie in supporting employers to improve their product marketing and human resource strategies, and aid access to financing, rather than relying exclusively on VET provision. However, when 'genuine' skill shortages arise and start to inhibit an economy's healthy return to growth, VET becomes crucial.

What can policy-makers do to improve skills matching?

We need to ensure that good research will continue to help us measure and trace the issue over time. The OECD PIAAC, World Bank STEP and Cedefop ESJ surveys have only recently allowed us to make significant progress in understanding the context of skill mismatch. We should also continue to exchange best practice between EU Member States. Cedefop recently collected examples of such skills matching

policies: the inventory has highlighted that the key to skills matching lies in better linking efforts to develop European tools for skills transparency and validation with labour market intelligence, using a range of policy innovations (such as competence-based matching platforms). We must also rely on a partnership approach, in which the education and training system bestows strong key competences, but firms match this with strong commitment to the continuing skill formation process.

What is the main lesson from Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey?

The survey has taught us many things about the way in which skills are continually developed and used in the European labour market. Perhaps more interesting is the revelation that, to achieve sustainable skills matching in jobs, both workers and firms must 'break sweat'! Workers need to invest continuously in their skills development. But it is equally important that they do so in

workplaces where their work tasks evolve accordingly. Unless people's everyday jobs entail a lot of informal learning, space for problem-solving, autonomy and execution of non-routine tasks, the skills of individuals will inevitably stagnate and companies will suffer in the long run. ■

Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey is the first survey on skill mismatch, carried out in 2014 in all EU-28 Member States. Some 49 000 adult employees were asked questions about their skill development, skill needs in their jobs and the evolution of skill mismatch over their career.



Skill shortages and gaps in European enterprises: striking a balance between VET and the labour market



Tackling unemployment while addressing skill mismatch: lessons from policy and practice in EU countries



VALIDATION OF **NON-FORMAL** AND **INFORMAL LEARNING**:

progress

and challenges



Member States are gradually placing validation higher on their policy agendas, but decisive action is still required in several areas

European countries are making progress towards the objective set by the European Union Council of having validation of non-formal and informal learning arrangements in place by 2018. According to Cedefop's 2016 update of the European inventory, which provides an overview of validation practices and was published in March 2017, all 33 countries under study offer the opportunity to individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences validated or are developing arrangements to do so.

The importance of skilled and knowledgeable citizens to Europe extends beyond formal education to learning acquired in non-formal or informal ways. People must be able to demonstrate what they have learned, irrespective of where, to be able to use this learning for further education and training or to advance their career.

It was in 2012 that the Council set the 2018 target for Member States. To assist them in the implementation of the recommendation, Cedefop, in collaboration with the European Commission and in consultation with the Member States, updated the European guidelines and has carried out regular updates of the European inventory.

While the guidelines elaborate on a series of principles from the recommendation, clarifying the different options and the steps countries need to take, the inventory provides an illustration of how those different principles are being implemented nationally.

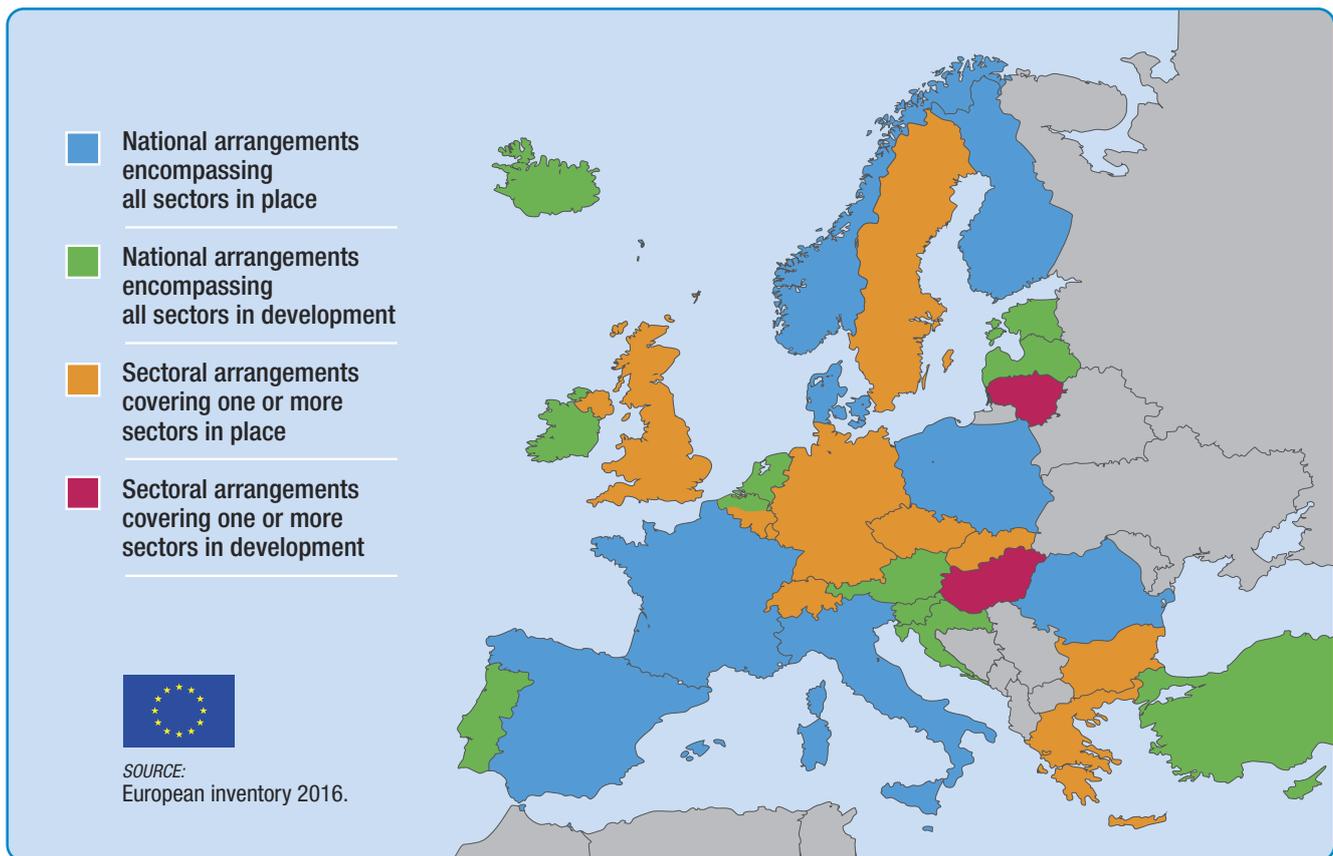
The countries covered by the inventory are the 28 members of the European Union, the European Free Trade Association members and Turkey. The latest update results are in line with the conclusions of the

conference organised by Cedefop in November 2016, in which participants emphasised the need to make validation a reality, moving from policy to practice.

Member States are gradually placing validation higher up on their policy agendas, but decisive action is still required in several areas to meet the principles outlined in the 2012 Council recommendation. Analysis suggests that the main challenges relate to professional development of validation practitioners and prioritisation of disadvantaged groups; these principles exhibit a comparatively low degree and reach of activity.

EUROPEAN INVENTORY ON VALIDATION MAIN FINDINGS

- Validation arrangements are in place in 32 of 33 European countries covered by the 2016 inventory (in Croatia, a validation system is still under development).
- Validation is mostly used for awarding parts of a qualification, mainly in conjunction with credits or gaining exemptions, as well as for accessing education programmes.
- Opportunities are reaching low-qualified and low-skilled jobseekers, but progress is needed in use of validation by disadvantaged groups.
- Data on take-up remain limited. Where they are available, an upwards trend can be observed.
- The four stages, identification, documentation, assessment and certification, are interconnected as outlined in the 2012 Council recommendation. All stages are used in all sectors but in different combinations.



VALIDATION OF **NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING** is the process in which an authorised institution corroborates against a set of relevant standards the knowledge, skills and competences that an individual has acquired outside the formal system. It is a process that makes all learning visible and valuable.

- Greater attention has been paid recently to ensuring national coordinating institutions for validation are in place.
- There is strong variation in the level and nature of stakeholder involvement in validation across countries. Variation in the role of different stakeholders reflects the specificities of the different sectors.
- Countries tend to have several sources of funding for validation. National public funding is the most common.
- Information, advice and guidance are available in most countries but are not always a requirement.
- The number of countries where there is a link between validation and the national qualification framework (NQF) has increased, although the strength of links between validation and NQFs varies across sectors.
- Three in four countries use exactly the same standards for validation as those used in formal education, in at least one subsector of education.

- In many instances, it is possible to identify from a certificate if the qualification has been awarded through validation.
- There is increasing recognition that validation arrangements require specific forms of quality assurance.
- Professionalisation of validation practitioners through specific professional qualifications and/or competence development remained a challenge in 2016.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of countries offering skills audits.
- Commonly used validation approaches are portfolios, a combination of methods, and tests and examinations. More can be done in standardising tools and the use of ICT.



European inventory on validation: 2016 update



European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning



2012 Council recommendation



A GREEK PHILOSOPHY to developing the right skills



Ancient Greece also struggled with the best way to provide people with the skills they needed

Surveys consistently show that around a third of employers cannot find the skills that they need. This is despite a youth unemployment rate in the European Union (EU) of over 18% and rising levels of educational attainment that foresee 40% of 30 to 40 year olds having a university level qualification by 2020.

But discussions about what the 'right' skills are and how to acquire them are not new. Ancient Greece also struggled with the best way to provide people with the skills they needed. A debate about the value of practical skills for the labour market, compared to more abstract thinking, was raging in Athens in the 4th century BC between supporters of Plato's Academy and those of Isocrates' School.

One set of skills in favour in ancient Athens were those of 'philosophy'. This was considered at that time as the ability to form reliable opinions and correct judgements based on the facts of a situation, in order to deal with the problems it posed.

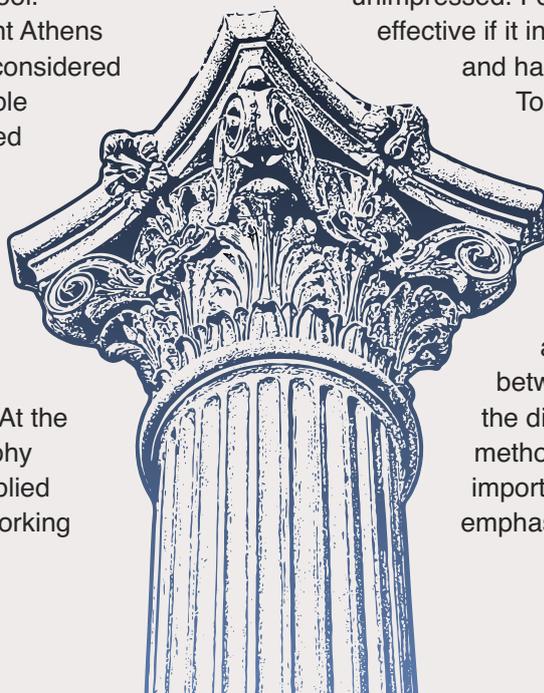
ISOCRATES VS PLATO

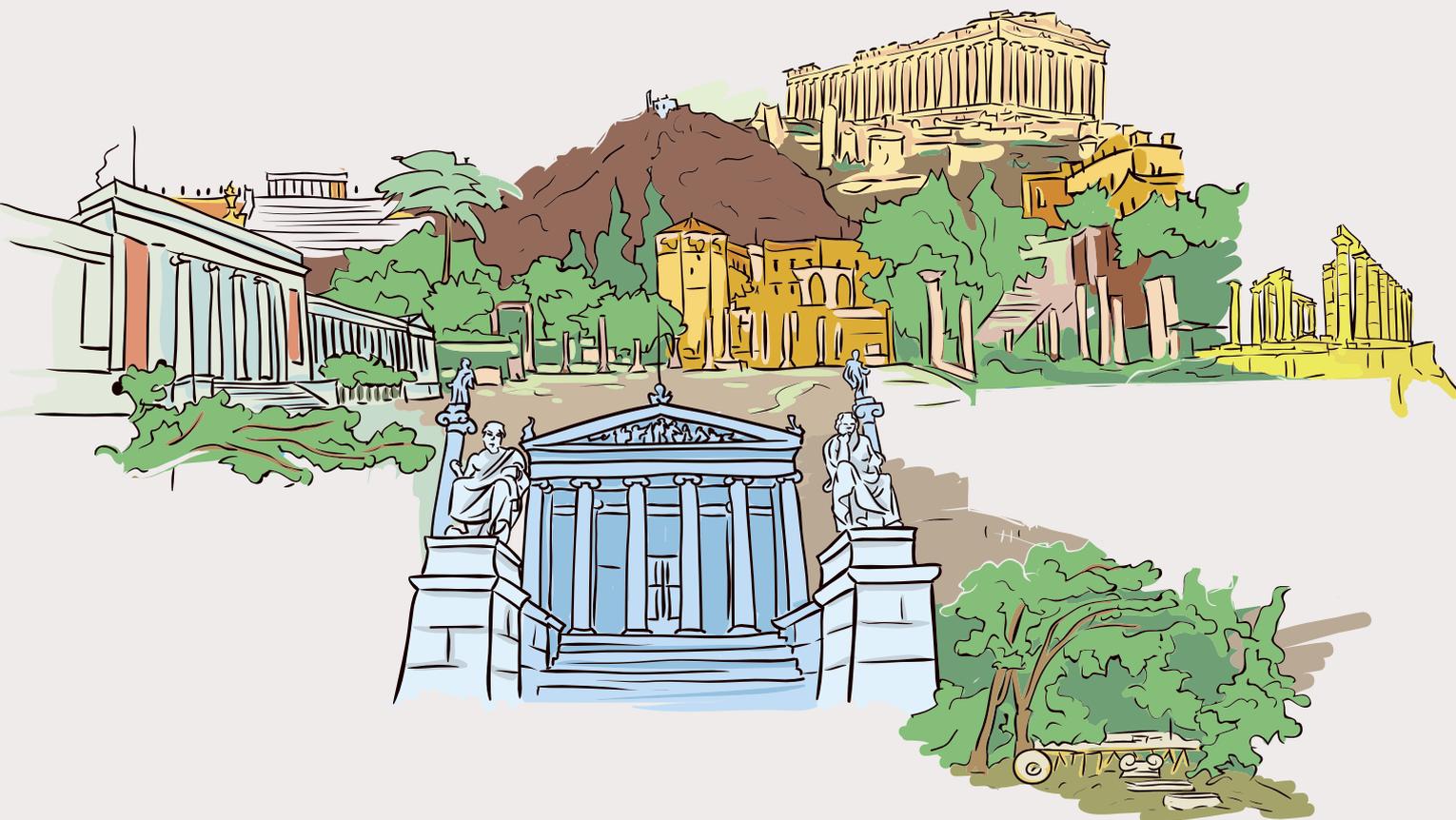
Isocrates (not to be confused with Socrates, the Greek philosopher) founded his own school at which he taught rhetoric, the art of persuasion. At the school, students learned that philosophy was a practical – vocational – skill applied through rhetoric. Having started his working

life as a speech writer for the law courts before becoming an educator, Isocrates saw education as preparation for a useful life resolving practical problems, particularly of governance.

In contrast, Plato was always involved in education as a student and as a teacher at the academy he founded. In Plato's academy, students did not learn to become lawyers or politicians but addressed more abstract notions such as what justice is and ideas about how life should be lived. Plato did not believe that Isocrates taught philosophy at all: philosophy was not a practical skill but the higher realm of ideas that had to be explored to form the right opinions and judgements. Isocrates was unimpressed. For him learning was more effective if it involved a practical activity and had a practical value.

Today, our understanding of philosophy is closer to Plato's ideas, while vocational education and training (VET) seems closer to the principles of Isocrates. But at the heart of the debate between the two schools was the difference in the learning method rather than what was important to learn. Plato placed emphasis on analytical, critical





thinking and reasoning to make better decisions and improve our lives. Isocrates focused on combining natural talent with training, practice and experience to develop skills to be used for the common good.

COMBINED APPROACHES

There are modern parallels. Today there is a debate about which learning route – general education or VET – is better. But in a world being transformed by demography, globalisation and technology, the practical skills taught at Isocrates' school need increasingly to be accompanied by the critical and creative thinking developed at Plato's academy. More than two millennia ago Aristotle, a graduate of and teacher at Plato's academy, but influenced by Isocrates, saw the value of combining the two approaches, arguing that Plato's philosophy is also useful in a practical sense. By encouraging people to question accepted practice, philosophy can influence or even change it through new perspectives and approaches, opening up the mind to new possibilities. But these new insights had to be applied through the practice of wisdom or intelligence.

Despite their differences, both schools

in ancient Athens were very successful. Today, the traditional divide between general education and VET is breaking down. Key skills, such as analytical thinking, problem-solving and effective oral and written communication skills can be acquired both by studying philosophy in an academic institution and at the workplace dealing with everyday situations.

PROVIDING THE TOOLS

In life and at work people need to combine practical and theoretical skills with experience and the ability to think. The key is providing them with the opportunities to acquire these skills through whichever route they choose to learn. And employers, in their search for the skills they need, should not

look just to traditional learning routes but recognise more readily their potential as educators.

How things will develop remains to be seen. Despite his insights, Aristotle did not get the job of director of the academy on Plato's death. Instead, he became the tutor of the future Alexander the Great and later founded his own school, the Lyceum. The rest is history. ■



new

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IN FOCUS

ON THE WAY TO 2020: DATA FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICIES

In its continuous effort to provide European policy-making with sound evidence regarding vocational education and training (VET), Cedefop has selected 36 indicators to quantify key aspects of VET and lifelong learning. The report accounts for the challenges and opportunities arising from recent developments in the international statistical infrastructure and includes updated comparable data from the European statistical system. The indicators were selected based on policy relevance for the Europe 2020 objectives and, while they do not claim to assess national systems, they could be used to reflect on countries' situations and progress towards strategic objectives. The countries represented in the statistical overviews include all European Union Member States, along with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.



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- [■ Briefing note – Qualifications frameworks in Europe](#)
- [■ Spotlight on VET Croatia](#)
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coming up



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IN FOCUS

3RD CEDEFOP BRUSSELS SEMINAR: ADDRESSING AND PREVENTING LOW SKILLS

26 JUNE

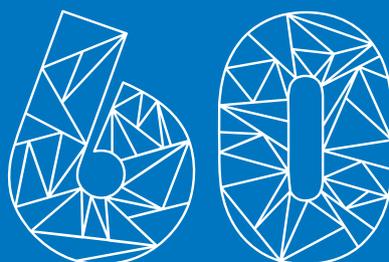
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM



The seminar, organised in cooperation with the Maltese EU Presidency, will serve as a platform for policy-makers, social partners and other vocational education and training and labour market stakeholders to discuss factors which impact on workers' average skill levels: early leaving from education and training, long-term unemployment, ageing, skill mismatch, socioeconomic background, migrant status and gender. Discussions will also focus on how to encourage the development of systems to address low skills, a key objective of the recommendation *Upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults*.

OTHER EVENTS

| | | | |
|-----------|--------------|----------------------|---|
| MAY | 29-31 | VALETTA, MALTA | Meeting of Directors-General for Vocational Training (DGVT) and conference on making VET a first choice: access to skills for jobs, social cohesion and equality, in the framework of the Maltese EU Presidency |
| JUNE | 7-8 | TURIN, ITALY | Torino process conference 2017 on changing skills for a changing world |
| JUNE | 15-16 | THESSALONIKI, GREECE | Cedefop policy learning forum on vocational training for the long-term unemployed: learning from inspiring practices |
| SEPTEMBER | 7-8 | THESSALONIKI, GREECE | Cedefop policy learning forum on setting up and developing apprenticeships in Europe |



ROME

PEACE
DEMOCRACY
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