

## IMPROVING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING THROUGH DATA, ANALYSES AND EXCHANGES

Cedefop continues channelling European experience  
to improve vocational education and training policies

The European Union's (EU's) economic recovery has strengthened; unemployment is down and employment up. But the economic downturn has accelerated long-term trends of globalisation and digitalisation that demand new skills. Forecasts of a smaller available workforce due to demographic trends are also becoming a reality.

Vocational education and training (VET) can help tackle these issues, especially as part of a comprehensive policy approach. For example, without good quality jobs providing opportunities to learn new skills, highly qualified young people entering the labour market will be underused. Promoting equality, inclusion and solidarity requires learning and career pathways to help adults with low levels of education and new migrants to Europe into work; learning must be at the heart of European pillar of social rights.

In 2017, Cedefop's expertise continued supporting the European Commission, Member States and social partners, helping develop VET policies addressing these and other issues. For Cedefop, 2017 was successful, but difficult. For some years, the Agency has struggled to reconcile rising demand for its expertise with the cuts in its resources required of it as an agency at 'cruising speed'. Worries of being unable to fulfil its mandates required Cedefop, in 2017, to implement more negative priorities than in previous years and reduce its activities.

The need to find resources for its activities, prompted Cedefop to review ways to streamline its administrative processes. In anticipation of recommendations from its periodic external evaluation (which began in 2017 and will report in 2018) and to implement European Commission, European Parliament and Council proposals, Cedefop instituted systematic cooperation to share services with other EU agencies and the European Commission. Efficiency gains identified by the review and from

### Box 1: ABOUT CEDEFOP

Cedefop is the European Union's oldest agency. It strengthens European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET), supporting the European Commission, Member States and social partners in designing and implementing VET policies. Over the period 2018-20 Cedefop is working to:

- shape VET by supporting the modernisation of VET systems;
- value VET by empowering people to obtain skills for work and life through VET;
- inform VET to improve VET policies through labour market intelligence.

Cedefop monitors European VET policy developments, provides new knowledge and evidence to support policy-making and implementation. It also acts as a knowledge broker exchanging ideas and stimulating debate on VET-related issues.

All of Cedefop's activities support the European VET policy agenda and include tasks that the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, Member States and social partners have specifically asked the Agency to carry out.

These include reporting on VET policy developments in Member States, and helping devise and implement European tools that support mobility, such as Europass and the European qualifications framework, validation of non-formal and informal learning, European skill supply and demand forecasts, and the Skills Panorama. Cedefop's intelligence, gathered through research, policy analysis and networking, is disseminated through its website, publications, social media and events.

Founded on 10 February 1975 and originally based in the then West Berlin, Cedefop moved to Thessaloniki, Greece in 1995. Cedefop's analyses of VET systems and policies are highly valued. It is recognised as a leading centre of expertise on qualifications frameworks, skill forecasting and skills analysis. To ensure work is complementary and not duplicated, Cedefop cooperates with other European, national and international organisations. Cedefop's 1975 Founding Regulation is being revised.

shared services will be transferred to operational areas, starting in 2018. In 2018, Cedefop's new Founding Regulation should come into force. It will reflect how Cedefop's tasks have changed and broadened despite its cruising speed status. In 2018, Cedefop will continue implementing its plans to help shape, value and inform VET in various ways (Box 1), guided by its motto to **think European and act local**.

## Shaping VET

The concept of shaping VET reflects views on modernising systems and institutions. In 2018, Cedefop will publish its interim analysis of Member States' progress in implementing the **European VET policy priorities** for 2015-20, agreed in Riga in June 2015 by the European Commission, Member States and European social partners. The priorities are: to improve work-based learning; reinforce key competences; strengthen VET quality assurance; improve access to VET and qualifications; and promote professional development for VET teachers and trainers. Cedefop's **ReferNet network** provided information for the analysis and will continue being the main source of information for Cedefop's **descriptions, spotlights and short videos of VET systems**.

To understand the need and potential to adapt in the future, Cedefop's research provides new insights into the **changing role of VET**. Following work on how external and internal factors influence VET, Cedefop published two papers, in 2017, on how definitions and concepts have changed over time. Cedefop's workshop 'VET in the 21st century' discussed changing expectations and a seminar organised with the Estonian Presidency considered the readiness of VET systems for work in the future. In 2018, Cedefop will develop scenarios for the future through the publication of four papers and, supporting the Austrian Presidency, will organise a conference on the future role and nature of VET, in Vienna, as part of the 2018 European vocational skills week.

In 2017, Cedefop extended the online **mobility scoreboard** that helps Member States identify where to invest effort to improve mobility for initial VET learners. In 2018, there will be more country-specific information to support national mobility policy development.

Cedefop has played a major role in developing common **European tools and principles** to help modernise VET systems. The European qualifications framework (EQF) and its related national qualifications

frameworks (NQFs) compare all types of national qualifications with each other and those from other countries. Cedefop will continue helping develop the EQF and NQFs in line with the Council recommendation agreed in May 2017. Some 39 countries are cooperating on the EQF; diplomas and certificates in 20 countries now show the NQF and EQF level they relate to. In 2017, Cedefop updated its analyses of NQF developments in Europe and worked with UNESCO and the European Training Foundation on the third global inventory of national and regional qualifications frameworks, which will be available in 2018. To strengthen comparability of qualifications, Cedefop will publish, in 2018, a study comparing methods countries use to assign qualifications to EQF levels 3 and 4. Cedefop's conference, 'Do NQFs make a difference?' held in November 2017, showed that NQFs are influencing cooperation across sectors and strengthening links with validation and the use of learning outcomes. In 2017, Cedefop published its handbook on defining and writing **learning outcomes** (what someone knows and is able to do at the end of any formal, non-formal or informal learning process). In 2018, Cedefop will support the review of the Council recommendation by examining the strengths and weaknesses of learning outcomes. It will also analyse the impact of policies to promote the use of two **key competences** (languages and digital competence). Cedefop will continue helping develop and implement the European credit system for VET and the European quality assurance framework for VET, based on recommendations of the European Parliament and Council agreed in 2009.

Use of **Europass**, a portfolio of documents showing someone's skills in a standard format, available in 27 languages, continues to rise. Cedefop manages the Europass website, visited by more than 178 million people since its launch in 2005, 25 million in 2017. Since 2005, 106 million CVs have been generated online, 21 million in 2017. In 2018, Cedefop will improve the current Europass web resources. It will also support the European Commission in developing the concept for, and content of, Europass2, a single integrated platform for skills and qualifications.

## Valuing VET

Valuing VET is about employability; enabling citizens to achieve competences and skills required for work and life. Following publication, in 2017, of the findings of its first **opinion survey on VET in the EU**, Cedefop will design a second survey in 2018 that will provide comparative data over time on different topics.

Cedefop's conference on **lifelong guidance** policy and practice, organised with the Estonian EU Presidency, and its workshop on ICT and labour market intelligence in lifelong guidance were part of the 2017 European guidance week. In 2018, Cedefop will update its toolkit for lifelong guidance practitioners and users. Its study on validation in lifelong guidance will examine ways, including ICT tools, to validate skills acquired by non-formal and informal learning.

In 2017, Cedefop and the OECD held an expert forum on **integrating refugees and migrants into the labour market**. It found that many countries are integrating migrants through new features in their systems but there is a need to increase and adapt VET programmes. In 2018, Cedefop will work with the European Commission to develop new approaches to strengthening cooperation among Member States, to improve VET-related policies for integrating refugees and migrants into the labour market.

To promote **apprenticeships** in the EU, Cedefop advocates work-based learning and encourages international partnerships under the European alliance for apprenticeships. At their request, Cedefop reviews apprenticeship arrangements in Member States. In 2017, Cedefop finalised reviews for Greece, Italy and Slovenia and worked with Croatia and Cyprus. Cedefop also published an online database on mainstream apprenticeship schemes in Member States, Iceland and Norway. Cedefop will continue promoting apprenticeships in line with the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships and, in 2018, will publish a cross-national overview.

In 2017, Cedefop published its online VET toolkit for tackling **early leaving from education and training**. A policy learning forum discussed VET's central role in preventing people leaving education early; 15 country reports linked to the forum were published online.

In 2017, to support the New skills agenda and the Council recommendation on upskilling pathways, Cedefop collected examples of work-based learning to teach basic skills. It held the first of several policy learning forums on **low-skilled adults** and early school leavers, and also organised a workshop with the Maltese EU Presidency on addressing and preventing low skills. In 2018, Cedefop will examine, in selected countries, VET and adult learning policies for low-skilled adults and others at risk of economic and social exclusion. To support implementation of the upskilling pathways recommendation, Cedefop will also organise with the European Commission and the

European Economic and Social Committee a policy learning forum on how to engage low-skilled adults in education and training.

In 2017, Cedefop contributed to the Estonian EU Presidency peer review session on **teacher and trainer** professional development in work-based learning. In 2018, Cedefop will organise the second policy learning forum on developing VET teacher and trainer competences VET.

## Informing VET

Informing VET is about providing labour market and skills intelligence to support VET policy development. In 2017 Cedefop published on the Skills Panorama portal the latest data on, and analyses of, **skill supply and demand in the EU**. It will publish new forecasts in 2018, highlighting future employment opportunities, and occupations from which many are expected to leave, creating high replacement needs. In 2017, to increase its evidence on trends in skill supply and demand, Cedefop expanded its **analysis of online vacancies using automated web tools**. In 2018, it will publish its first findings. In September 2017, a Cedefop and Eurostat seminar followed up the 'European big data hackathon', held in March, where teams from 22 European countries competed to find ways to use big data to improve the match between skills and jobs. Eight teams attended the seminar which looked at how to move from prototype ideas to mainstream solutions.

To inform decisions on skills and jobs in Europe, Cedefop operates, with the European Commission, the **Skills panorama**, a web portal of data and information on labour market trends and skill needs across Europe. In 2017, Cedefop placed data and labour market and skills intelligence on many topics, including: assessing and matching skill needs, underskilling, big data skills, and new forms of self-employment.

Aligned with the Skills agenda, Cedefop works, when requested, with Member States to help improve **skill anticipation and governance**. In 2017, events were held in Bulgaria and Greece to raise awareness among stakeholders of the importance of skill anticipation for evidence-based policy-making. In 2018, Cedefop will finalise the country reviews of skills governance in Greece and Bulgaria and work with Slovakia and Estonia. In 2018, Cedefop will also release, on the Skills Panorama, an upgraded **European skills index (ESI)**. The ESI identifies

strengths and weakness in countries' abilities to develop and use their workforce's skills.

Cedefop will continue working with the European Commission, Eurostat and the OECD to improve **VET data and statistics**. Cedefop published updated VET policy indicators in 2017, and will publish findings of the latest continuing vocational training survey in 2018. Also in 2018, Cedefop and Eurofound will finalise the next **European company survey**, which will examine the link between company skills and business strategies, including digitalisation. The survey will be launched in all EU languages in 2019. Cedefop will also build on the results of its **European skills and jobs survey** to investigate challenges for retraining and upgrading skills in new jobs made possible by digitalisation.

## Communication and organisation

Effective **communication** is essential for Cedefop to be acknowledged and valued by stakeholders. Cedefop performance indicators show stakeholders value its work, and demand for its expertise is rising (Box 2). Cedefop's communication strategy is aligned with the European Commission and includes joint activities, such as the European vocational skills week. Cedefop's website provides high-quality data and audiovisual online content; presenting comparative data by country remains a priority in 2018.

Cedefop's magazine *Skillset and match*, published three times a year, showcases Cedefop's work and European VET developments. In 2017, its articles and interviews covered themes such as VET in the 21st century, and skills and jobs for refugees. Brussels-based seminars with EU Presidency countries raise the profile of Cedefop's work among EU institutions and Member States' EU Permanent Representations. To respond to changing stakeholder needs, in 2018, Cedefop will produce a VET yearbook; written by Cedefop researchers, it will pool research evidence to provide more holistic analyses of VET issues.

As a knowledge-based **organisation**, Cedefop's value lies in its human capital. Cedefop's staff survey in 2017 reported a 72% total satisfaction score (the highest of the 20 EU agencies participating in the survey). An independent survey among Governing Board Members reported 77% total satisfaction on the quality of Cedefop's consultation with its stakeholders. In 2018, Cedefop will implement the recommendations of the surveys and will continue promoting wellbeing and dignity at work.

### Box 2: USING CEDEFOP'S EXPERTISE IN 2017

Cedefop's work is widely cited in policy documents of the EU, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, and other international organisations.

Cedefop recorded more than 377 000 publication downloads, including 63 000 Cedefop briefing notes, which are published in eight languages; this shows interest is high in Cedefop's knowledge and insights.

97% of 326 participants rating Cedefop events found them good or very good.

There were 732 media articles on Cedefop's work, including 650 web articles, 61 in newspapers and 19 in magazines; articles appeared in leading European media.

11 070 followed Cedefop on Facebook and 6 300 on Twitter. Facebook followers increased by 18% and those on Twitter by 22%.

In implementing efficiency gains resulting from its administrative review, Cedefop will take every care to continue its exemplary record of compliance with regulations and recommendations by the European Court of Auditors and the European Commission's Internal Audit Service. Cedefop will also continue implementing environmental management systems.

It remains to be seen what new tasks or developments will come from Cedefop's new Founding Regulation and the external evaluation. But, in 2018, Cedefop will continue remaining 'fit for purpose' and committed to strengthening European cooperation between the European Commission, Member States and social partners to improve VET policies.



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