

## I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

## OPINIONS

## EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

477TH PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 18 AND 19 JANUARY 2012

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Post-secondary vocational education and training as an attractive alternative to higher education' (own-initiative opinion)**

(2012/C 68/01)

Rapporteur: **Ms Vladimíra DRBALOVÁ**

On 20 January 2011, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Article 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

*Post-secondary Vocational Education and Training as an Attractive Alternative to Higher Education.*

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 16 December 2011.

At its 477th plenary session, held on 18 and 19 January 2012 (meeting of 19 January 2012), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 208 votes to 7 with 10 abstentions.

### 1. Conclusions and proposals

*Recommendations for the European Commission*

1.1 The Committee calls upon the Commission to encourage Member States to achieve the long-term and short-term objectives set out in the Bruges Communiqué and to **improve the quality and efficiency of VET so as to enhance its attractiveness and relevance**. The social partners at all levels must continue to play an active role in the Copenhagen process and help attain the short-term deliverables.

1.2 The Committee urges the Commission to bring both processes – Bologna and Copenhagen – together in an integrated approach. This synergy will help to provide people with the skills they need to reach their potential in terms of development and employability.

1.3 The Committee considers that the Commission has to be a platform for statistics-based evidence monitoring the situation

in the different Member States and should create a platform to allow the exchange of good practices.

1.4 The Committee welcomes the Commission's endeavour to implement new instruments and launch new initiatives. However, there is an urgent need, first and foremost, to assess what has already been developed, to avoid duplication of tools and to make sure that existing programmes and policies are properly and fully implemented.

*Recommendations for the Member States*

1.5 To set the number of young people getting into university as the only indicator is misleading when formulating education policy as it is only partially relevant to the needs of the labour markets in terms of skills. Education and training systems need to be balanced.

1.6 To implement the Bruges Communiqué and Copenhagen Process effectively and to help achieve the EU headline target of 40 % completion of tertiary or equivalent education, **which includes a higher level of VET.**

1.7 To develop financial and non-financial incentives both for companies, especially SMEs and micro and craft-type companies, in order to increase the attractiveness of both IVET and CVET and mobilise businesses, and for education institutions to cooperate with business.

1.8 To engage in comprehensive promotional activities with a view to systematically raising social recognition of post-secondary vocational education.

1.9 To provide counselling services that are more effective and adapted to the needs of the labour market and of young people, with individual counselling for persons with disabilities. There is an urgent need to expand the mindsets of young people, their families and counsellors who tend to consider that attending university is the key to employment.

#### *Recommendations for business organisations*

1.10 Business organisations in cooperation with other social partners should actively participate in advice and guidance systems since they are the relevant structures for providing information on VET and labour market opportunities. They should assist learning providers in developing work-integrated learning and new methods.

1.11 Industrial sectors and companies have to provide more places for apprenticeships and possibilities for workplace learning and encourage employees to pass on knowledge and experience to apprentices and workplace learners or temporary VET teachers.

#### *Recommendations for educational institutions*

1.12 To develop their trust in creating links with companies and recognise the need for constructive cooperation and the value of experience gathered in external environments.

1.13 To cooperate more closely with sectors of industry and further develop wider range of methods of work-integrated learning, a more flexible attitude towards VET is needed.

1.14 The quality of teachers and trainers needs to be guaranteed. They should be familiar with the changing needs of the workplace. Traineeships for teachers and trainers in enterprises should be encouraged.

#### *Recommendations for the social partners*

1.15 The Committee calls on the social partners' organisations to meet their responsibilities, to be pro-active in the process using all methods and tools for improving the attractiveness of post-secondary vocational education and training (sectoral job and skills councils etc.).

1.16 Social partners at all levels should properly carry out the commitments resulting from their joint working programmes and contribute towards the process of delivering and implementing all EU VET-related instruments at national level.

#### *Recommendations for individuals and Civil society organisations*

1.17 People should be made aware that higher education is not necessarily a guarantee of employment and effective alternatives should be considered. They must therefore recognise their responsibility in making informed study and training choices. Ultimately, they should be confident enough to commit themselves to post-secondary vocational education.

1.18 The preferences of students and the expectations of their families should be set against employers' needs. In future, they could use the newly-developed EU skills Panorama and its predictions of skills supply and labour market needs.

## **2. European political framework**

2.1 In June 2010, the EU Spring Summit adopted its new strategy for growth and employment entitled Europe 2020, underpinned by seven flagship initiatives and strategic documents to strengthen the EU internal market (Single Market Act).

2.2 The key flagship initiative the Agenda for new skills and jobs, which focuses on equipping people with the right skills for employment and matching skills supply with labour market needs, create a strong synergy with other initiatives (Industrial policy, Digital Agenda, Innovation Union, Youth on the Move, European Poverty Platform etc.).

2.3 The Europe 2020 objectives will be underpinned by the proposed **Multinational Financial Framework** (MFF) <sup>(1)</sup>. The budget for Europe 2020 will invest in Europe's brains by increasing the amounts allocated to education, training, research and innovation.

<sup>(1)</sup> A Budget for Europe 2020 COM(2011) 500 final Part I and II from 29.6.2011.

### 3. Vocational education and training - current developments and challenges

3.1 Development of the European labour markets is currently driven by financial and economic crises, globalisation, demographic pressures, new technologies and many other factors.

3.2 The five horizontal objectives set out by the Europe 2020 Strategy include:

— An objective of a 75 % employment rate for 20-64 year-olds.

— An educational attainment target tackling the issue of early school leavers by reducing the drop-out rate from the current 15 % to 10 %.

— The desire to increase the proportion of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education from 31 % to at least 40 % in 2020.

3.3 The Copenhagen Declaration of 29 and 30 November 2002 launched the European strategy for enhanced cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET), commonly referred to as the '**Copenhagen Process**'.

3.4 A strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (VET 2020) was adopted by the Council on 12 May 2009.

3.5 The EC Communication 'A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) to support the Europe 2020 strategy'<sup>(2)</sup> outlines key elements to be pursued to relaunch the Copenhagen process and highlight the key role of VET in lifelong learning and mobility.

3.6 A strong commitment was written into the Bruges Communiqué adopted in December 2010 by the EU Ministers for Vocational Education and Training and European social partners. The Communiqué reviews and sets out the following priorities for EU cooperation in VET up to 2020:

— Development of post-secondary VET and VET at higher EQF levels,

— Permeability and open pathways between VET and HE,

— Policy document on the role of vocational excellence for smart and sustainable growth.

3.7 To build on the commitment from Bruges the Commission is developing an Agenda for excellence in vocational education and training focusing on both Initial and Continuing VET. The process should be finalised by the Council conclusions (end of 2012).

### 4. Evidence base for the process of enhanced cooperation in VET

4.1 Cedefop's forecasts of future skills needs show a greater demand for medium and high-level qualifications up to 2020, and a decreasing demand for low-skilled workers. However, the European population of working age still currently includes 78 million low-skilled persons.

4.2 Cedefop's fourth report on vocational education and training research in Europe entitled Modernising vocational education and training provides an evidence base for the process of enhanced cooperation in VET. It also sets priorities for reforming VET aimed at contributing to the EU's strategy for growth and employment.

4.3 Modernising VET is urgent with regard to increased global competition, an ageing population, pressures on the labour market and the objective of aiming to improve social cohesion in Europe.

4.4 Cedefop also addresses the question of how to improve the image and attractiveness of VET. The general impression emerging from the analysis of indicators related to VET attractiveness in the EU is negative. Some research has made it possible to identify the main groups of determinants influencing the attractiveness of education pathways:

a) Schooling content and context: selectivity of pathways, reputation of institutions, tracking or programmes,

b) Students' educational and labour-market prospects: access to further studies (in particular at tertiary level), employment prospects,

c) Economic factors: financial aid or tax incentives or tuition fees.

<sup>(2)</sup> EC Communication COM(2010) 296 final.

4.5 In its publication *A bridge to the future*, Cedefop also focuses on the progress made in developing and implementing common European principles (guidance and counselling, identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning) and instruments <sup>(3)</sup> (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass). Those principles and instruments aim to help enhance the mobility of employees, learners and trainers between the various education and training systems and between countries. Their development and implementation encourage the evolution in learning outcomes in all types and levels of education and training to support lifelong learning.

4.6 The new Cedefop research paper <sup>(4)</sup> addressing vocational education and training at higher qualification levels in 13 countries and six sectors shows that views and conceptions of VET and EQF at levels 6 to 8 are influenced by the national contexts.

4.7 The European Training Foundation (ETF) highlights a strong need to provide information on the various professional sectors and a need for evidence-based policies to link the education sector with the professional sectors. To increase the attractiveness of post-secondary VET, the ETF recommends that:

- degrees be recognised through a close partnership with the corporate world;
- post-secondary VET (or higher vocational education) be integrated into the tertiary education system;
- education options and stepping stones to lifelong learning be created;
- international partnerships for higher vocational education be created;
- there should be an educational mix of 20 % lectures to 40 % tutorials and 40 % workshops;
- teaching staff should comprise both academic staff and experts from the corporate world.

<sup>(3)</sup> EQF (European qualification framework), ECVET (European credit system for VET), EQAVET (European quality assurance reference framework for VET), EUROPASS (a portfolio of documents to support job and geographical mobility).

<sup>(4)</sup> Cedefop Research Paper No. 15 Vocational education and training at higher qualification levels.

4.8 A study commissioned by the EC focusing on the identification and analysis of future skills needs in micro and craft-type companies <sup>(5)</sup> recommends that training programmes should integrate future trends and developments in skills needs more than is the case at present. More work-based learning programmes and means of recognising practical knowledge gained informally need to be established, including at European level.

4.9 The OECD informal ministerial meeting on VET which took place in Copenhagen in January 2007 recognised the dramatically increased profile of vocational education and training and launched an analytical work leading to a final report in 2010, 'Learning for jobs' <sup>(6)</sup>. A follow-up policy review focusing on post-secondary vocational education and training 'Skills beyond School' was launched at the end of 2010.

## 5. VET from the labour market viewpoint

5.1 Demographic changes, combine with a forecast need for more skilled workers, mean that Europe is faced with a shrinking workforce and labour shortages in some sectors despite the economic crisis.

5.2 The structural shortage of skilled labour in the EU is a fact. For European businesses, the immediate consequences of these shortages are missed opportunities for growth and increased productivity. The lack of skilled labour will be one of the main obstacles to economic growth in coming years.

5.3 The greening of jobs and the development of the 'silver economy', including social and health care services, generates opportunities to create new, decent jobs for all working age groups as well as to improve the competitiveness and growth potential of the entire European economy. It also represents a higher demand for new professions, updated and upgraded skills.

5.4 Vocational education and training can contribute to achieving the above-mentioned Europe 2020 head target: 1) by providing opportunities to progress from vocational education and training to specialist training and higher education, 2) by developing VET at higher levels of the EQF based on sound VET systems at secondary level, 3) by contributing to the provision of adequate arrangements for the validation and accreditation of non-formal learning outcomes at all levels and 4) by developing work-linked training which involves adults in ensuring the success of young people.

<sup>(5)</sup> Final report Identification of future skills needs in micro and craft (-type) enterprises up to 2020, FBH (Forschungsinstitute für Berufsbildung in Handwerk an der Universität zu Köln, Januar 2011).

<sup>(6)</sup> OECD review on Learning for Jobs project (focused on VET), <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/63/43897561.pdf>.

5.5 To enhance the competitiveness of European businesses and companies, it is crucial that Europe has a mobile labour force equipped with a set of skills and abilities that corresponds to current labour market demands. Businesses need transparent and comparable qualifications, irrespective of the way in which skills have been acquired.

5.6 Building credit and qualification systems on the actual outcome from learning will make it easier to assess what abilities an individual possesses. This will contribute to a better matching of supply and demand in European labour markets. Employers do not reward qualifications, they reward performance. Likewise, the education system should increasingly reward the actual outcome from studies rather than for instance the number of weeks a course runs.

5.7 Opportunities to progress from VET to Higher Education (HE) are important and could be facilitated by improved transparency regarding the outcome. EQF could prove to be a useful tool for increasing permeability between VET and the HE credit system, since it is working as a converter of learning achievements into units at the corresponding qualification level.

5.8 Post-secondary VET cannot be placed in a grey area between upper secondary VET and higher education. Post-secondary VET is strategically important within the EU 2020 Strategy as a way of making VET a more attractive career option for young people and supporting upskilling and higher levels of attainment. From the perspective of small and medium companies in Europe that some progress has been achieved towards making VET and higher VET more relevant and attractive. Nevertheless, more needs to be done at all levels – European, national, regional, local and sectoral – to diversify VET provision of at higher levels, improve permeability, reform VET systems and create financial incentives, in order to stimulate both companies and individuals regarding the provision and take-up of higher VET.

5.9 Quality and excellence in VET is decisive for making VET more attractive. However, high quality VET is not cheap and SMEs have specific challenges: 1) they are the largest providers of IVET, 2) they need to update the skills of all their workers, not just the best qualified. Regarding the latter, 'on the job training' is crucial for upgrading skills in SMEs.

5.10 Cross-border learning mobility is a key area which business has long supported, notably for young persons in VET and apprenticeships. Europe currently still has an insufficient level of mobility as regards VET employees, learners and teachers. Their mobility can only be improved by having a good knowledge of at least one foreign language.

## 6. What are the reasons for the lack of attractiveness of VET, and particularly post-secondary VET

6.1 The term higher education is frequently used as a synonym for academically-oriented, university education. Higher education is often contrasted with vocational training – with the latter understood as being at a lower level.

6.2 Policies to develop and expand higher education have not paid enough attention to VET. Vocationally (or professionally/labour market) oriented education and training is already an important although 'invisible' part of higher education.

6.3 VET is highly diversified across Europe. A diversity of institutional solutions creates confusion. In some countries it makes little sense to refer to it as a system.

6.4 National education and training systems themselves are somewhat opaque and there is a low level of permeability between the different learning pathways. Post-secondary education and training is provided by a wide variety of providers: universities, tertiary VET institutes, secondary schools, adult education institutes, social partners, private firms.

6.5 VET qualifications are sometimes difficult to understand and not easily recognised in other countries. VET programmes do not match the Bologna three cycle models (Bachelor, Master, Doctor). There is still not a clear vision of how and at what level to classify vocational qualifications in the NQF or the EQF.

6.6 There is no linkage between the qualifications and skills obtained from study and national occupational classification systems.

6.7 The image of industry itself is undermined because of the vision the media often convey and because of the current crisis. This leads to an increasing mistrust of companies in Europe.

6.8 Stigmatisation and low social recognition of VET graduates deters a substantial number of young people from committing themselves to this training path.

6.9 A low level of numerical literacy in primary school leads to a reluctance on the part of young people to focus their career plans on STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) or on practically-oriented studies.

6.10 The low ability to respond to constantly - changing skill needs caused by rapid ICT-driven changes and the gradual shift towards a low carbon economy.

6.11 There is a perceived lack of educational and labour-market prospects in such areas as: access to further studies, in particular at tertiary level, employment prospects, earnings, job satisfaction and finding a good job-education match.

6.12 There is a lack of information and assistance for individuals and their families when the future career of young people is discussed for the first time. Parents' life experiences and career paths are often the main drivers for the final decision about the choice of school and future job. Career guidance is too often fragmented, reactive and far removed from practice.

6.13 In some Member States, there is a lack of financial and non-financial incentives for employers provided by governments to invest in and undertake VET.

6.14 The framework for cooperation between business representatives and educational institutions is insufficient for the purpose of designing programmes which balance theoretical learning and professional skills. A lack of trust in schools or universities for creating links with companies still persists. Within educational institutions there is a low level of recognition of the value of experience gathered in external environments.

6.15 The current labour force is ageing. Many countries are facing a shortage of teachers and trainers in VET institutions. Some teachers and trainers also lack recent workplace experience.

6.16 The role of VET in combating social disadvantages is underestimated. The disadvantaged are more likely to leave school early.

6.17 VET, and particularly post-secondary VET, suffers from gender stereotypes which affect career development.

6.18 Cross-border learning mobility is a big problem in the field of VET and apprenticeship. Europe still has an under-developed level of mobility among VET learners and teachers.

6.19 Better language skills will be needed in order to make mobility both possible and worthwhile.

6.20 Tertiary education is not perceived sufficiently as a global challenge, especially post-secondary VET. Participation in the global circulation of knowledge should be supported.

## **7. How can post-secondary education and training be made more attractive**

7.1 The percentage of students in universities can no longer be seen as the sole measure of modernity and progress. Universities alone cannot ensure economic growth and social progress. All alternative path ways need to be identified and promoted.

7.2 The Copenhagen process, which aims to ensure the transparency and quality of vocational qualifications, needs to be closely connected with the reform of higher education. Bringing both processes – Bologna and Copenhagen – together in an integrated approach is critical for the successful and sustainable integration of young people into the labour market.

7.3 The reputation of industry in Europe needs to be improved. A fresh approach to industrial policy is necessary, because of its important contribution to growth and job creation, and the development of innovation. Such an approach would support industry by placing the emphasis on sustainability, innovation and the human skills needed to keep EU industry competitive in world markets.

7.4 Services are fundamental for Europe's economy. They account for 70 % of the EU's GDP and about two-thirds of total jobs. Nine out of ten new jobs are created in the services sectors. They provide new opportunities from the post-secondary VET perspective.

7.5 A Europe which is facing labour shortages in many professions needs to focus more on how to balance education and training systems, and on finding the right mix between general, vocational and academic education. Post-secondary VET demonstrates the challenge in this respect. Its aim is to make the fullest use of the work place as a valuable learning environment.

7.6 Qualification frameworks can be very useful to VET systems. Qualification frameworks have the potential to unify the VET system, increase transparency, so that the value of different qualifications can be more clearly recognised by students, employers and other stakeholders facilitate lifelong learning and improve access to higher education for all. The work undertaken on qualification frameworks has resulted in a

renewed debate on the profile and status of vocational education and training – on how to define and understand VET.

7.7 A real sense of cooperation between educational institutions, business representatives and SMEs must be developed on the basis of mutual trust and understanding. The EESC believes in the newly-proposed 'Knowledge alliance' <sup>(7)</sup>, i.e. ventures bringing together business and the education/training sector to develop new curricula addressing innovation skills gaps and matching labour market needs. In this respect the Commission's proposal to create the first VET-Business Forum in 2012 is a promising new initiative.

7.8 Industrial sectors and companies themselves have to invest in in-house training, offer more possibilities for apprenticeship and workplace learners, allow interested and suitable employees to become on-site tutors for apprenticeship and workplace learners, further the interest of suitable employees to work as temporary VET teachers, allow VET studies for employees during working hours and cooperate with educational providers in developing courses in line with the market's demand for certain skills.

7.9 Educational providers should further develop methods of work-integrated learning, (i.e. the majority of learning), and not just apprenticeships, should take place at the work place, have a more flexible attitude towards VET (more flexible learning methods), include the use of ICT in all VET and cooperate closely with industrial sectors in order to identify new learning needs.

7.10 As careers diversify, effective career guidance is becoming both harder and yet more essential and demanding. People, particularly young people, need to have a clear picture of their studies and prospects. The old idea that initial vocational training would prepare students for a single occupation throughout their working life is no longer sustainable. Career guidance needs to be coherent, well-resourced, proactive, objective and well supported by evidence. Particular attention should be paid to counselling provided to persons with disabilities; such counselling must be individually tailored, taking into account different types of disability and the possible resulting mobility restrictions and obstacles to obtaining certain qualifications.

<sup>(7)</sup> Flagship initiative Agenda for new skills and jobs.

7.11 The role of the family cannot be underestimated. Information, advice and guidance (IAG) should also be focused on the family, because parents and family members often play a decisive role in a person's choice of study plans and career. More information, awareness-raising and evidence-based policy is necessary to illustrate the labour market opportunities associated with higher VET.

7.12 Nevertheless, VET provision needs to balance student preferences and employers' demands. Student preferences are relevant, but such preferences on their own are usually not enough. Employers' needs are important, but it is not always easy to establish what those needs are. The balance also depends on the funding provided by government, students and employers.

7.13 Equal treatment for all students has to be guaranteed in all learning pathways, as does equal access to financial subsidies for housing, transport, health care and social security schemes.

7.14 The quality of teachers and trainers is important; they need to be familiar with the workplace. To tackle these problems flexible pathways of recruitment should be encouraged, designed to facilitate the entry of those with industry skills into the workforce of VET institutions. Programmes to increase teacher mobility need to be developed.

7.15 The role of the social partners is vital in making VET more relevant and flexible. In order to promote excellence in VET, the social partners should be involved more in the design and implementation of VET policies, notably curricula, to ensure that the skills taught are relevant for the labour market. The facts prove that those countries which coordinate the links between schools and the labour market and include labour market actors in the monitoring, supervision and certification of vocational skills and qualifications are generally regarded as successful. The EESC has already highlighted many times the role of Sectoral and Transversal Employment and Skills Councils <sup>(8)</sup> in carrying out analyses of quantitative and qualitative labour market needs and has welcomed the joint efforts of the European Social Partners to focus on education and training in their joint work programmes <sup>(9)</sup>.

<sup>(8)</sup> EESC Explanatory Opinion, OJ C 347/1, 18.12.2010.

<sup>(9)</sup> The framework of actions for lifelong development of competences and qualifications (2002) and Autonomous agreement on inclusive labour markets (2010).

7.16 The crisis has shown that many smart and effective solutions for maintaining jobs and launching different education and training schemes have been developed at company level. The EESC opinion on crisis exit strategies<sup>(10)</sup> contains a number of 'good practices' in this respect.

7.17 Learning mobility helps to enhance employability, particularly that of young people, through the acquisition of key skills. The EESC therefore welcomes the ambitious but politically necessary benchmark proposed by the Commission on learning mobility. This specifies that at least 10 % of EU graduates from initial VET should have a study or training period abroad. It should improve VET mobility in quantitative and qualitative terms by putting VET and higher education on an equal footing.

7.18 The recent Green Paper on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications<sup>(11)</sup> launched a public discussion on how to reduce and simplify the restrictive regulations governing professional qualifications in order to improve the functioning of the Internal Market and boost cross-border mobility and business activity. The success of the newly-proposed European professional card will depend primarily on mutual trust and cooperation between the Member States.

7.19 The EESC is convinced that it is essential for all teachers and trainers, in particular in VET, to have the high quality language skills needed to promote content and language integrated learning (ET 2020). The EESC supports the activities provided in this area by the Business Platform for Multilingualism<sup>(12)</sup> and the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism aimed at securing lifelong language learning opportunities for all<sup>(13)</sup>.

7.20 In the twenty-first century it is absolutely crucial to eliminate the stereotypes that already exist in primary schools and to promote equal opportunities for men and women at all levels of education and training, supporting cultural measures to direct young women more towards scientific and technological studies, as mentioned in the European Pact for Gender Equality<sup>(14)</sup>.

7.21 In the last decade, countries have developed and implemented various cost-sharing approaches. This has changed the balance of contributions made by states, employers and individuals. The financial measures include: training funds, tax

incentives, vouchers, individual learning accounts, loans and saving schemes. They aim at increase private investment and participation in ECVET.

7.22 The biggest financial contribution from the EU budget to investing in people comes from the European Social Fund (ESF). In order to raise skills and to help tackle the high levels of youth unemployment in many Member States the actions currently supported by the Leonardo programme will be reinforced in the next MFF period<sup>(15)</sup>.

## 8. Proper implementation of European instruments and principles at national level

8.1 With the launch of instruments aimed at increasing European cooperation in VET, it has become clear that more cooperation between the different structures is needed to improve the functioning of the structures themselves.

8.2 The Copenhagen and Bologna processes cannot continue to develop independently from one another. Interoperability and comparability between the respective instruments should be increased. It should be recognised that the Copenhagen process is less advanced, with the proper functioning of ECVET<sup>(16)</sup> and EQF still several years away.

8.3 EQF, ECVET, EQAVET should help to promote learning at all levels and in all types of education and training. The EQF should be rated at levels 6-8 in the NQFs on a par with higher education. For ECVET, the credit points system for VET, coherent and convergent implementation is required with the ECTS<sup>(17)</sup>, as ECVET is not an operational system yet.

8.4 European instruments can be complemented by national instruments (e.g. National Qualification Frameworks) or adopted in national rules (e.g. on national credit systems) when it proves necessary in the scope of national reforms. More interaction is needed between the different levels (EU, national, regional).

8.5 Progress has to be made in implementing an 'Erasmus for Apprentices'. This programme will enable VET to be considered on an equal footing with higher education initiatives and will thus contribute to promoting VET. It will give an

<sup>(10)</sup> EESC Own Initiative Opinion, OJ C 318/43, 29.10.2011.

<sup>(11)</sup> COM(2011) 367 final, Green Paper – Modernising of the professional qualification directive, 22.6.2011.

<sup>(12)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/business\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/business_en.pdf).

<sup>(13)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/doc5080\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/doc5080_en.pdf).

<sup>(14)</sup> 3073rd EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS Council meeting, 7 March 2011.

<sup>(15)</sup> A budget for Europe 2020 - COM (2011) 500 final of 29.6.2011.

<sup>(16)</sup> European credit system for VET – helps validate, recognise and accumulate work-related skills and knowledge.

<sup>(17)</sup> European Credit Transfer System.

international dimension to VET, tackle its lack of mobility and reinforce the visibility and attractiveness of post-secondary vocational education.

8.6 However, the Commission should hold back on creating new instruments before the potential added value from existing instruments has been assessed. Communication and cooperation

within and between existing instruments needs to be improved for their objectives to be translated in practice.

8.7 The EESC has drawn up a number of quality opinions on the relevant instruments – on ECVET <sup>(18)</sup> and EQAVET <sup>(19)</sup> and on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the Member States <sup>(20)</sup>.

Brussels, 19 January 2012.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Staffan NILSSON

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<sup>(18)</sup> EESC opinion, OJ C 100/140, 30.4.2009.

<sup>(19)</sup> EESC opinion, OJ C 100/136, 30.4.2009.

<sup>(20)</sup> EESC opinion, OJ C 162/90, 25.6.2008.

## APPENDIX

to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

The following amendments, which received at least a quarter of the votes cast, were rejected in the course of the debate (Rule 54(3) of Rules of Procedure):

**Point 1.10**

Amend as follow:

*Business organisations should actively participate in advice and guidance systems since they are the ~~most relevant structures~~ key actors for providing information on VET and labour market opportunities. They should assist learning providers in developing work-integrated learning and new methods.*

**Voting**

For:	81
Against:	100
Abstentions:	20

**Point 1.18**

Amend as follow:

*The preferences of students and the expectations of their families should be encouraged to converge with ~~set against~~ employers' needs. In future, they could use the newly-developed EU skills Panorama and its predictions of skills supply and labour market needs.*

**Voting**

For:	75
Against:	127
Abstentions:	18

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