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## FLEXIBILITY IN VOCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION – LEVEL 4 AND HIGHER

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### Policy contribution

The Associations of VET providers combined in VET4EU2 want to contribute to the policy development in VET that is underway in evaluating and revising the Bruges communique. An important issue is the flexibility and connection between VET and higher (vocational) education. We recommend the following points as ingredients for shaping more flexible learning pathways, connecting VET and HE (as part of a 'column for professional education').

1. There is a need for more possibilities for people (regardless of age) after completing a level 4 program (the minimum entry requirement to higher education Institutions) to get a degree at levels 5 and higher.
2. In general there is a need to investigate routes that will allow youngsters having a level 4 VET qualification to enter HE with as less as possible thresholds, directly or after taking bridging courses (no more than 1 year). This means that a VET program should have specific modules to prepare students for HE - and that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must be aware of these students as possible 'clients'. HEIs delivering professional higher education can offer those bridging courses - in collaboration with and support from VET institutions. A flexible first semester or year can facilitate the transition from level 4 VET to HE.
3. Good practices within the EU and third countries of flexible learning pathways for VET students transferring to HE could be exploited and adapted to the needs of individual Member States. It should be proposed to the DG EAC for VET/AE to make this the main subject of a VET Business Forum, having in mind that employers are involved in VET programs. Also the success of 'practical instruments' like apprenticeships, internships, projects as part of those programs are depending of the input of 'players' on the labor market. As input for the Forum, the Associations are offering to prepare a draft document, with concrete ideas for 'The Column of Professional Education in 2020'.
4. Closer cooperation between institutions offering Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET) and Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE) is imperative according to the outcomes of the CEDEFOP study on the role of level 5 in countries having a NQF. This means that transfer from HVET to SCHE and from HVET or SCHE to Bachelor's programs (or other qualifications at level 6 of the EQF) can be more and more effective and attractive if a clear and coherent credit transfer system is in place.
5. The Associations can work together to bring together all parties involved to reach a mutually agreed on methodology and the instruments to be used towards accomplishing this very important task.
6. An impetus must be given for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. All Member States have agreed to have at National level by January 2018, a mechanism for the recognition and transferring of Learning Outcomes acquired via non-formal and informal learning routes. The collaboration of all parties involved in HE, VET, HVET and SCHE, is imperative to facilitate successful and timely implementation of the mechanism for the recognition and transferring of LOs via informal and formal education. Quality Assurance issues, level of the LOs, Certification, Validation of providers are some of the key elements to address and agree on. The necessary instruments and tools are already available, (NQF, EQF, ECTS, ECVET, QA, etcetera) so there is no need to reinvent the wheel just to find ways to implement them and putting them into use.
7. A flexible learning pathway can provide the opportunity to the learner at any time and moments to decide about the next step, when, how and why.

8. The use of online resources (open, free, MOOCs) can contribute effectively and efficiently to develop the flexible learning pathways. Facilitation, mentoring, guidance and mentoring will be needed to exploit the potential gains of these resources.
9. Flexibility is also a need for achievement of level 4 programs. For this the European member states shall accept recognition of prior learning and cumulative learning pathways i.e. with help of ECVET as possible pathways without any restrictions. This does not only give a benefit to the target groups but also for enterprises and society in total by acting against 'dropping out of the system', by producing qualified workforce and opening new pathways for an inclusive future.

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*The abbreviation VET4EU2 refers to the 4 networks that are mainly working in secondary VET and the two networks that work primarily in Higher Professional Education.*

*VET4EU2 could be heard as "VET for you too", thus indicating that VET is an honorable educational route for all. It also refers to the route from VET to Higher Education, which should be considered as an equal option compared to the route through General (secondary) Education. Using this abbreviation is also an indication of the strong will to work together on the issues above.*

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Note: In a formal sense the above policy contribution is not endorsed by all the VET4EU2 providers associations. EVTA was not able to endorse this at this time but might endorse this at a later stage. It is endorsed by all other associations

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