

Paper supporting the Osnabrück Declaration

VET4EU2

November 2020

As VET4EU2¹, the platform for European VET associations, we wholeheartedly support the signal that is being sent out by the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training by having the Osnabrück Declaration in these uncertain times. Such a ‘wake-up call’ to work on the short-term deliverables at an international, national, regional, and local level is crucial for the period from 2021 till 2025.

The Declaration is closely linked to what we as VET4EU2 with our members in Europe and in many other countries consider to be of great importance in order to use the VET sector for the recovery of the economy, society and the communities in all those countries.

We support the Declaration being aligned with other initiatives by the European Commission as the Pact for Skills and the Recommendations for Vocational Education and Training which provides the opportunity to focus on actions that will be supported by the VET providers.

This paper therefore emphasizes our role by providing a range of possible actions and commitments such as stronger cooperation with the European Commission, Cedefop, ETF and other stakeholders in supporting the implementation of deliverables from the perspective of the VET providers.

The actions are grouped on the basis of the four objectives, in addition to a list of more general options. After discussions with other organizations, the actions will be elaborated in more detail.

A number of actions can be supported in future projects, to be developed by our associations. In doing so, consideration will be given to how to make use of Erasmus+ and other options offered in a European context.

In view of the strong international character of VET4EU2, our associations representing members and their partners in 36 countries worldwide, we do not only want to call on the members of our associations and their partners to discuss the objectives and the actions to be linked to them, but also on contacts outside the European Union. This we consider necessary for various actions, given the way in which VET has taken shape in the whole world and is now being used to restore the effects of COVID-19.

¹ VET4EU2 currently consists of six European associations of education and training providers: EfVET, EUpVET, EVBB and EVTA as associations for the VET system as well as two European associations from higher education: EUCEN and EURASHE.

Our general aims

Given the complexity of the current situation, broad support is needed, to convert the proposed ‘short-term deliverables’ into concrete actions. Education ecosystems cannot change overnight, so effective actions directed and harmonised with multiple stakeholders and approaches – top to bottom as well as bottom to top – are crucial.

VET4EU2, with its experts and practitioners, is a vital stakeholder on the pathway to the development of and implementation at the grassroots as well as regional, national and EU level. VET is one of the main tools for inclusion and as such one of the main drivers to prosperity.

As VET4EU2 our general aims are to:

- Enable an effective, systemic, and harmonized response to and implementation of set objectives by including and empowering the voice of VET providers’ representatives directly in dialogue with all relevant policy, research, operational and development bodies, and at all levels (joining forces and representation of VET providers).
- Consolidate and strengthen effective activities like International Mobility and Peer Learning Reviews resp. Activities (and similar opportunities) for VET providers’ representatives to enhance the exchange of good practices at international level. VET4EU2 can join a coordination group for this, using its network for finding an effective approach, based on a formal arrangement.
- Strengthen the competitiveness of companies through VET and Work Based Learning, in the regional, national and international context, in favour of (future) employees and also self-employed workers. VET4EU2 can cooperate with the social partners, to explain the possibilities for this and to emphasize the role of VET providers from their perspectives in VET stakeholders’ groups.
- Embed, support, and clearly recognize the position of VET in the European Education and Training Area. VET4EU2 can be seen as the formal representative of the VET providers, including Higher VET, and as an international platform that has members in all member states and beyond. In this context, it can provide a supportive voice for making a EETA as strong as possible.

Looking at these ambitious aims, and in its current position as a network of formal associations with a legal status, VET4EU2 is represented in the ACVT and European stakeholder groups for topics as EQF, VNFIL, and EQAVET, based on the recognized status of being part of the expert group ‘Platform of European Associations of VET Providers’. This also means that we have a regular dialogue with DG EMPL, Cedefop, ETF and other stakeholders. At national and local level, we promote awareness, integration and implementation of the Osnabrück Declaration among our members.

In this way VET4EU2 has a well-functioning structure for bridging the different levels by using recommendations, plans, actions, pacts and so on, formulated at the European level, and to communicate with the individual VET providers and their local networks, and vice-versa. Empowering such a structure as VET4EU2 has a clear added value.

In addition, VET4EU2 has the capacity to be involved in the progress of the implementation of the objectives. In line with this, actions can be developed and supported, in the period up to and including 2025, together with our partner organizations that are able to make a substantial contribution. Consequently, VET providers (VET4EU2) can act as essential partner to materialize the principles of the Osnabrück Declaration, using it as a guide and proposing needed additional initiatives.

Our aims for objective 1: Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

- Maximize excellence in VET provision to boost innovation in all sectors and at all levels (even regional and local), for ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ learning pathways.
- Promote public-private partnerships in VET to capitalize the best of both worlds by cooperative efforts.
- Strengthen the on-going process of adapting to change, leading VET to a constant transformation that enables both learners and providers not only to respond to emergencies but to also achieve a sustainable development.
- Develop an instrument to close the loop of the rapidly developing skills forecasts, autonomous curricula development and emerging skills gaps in the labour market and boost employability.
- Promote implementation of a transparent quality assurance structure for VET integrating work-based learning to prevent exploitation through cheap labour force and ensure achievement of all set objectives, providing the labour market with high skilled professionals.

Our aims for objective 2: Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and Digitalisation

- Engage the variety of vulnerable groups and citizens by offering effective LLL schemes in VET and address and facilitate their social inclusion.
- Empower workers and learners to reach full and true citizenship in society and social inclusion by using VET for actions linked to a number of key principles of the Pillar of Social Rights, that have a direct and indirect focus on education.
- Establish transparent schemes for digitalization attainment, stackability and recognition of micro-credentials, whilst making a differentiation between the required (holistic) skills of starting professionals and adults with more life and work experience.
- Ensure accessibility to digitalization through infrastructure and supportive training.

Our aims for objective 3: Sustainability – a green link in VET

- Increase the advocacy of European culture and values by enriching Erasmus+ VET opportunities, distance learning and curricular focus on green recovery and the policies fostering prosperity, equality, social inclusion and well-being for all.
- Strengthen independence and operability of VET providers and their networks on international, national, and regional levels by systemically supporting and activating VET structures and interaction with social partners on achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our aims for objective 4: European Education and Training Area and international dimension of VET

- Support EU policy development by proactive representation and cooperation of EU VET providers in VET stakeholders' groups.
- Open flexible educational pathways and accessibility by formalizing transparent permeability between all levels of education, including VET and Professional HE for a stronger and transparent European Education and Training Area.
- Promote clarification of the role of VET and the position of VET providers at higher levels of the EQF for having more progression routes starting in VET and using qualifications in formal and non-formal Higher VET.
- Accelerate systemic cooperation on international level between VET providers and social partners by enabling dialogue in formal settings and hereby strengthening the internationalisation of VET.