

## Covid-19: Boosting the change of teaching in VET

### Introduction

Over the past two years, Covid-19 has pushed many countries and all education sectors to find solutions to keep education going. It quickly became clear that other forms of distance learning had to be used to ensure that pupils and students could follow their education as well as possible within the applicable frameworks.

This has demanded a lot from all those involved in the educational process. Of course, in that case, consideration should be given to the deployment of teachers, supervisors and coordinators. This means that action is needed now to see how the experiences gained with online education and also forms of hybrid design will lead to adjustments. But it is simply about the role of the lecturers, the competencies that are and has to be required and the way in which, together with the management of the institutions, it is seen how the transition to a more hybrid structure can take place.

This means that to make the change really happen the VET providers need to take further steps, and take them now. It is the momentum to take seriously what we have learned during the pandemic.

More than over a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, schools, academic and industry leaders in Europe are faced with unprecedented challenges as they put education on record in the face of a rising upskilling unemployment sector.

**Vocational Education and Training (VET)** refers to secondary technical education and practical training that develop the competences, skills and knowledge of apprentices working in different sectors of industry and students and trainees in different VET Institutions. EfVET is strongly involved in that part of the education system that provides courses and training programmes related to employment with a view to enable the transition from secondary education, also up to level 5 of the EQF, to work for young students and trainees (to be seen also as a social objective of VET) and supply the labour market and the companies with competent apprentices in a strong collaboration with the VET providers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed the biggest challenges impacting the digitalisation revolution and technologies, on employment and changing skills needs, looking at all people being involved in an institution. The Covid-19 crisis brought also about a number of policy challenges, at the national, regional and institutional levels, and we have seen that at the same time the consequences of the crisis provided an opportunity for accelerating digitalisation – looking at the best scenarios.

## Efficiency of the learning in the future

However, to proceed, we need to ensure the proper and safe access to digital materials to all of our students and staff members in VET, for all programmes. The learning environments of VET providers have to offer all students the possibility to get the basic skills in surfing in these totally digitalisation processes. However, most of the learning in the future will happen in formats that can be seen as work-based learning (WBL). Then we have to realise that the majority of companies in different sectors develop their dynamic processes so quickly that it does not make sense to try to invest in such environments for each industry in all VET schools, but to look at better scenarios for the collaboration between the VET sector and the world of work.

Would it be possible to share - next to the use of machines and other material for the production and service - simulators and virtual learning processes with VET providers in regional and/or national networks, as an approach in the future? Could we help them by having all learning materials be translated to all European languages using AI? Could we concentrate to coach our students in choosing their own learning paths, but guided in the best way by the VET providers and their stakeholders, including businesses?

A recent Cedefop<sup>1</sup> article is summarising the current needs and trends of digital skills in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, there has been analysed an amount of recruitment data, which skills are most demanded currently. According to the research there are five key skills that are demanded the most in future jobs, meaning that in VET in the coming years the providers have to focus on them as good as possible. As a reference, we can look at good practice examples in Germany where the regional government responding to the future skills shortage requires now all VET providers to have the possibility to give students an option to learn about AR (augmented reality) technology which is needed in the labour market. This means that the development, testing, evaluation and transfer of educational content with this technology requires appropriate pedagogical expertise or experience that is currently not available or not available in sufficient depth and breadth. This is where some Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership projects (e.g. AR4VET<sup>2</sup>, DIOS<sup>3</sup>, FightARs<sup>4</sup>) bring huge value in dealing with this challenge, but it is definitely just a small part of the process that is needed for the whole VET sector.

We believe that Digitalisation is an excellent lever to accelerate the transition towards a green deal and resilience economy. Therefore, EfvET would like to stress the importance of the role of teachers and other educators in digital learning. We are aware of the situation that there are many other opportunities for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/digital-skills-challenges-and-opportunities-during-pandemic?src=email&freq=weekly>

<sup>2</sup> AR4VET - teasers for VET trainers and teachers - <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/2017-1-DE02-KA202-004240>

<sup>3</sup> Didactic innovation labs (DIOS) – digitalisation experts in VET - <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/2020-1-DE02-KA202-007621>

<sup>4</sup> FIGHTARs - teasers for firefighters training in immersive rescue environments - <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/2020-1-CZ01-KA202-078371>

people to a further upgrade of their knowledge and develop the skills they need throughout life. Lifelong Learning is a matter of the creation of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities for individuals at any age. It allows them to unlock the knowledge of VET where needed and relevant for them, and to insure their well-being in the (near) future.

How about a blended learning? The new normal in VET will be more blended than before, having innovative changes to be adapted. We have to realise that the majority of the VET teachers has – for all kinds of reasons - no sufficient knowledge and skills in accessing and using e-learning. Teachers and learners have to be engaged in digital learning, no matter what. EfvET believes that we have to adapt to the online platforms as an integral part of our blended learning systems. We have to ride this roller coaster, as student, employer, teacher, manager, institution and in all types of networks.

### **Now we have planned this quite a lot...it is time to make the change**

With this position paper, the EfvET Members would like to encourage the EU and its member states to take the concrete steps in the development of teachers' skills and welfare and it should be the following:

- Digital skills need to be integrated to the teachers' education by getting familiar with several possible applications supporting the on-line guidance of learning processes, learning the basics about AI, immersive technology, IoT in education, no matter if the learning takes place on-line or at the workplace.
- National and European wide material banks of each branch should be established and translated into all European languages using AI and Open educational resources.
- New pedagogical management should support the development of resilience among teachers, students and the world of work.
- As digital learning and working increases, education systems need to put more resources on the wellbeing of all stakeholders of the education system (students, teachers, work-place trainers, other Guidance staff).
- Networks of teachers, managers and ambassadors of digital and green skills development should be established (examples are the Code week<sup>5</sup> and the eTwinning<sup>6</sup> network).
- All students and teachers should have similar access to learning materials in each member state of the European Union, by using relevant sources and effective platforms.
- It is necessary to create a better working atmosphere in teacher teams and better learning approach in their teaching environment by using different methods and digital tools, to be available for all teams.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://codeweek.eu/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.etwinning.net/lt/pub/index.htm>

In line with this, EfVET is willing and able to provide a number of webinars and online workshops before and during the European Vocational Skills Week in 2022 to anyone who wants to know and learn more about the topics mentioned above. This includes sessions with employers and students (youngsters and adult learners) to indicate which phase of development the VET sector is in and what strategy the providers of VET training have developed. Naturally, it will be examined to what extent European networks for VET contribute to this, and also how EfVET and its European partner organisations can support them. In the coming period we will have to find out in what way it can be done. EfVET will also take part in the process for setting up so-called Teachers Academies, partly due to the possibilities that are available with Erasmus+. These academies will be set up broadly. It will therefore be examined which partners within Europe are in line with our aim to allow such academies to uncton as networks and platforms to work concretely on developments that can be shaped jointly. The provision of VET on the basis of a hybrid approach will certainly be part of this.

We need actual support from the EC to make a change. This will be discussed during the annual conference with the members. The focus will be on having projects and to use other budgets.

#### **Authors and purpose of the Position paper**

This position paper is drafted by EfVET Members and Vice-President Policy. EfVET is ready to organise webinars and help to connect over hundreds teachers, trainers and teams of managers to share the best practices and thus, enhance and accelerate their spreading in Europe. However, this kind of actions call for remarkable resources to both the VET providers 240 members in the form of funded projects and to the associations representing VET providers, to be able to connect the change agents in the best possible way.

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