

Workshops on VET Teachers and Trainers: Key Actors to Make Lifelong Learning a Reality in Europe

Study-specific background paper 2

“Defining VET Professions”

Background

The study ‘Defining VET Professions’ was carried out by a multinational consortium coordinated by HAMK University of Applied Sciences (Finland) for Cedefop/TTnet with the aim to contribute to the development of a European competence framework for IVET professions. The final report was presented in October 2007. In the context of the project the development of the competence framework was to be supported by analysing the roles, responsibilities and competences of selected professions in initial vocational education and training, and by identifying the main trends in the development of these. The deliverables of the project were the following:

- 1) Competence framework (or basis for such)
- 2) Recommendations on initial and continuing training of trainers
- 3) Recommendations for TT policies
- 4) Suggestions for the use of the framework.

The project studied the roles, responsibilities and qualifications of three types of VET practitioners, namely, IVET teachers, IVET principals and IVET trainers. Teachers are defined as educators who work in formal school or college settings and teach in vocational courses. IVET principals are heads of vocational training institutions. IVET teachers work in enterprises and carry out training activities either as full-time instructors or part-time beside other professional tasks. The study was carried out by a series of semi-structured interviews with 90 members of the above-mentioned IVET professions from ten European countries (FI, UK, DK, DE, EE, IT, PT, LV, LT, HU). Altogether 32 teachers, 18 full-time trainers, 11 part-time trainers and 29 principals were interviewed. On the basis of the analysis of the responsibilities and tasks of each profile a draft competence framework was drawn up.

The general educational environment in which IVET professionals work is characterised by three major trends:

First, there is the demographic change in European societies where the number of young people is decreasing. This demographic change affects educational institutions, which may have difficulties in finding enough students, and it also entails the risk of a shortage of skilled VET professionals in the future.

Second, there is integration of VET into a more comprehensive system lifelong learning, which raises issues concerning the modularisation of programmes and the transferability between VET and other educational pathways. It can be expected that this development will further undermine the distinction between teachers and trainers.

Third, there is a tendency in many of the participating countries to decentralise the education system. Often training institutions have a great degree of autonomy, which improves the opportunities of VET teachers to influence the implementation of VET (e.g. in terms of curriculum development), but also puts more pressure on teachers and principals.

IVET teachers

One of the main results of the study was that there is a developing professionalism of VET teachers across the EU countries participating in the study. The teachers in the sample, who came from Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and the UK, reported that they were developing frameworks of national standards based on “professional values”. These standards concerned aspects of teaching and learning such as lesson planning, tutorial support, individualised or personalised learning, assessment, management of learning environments and others. With the exception of Portugal and Finland, VET teachers do not have high status as compared to teachers of academic subjects or teachers in the general school sector, which affects retention and recruitment of teachers.

The qualification requirements for IVET teachers in the participating countries appear to be very similar. This is especially true for requirements concerning formal qualifications. Most respondents had a degree; all had some higher specialist qualification. All had, or were working towards, a full teaching qualification. Many had considerable experience in working within their profession or trade before entering VET teaching. In most of the participating countries, routes to full qualified teacher status were both pre-entry or work-based training delivered part-time either in-house or through a higher education institution. Most offered both a pre-service full-time route or part-time routes to full teaching qualification status with the most common route being the in-employment route. For permanent teacher positions, the pedagogical qualification is becoming a legal requirement, although in Finland and Portugal it is possible to teach on a short-term basis without a qualification.

As regards standards and competence frameworks for teachers, the study delivered a heterogeneous picture. Whereas the UK has a full mandatory competence framework, Latvia and Portugal have partial frameworks, Finland has a loose framework with formal qualifications regulated by law, and Italy has a legal framework defining “rights and duties” of teachers.

The responsibilities and competences of teachers are characterised by an increased workload in administration, quality assurance and the management of the learning environment. This is attributed to the ongoing strategies to improve the standard of vocational teaching and learning through national standards, which are the drivers of an emerging professionalism. At the same time, however, the additional responsibilities of teachers leave limited time for pedagogical issues. The competences identified on the basis of the task profiles of IVET teachers are:

- Administration: knowledge and understanding of QA systems, ability to record individual student progress;
- Pedagogy: ability to use a wide range of teaching strategies, ability to use learning theories, ability to use reflective practice to improve teaching skills;
- Development: ability to evaluate through feedback and reflection, ability to update subject-specific knowledge;
- Quality Assurance: ability to produce accurate records, ability to contribute to quality cycles, ability to reflect on evaluate professional performance;
- Networking: ability to liaise with external bodies such as schools, employers, careers services etc.

IVET trainers

Trainers were interviewed in five countries (Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary and Italy). There are notable differences in the degree of regulation of in-company training in

the participating countries from very high in Germany to very little in Denmark. Accordingly the conditions for the training of apprentices in the companies also vary. Large companies usually have a well-defined and well-structured system with separate training departments. Therefore a distinction has to be made between large companies where the training of apprentices is specialised and carried out by specifically appointed staff, and small companies where the owner himself or a trusted person is in charge of training. This leads to a differentiation between part-time and full-time trainers.

Part-time trainers have generally a worker's/craftsman's qualification and often a further technical or commercial qualification as well as some years of work experience. Their training activities take place within the general workload, and they are accountable to the training manager in larger enterprises or the general manager in SMEs.

The administrative activities of trainers fall under four main headings: general administration, finance, human resource management and organisation. As regards pedagogy, few innovative methods are applied in the training, but there is a general need for strong pedagogical skills for the trainer. Mentoring and coaching become increasingly relevant.

The *administrative* competences of trainers are project management and organisational competences as well as communicative and social competences. In the field of *pedagogy*, trainers must have, above all, a professional mastery of the occupational field at a higher level than the level targeted by the training. Trainers also need didactical skills and competences with regard to the combination of work and learning and the identification of learning opportunities in the work context, and the ability to motivate and guide students towards autonomy. *Development* competences such as the willingness to personal and professional growth and the ability to set challenging targets for the future were also identified. The field of *quality assurance* is less relevant for trainers. The necessary skills and competences in this area are team working skills, communication skills, general evaluation skills, the ability to prepare and develop an evaluation tool, and the ability to utilise results of quality assurance to develop one's own work and the institution. The *networking* competences include the ability to convey the social value and responsibility of in-company training, the ability to manage training relationships, interpersonal skills, team work skills and intercultural skills.

As regards the overall profile and future development of the trainer profession, one major trend is a change in the general paradigm of the training activities. One can observe a shift from teaching and passing on knowledge to self-directed learning. This means that active participation of the apprentices is expected and supported, which renders trainers' capacity to motivate and support the self-learning activities of apprentices particularly important.

IVET principals

The third group of IVET professionals came from Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and the UK. As regards the general working environment of IVET principals one can observe a change in the basic understanding of the principal's role that can be characterised as a shift from management to leadership. While management is primarily concerned with the organisation and regulation of work processes and the administration of resources, leadership is concerned in the first place with the empowerment of people to act independently. In addition there is a tendency towards decentralised decision-making in the VET systems that leads to an increase in local or institutional autonomy, although the influence of the central authorities remains strong. Local autonomy also means that various stakeholders, e.g. enterprises and professional organisations, are directly involved in the activities of VET institutions, increasing the network-

ing activities of principals.

The qualification requirements of IVET principals vary. Typically principals must hold a higher education degree, whereas a vocational qualification is not mandatory except in Latvia. Teaching or pedagogical training is required in five of the countries, covered by the interviews, which is only half of the total number of participating countries. Teaching experience is also required only in some of the countries. This leads to the question whether principals are adequately equipped for the management of an educational institution when they lack the understanding of the subject matters and the pedagogical and didactical aspects. Accordingly there are ongoing debates in the participating countries on the improvement of the qualification and professional competence of principals and the definition of qualification frameworks for this group.

The work profile of IVET principals is predominantly characterised by administrative activities and only to a small extent by pedagogical leadership and development. Their professional identity is in the first place a managerial one. Pedagogical leadership is understood mostly in a relatively narrow sense, covering mainly curriculum development and the development of new study programmes. The development of the institution and its members is also part of the principals' tasks, which means for the most part general measures such as the encouragement of innovation and the support of projects. Activities with a specific focus such as targeted measures for the professional development of staff members are less frequently mentioned, and there is a general tendency to view personal development as the individual responsibility of staff members. The principals' responsibilities in the field of quality assurance appear to follow a mechanistic approach as QA measures are confined to traditional methods like staff appraisals or assessments, which are applied in a somewhat isolated manner without a more holistic perspective. Principals do not deliberately utilise the results of different QA measures to improve the quality of their institutions. Finally IVET principals are involved in the management of networks, especially with regard to cooperation with the world of work, which is considered the most important networking activity.

On the whole one can say that principals are in the first place the administrative heads of their institutions. The pedagogical role of principals, on the other hand, has diminished both due to a lack of time and due to the fact that teachers have become more autonomous. This poses the particular challenge of leading an autonomous staff of experts, which means that the staff has to be supported and encouraged while at the same time leaving room for their individual development and visions. A further challenge is the integration of a more comprehensive quality assurance culture in the institutions. This requires also an awareness of the need to internationalise VET institutions.