

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

## **Thematic background paper 1**

### **“Cooperation between VET teachers and trainers – theory and practice, companies and schools”**

#### ***The roles of VET teachers and company-based trainers in European VET systems***

European VET systems are characterised by a variety of training models which is only insufficiently expressed by the familiar distinction of school-based, company-based and dual systems. Whereas there are genuine ‘dual’ systems, e.g. the German system of dual apprenticeship training – which in fact coexists with school-based programmes for particular occupations –, and school-based systems in which upper secondary schools offer full-time programmes that lead to vocational degrees like in Sweden, there are also training systems that do not clearly fall into one category of this typology. Some countries, e.g. Iceland, Slovenia or Romania, have school-based systems in which practical training in companies is part of the training programme in one way or another, and there are countries like Italy, Portugal or the Netherlands where company-based and school-based types of vocational education and training coexist. Accordingly there are many linkages between vocational schools and companies and a variety of issues that require some degree of cooperation between VET teachers and in-company trainers.

Typically VET schools employ both academics and persons with a vocational background. An exception is Ireland where VET training is delivered only by fully qualified teachers. Ireland and Portugal both possess an established system for continuing professional development (CPD) including obligations for teachers to participate in CPD activities.

The roles of in-company trainers are quite different across European countries. Some countries like Romania and Ireland do not have a particular concept for company-based training practitioners, while in other countries such as Germany there is a formal regulation in place specifying under which conditions a person is qualified to carry out training in a company. Some other countries, especially those that have predominantly school-based VET systems where training in the workplace is little or not at all formalised, have concepts of supervisors, trainers, coaches or masters in the workplace, who do not need a specific formal qualification. Even where a formal qualification or certificate is mandatory, the requirements vary considerably. Minimum duration of a trainers’ certificate course ranges from 8 hours (Italy) to 120 hours (Germany). The tasks fulfilled by company-based trainers are also quite different. A recent survey among experts from several European countries recorded the following task descriptions:

- Elaboration of individual training plans
- Managing reception and insertion of new apprentices in the company
- Facilitating the acquisition of skills and competences
- Ensuring the tutoring of the students
- Monitor and assess the progress made by the apprentices
- Report on students’ progress to the school
- Establish relations with the training centres in order to enable integration between formal training and practical experience

- Carry out final examinations

### ***Challenges for VET teachers and trainers***

There are some major challenges for VET teachers and trainers that affect the cooperation between these two groups. Given that the integration of school instruction and company-based training is considered an important factor for the quality of vocational education, the need to allow for cooperation between the staff of both training locations leads to new competence requirements for teachers and trainers. Especially the continuing professional development of trainers and teachers as well as the professionalisation of the trainers' role are frequently mentioned.

In several countries curriculum development increasingly involves cooperation between the school and the world of work. The integration of process-oriented and outcome based competences into the usual subject-structured school based curricula is regarded a challenge which imply that teachers reorganise their internal cooperation with each other.

In Germany, the action and process-oriented reform of many training regulations is considered a particular challenge for school-based curricula, since the usual subject structure is given up in favour of a systematic of outcome-oriented 'learning fields'. Teachers have to build teaching teams and need to completely reorganise their courses according to a more competence-based approach.

In Slovenia, the so called joint curriculum development is highlighted as a challenge. National curricula have up to 20 % of non-defined hours – the so-called 'open curricula'. The task of schools is to define 'open curricula' in cooperation with local companies. VET teachers and trainers have to define programmes of practical training which must be harmonized with school curricula. Other countries like Iceland and the Netherlands face the problem that the education of VET teachers and trainers must be more oriented towards the specific needs of work-based teaching methods.

### ***Cooperation at the level of companies and schools***

In most European countries there is a relatively strong institutionalisation of the partnership between VET schools and the world of work. Often this institutionalisation is required by law at the national and/or regional level, typically involving the social partners and sector representatives. Some of the key themes of the cooperation are the qualification structure and the structure of the curriculum. Below some examples from various European countries are given:

In Germany, the cooperation between schools and companies is a mandatory feature of the dual system and is legally prescribed for all levels from the federal government to the learning venues at the local level. The guiding and coordinating ministry at the federal level is the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). However, coordination is rendered difficult by the fact that the school part and the company part of dual vocational training (and the corresponding roles and responsibilities of teachers and trainers) are regulated by different bodies that operate independently of each other. While the federal government is responsible for in-company training, the school-based part is the exclusive domain of the *Länder*. Agreements between the federal and *Länder* levels, however, guarantee a minimum of coordination.

In the Netherlands the social partners are responsible for the qualification structure. The Knowledge Centres, which represent employer's organisations, trade unions and represent-

atives of education in specific sectors, are responsible for developing the qualifications. Every college, every sector, is organising the contacts with the regional companies.

In Italy, the cooperation between training centres and enterprises takes place at different levels. At the institutional level the apprenticeship system is defined through a bargaining process, involving the Ministry of Labour and representatives from the social partners. Within the national framework, at the regional level the regulatory law is made on a tripartite agreement with the regional representatives of social partners.

In Iceland there are National Occupational Councils for all branches. Representatives from different social partners such as representatives of employers, employees and the Educational authorities participate on these councils. Their purpose is to make proposals concerning the structure of vocational study and curriculum in special subjects of the vocational study programmes, as well as on the form and methods of evaluation, including final examinations, and monitoring the quality of instruction and instructional materials.

Although the cooperation between the world of school and the world of work is relatively institutionalised at national or regional level, involving the social partners, the cooperation at the school-company level is based to large extent on initiatives from the school. This gives room for a high degree of local choice and considerate local variations as to the organisation and intensity of the cooperation and communication.

Germany is a significant example. As cooperation between school and company has become institutionalised within the German dual system, the actual practice of communication and cooperation on the local level can be very little. It depends very much on the initiative of the vocational schools and companies how well developed the exchange actually is. Especially the participation of VET teachers in the local VET committees that are responsible for the organisation and supervision of the final examinations remains a controversial issue, as was recently shown by the debates that centred around the 2005 amendment of the Vocational Education Act, which, among other things, gave new decision-making powers to teachers in these joint committees. These difficulties are a symptom of the rivalries brought about by the shared responsibility for dual vocational training as it was described above.

In Estonia the cooperation at local level is quite random and depending on the initiatives in a certain field or school. The cooperation network is at its fairly initial stage and the measures to support the process are in the composing stage. In Sweden local decisions determine the amount of time the vocational teacher has for this part of his/her work. There are a number of examples of cooperation in which school teachers are allowed to take part in companies' internal training so as to give them in-service training. In Romania specific regulations and methodological requirements give an outstanding role to the school-company partnership and its effectiveness is very much depending on each of the individual school and company. In Iceland the collaboration of VET schools and companies is characterised as good, but informal. It is envisaged that it needs to be structured further in formal documentation.

### ***Cooperation between VET teachers and trainers***

Cooperation and communication between teachers and trainers take place on a regular basis, typically concerning the organisation of the company-based training of the trainee. There are remarkable differences as to what extent the cooperation between teachers and trainers is formalised or mandatory.

In Portugal the cooperation is ensured through continuous evaluation and the monthly team

meetings regarding the integrated evaluation of the trainees, teachers and trainers are provided with conditions to communicate and develop common strategies on the training curricula and its follow-up. The role of the enterprise is to provide monthly information about the performance of the trainees, as well as participate on monthly based team training meetings to make an integrated evaluation about the trainees. It is the enterprises' duty to participate on the final exam, as jury member. The jury also includes trainers from the VET institutions, representatives from the ministries of labour and of education as well as a representative of the social partners.

In Italy training providers are required by the regional authorities to organise at least one visit a year to the enterprise. In Germany, by contrast, the cooperation depends on the commitment of the people involved. A major aspect of the cooperation is the adjustment of teaching content and the planning of uninterrupted teaching and training blocks for the vocational school and the training enterprise. If classes are heterogeneous, cooperation among teachers and trainers from various enterprises is more difficult than with homogeneous classes.

While teachers and trainers cooperate on a regular basis in most countries, many countries either have launched or are planning initiatives to improve the cooperation. In Slovenia there are some cases of good practice in cooperation between VET teachers and trainers, namely, cooperation in designing new professional standards and programmes, in the monitoring of the final exams, and in providing the master exams. However, there still remains a good deal of work to be done to enhance the cooperation of teachers and trainers on a nationwide scale. Another example are the Netherlands where the government stipulates that teachers work in the companies for some hours a week to keep contact and to keep fresh in experiences.