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Employer-Led Vocational Education and Training in Europe (ELVETE)

Progress Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The ELVETE project focuses on three main target user groups: VET providers, VET students and employers. Its objectives focus particularly on the 14-19 education sector. These are:

- Networking – aimed at involving all three target groups throughout the project to ensure stakeholder needs are met;
- Case studies – aimed at gathering best practice already in place and identifying links between VET providers and employers, and how these benefit VET students;
- A quality-assured system for the development of a model vocational curriculum to be delivered for 14 -19 year olds, and standardised guidance for the engagement of employers in curriculum development – both of these will make it easier for VET providers and employers to collaborate, leading to VET students who are better able to meet employers' needs.

The ELVETE network consists of 12 members spread over ten European countries which cover all four areas of Europe. The expertise of the members of the network is focused on four main areas:

- **Access to users** – for instance partners such as HTL and Walsall College are 14-19 VET school providers, and other partners also have experience working with the 14-19 sector and/or other educational levels.
- **Employer/SME perspective** - as an SME, GI can provide valuable insight into an employer's viewpoint. AICA and TKNIKA provide experience of working on accreditation, qualifications and training that match employer needs.
- **VET training experience** - FOREMA, AIP, GI, NTUA and MSS offer valuable experience in teaching, training and education. TKNIKA work closely with VET trainers to disseminate innovation as quickly as possible from inception to classroom. In addition, they are based in the Basque Country which is well known as a European centre of excellence for VET training.
- **Networking and dissemination** – At least half of the project partners have a good amount of EU project experience and can link ELVETE with their existing and developing networks. Some, such as SPI, have pre-existing links with important relevant European organisations such as CEDEFOP.

In the first half of the project, the main outputs have been case studies produced by each partner with a focus on either VET providers or employers, which have allowed the consortium to identify and analyse best practice in collaboration between these two target groups to create better and more relevant VET provision for students. The individual case studies and case study summary reports can be downloaded from the project website, www.elvete.eu.

In the second half of the project, the information gained from the case studies will be used to create a draft curriculum (month 20). This curriculum will be reviewed by all partners with interested stakeholders through a series of focus groups. In addition, partners HTL and Walsall College will test aspects of the curriculum directly with their students, to further identify user feedback and make sure that the curriculum meets stakeholder requirements. Lessons learned during the piloting stage will be put towards the production of the final version of the curriculum. Recommendations and guidelines for implementation will also be produced and disseminated at a number of events, including the project final multiplier conference.

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1. Project Objectives

The ELVETE network focuses on VET in the 14 – 19 sector in order to make changes at the intersection of formal learning and continuous development. This focus is based on research with employers who understand that early engagement is a cost-efficient and long-term sustainable strategy for change.

The specific project objectives are:

1. Networking - Engage partners with experience of working with both education and industry in the design and provision of 14-19 VET;
2. Case studies - Draw together existing good practice in participating countries, as well as harvest national and EU policy frameworks and evidence of effective employer driven curriculum development;
3. A quality-assured system for the development of a model vocational curriculum to be delivered for 14 -19 year olds;
4. Standardised guidance for the engagement of employers in curriculum development
5. Recommendations for policy makers at national and EU level.

There are three main target user groups: VET providers, VET students and employers. Within the first 18 months of the project, these groups have been targeted through WP2 (VET providers and VET students) and WP3 (employers). The 12 network partners were split into two groups of six partners, focusing on either WP2 or WP3. Within these WPs, each partner has been tasked with writing four case studies from their region and/or national location (but not excluding other countries). WP2 has focused on case studies from the schools'/VET centres' point of view and how they engage with the business community, particularly where this engagement has had an influence of the curriculum delivered to their students. WP3 has focused on case studies from employers'/professional organisations' point of view and on how they engage with the education sector. In particular, examples have been sought where this engagement has had an influence of the curriculum delivered to the VET students. The case studies were then evaluated to produce a comparative and summary report highlighting particular areas of good practise and common themes. An impact report has been produced to critically evaluate the case studies to develop a deeper understanding, over and above the description provided by the case studies. This also allows the consortium to pick out examples that can be taken forward and developed for WP4. At the same time the case studies looked at what training needs are necessary in order for the work described in the case studies to take place (either actual or desirable). The target groups were closely involved in production of the case studies through a series of interview.

The production of the case studies and additional documents such as the impact and training needs analyses has the following potential impact upon and benefits to VET providers, students and employers:

- Give numerous “tried-and-tested” examples of how VET providers and employers can work more closely together;
- Enable VET providers to provide training which focuses more on employers' needs;
- Increase employers' likelihood of getting VET graduates with the skills they need;
- Increase students' employability by giving them training which is considered relevant by employers, and which gives them skills that are directly applicable to work and which other training courses may lack.

2. Project Approach

The network has focussed on VET in the 14–19 sector and has investigated existing good practice in participating countries, as well as national and EU policy frameworks and evidence of effective employer-driven curriculum development. The results of this investigation were 2 types of case studies: from the schools'/VET centres' point of view and how they engage with the business community and from employers'/professional organisations' point of view and on how they engage with the education sector.

While carrying out the research for the case studies, the partners have established cooperation with the stakeholders involved who, on the one hand were able to make their work known also to other people, and on the other hand, had the chance to learn from the “tried-and-tested” examples of other VET providers and companies.

The methodology for the case study production involved splitting the partners into two groups of six, based on whether they had closer links with VET providers or employers. Each group worked together to agree and produce a case study template and guidelines for the research process. The research method for the case studies included visits to the premises of schools/companies, interviews with management staff, as well as with students. Partners produced an individual description of all their case studies, as well as a summary report in which they analysed the results they had obtained. Following this, the workpackage leaders (HTL for workpackage 2 and TKNKA for workpackage 3) used the case study summary reports and additional information from partners to produce an overall impact report and training needs analysis. These documents will be used as a basis for draft curriculum production under workpackage 4.

The main added value resides in the fact that the case studies focus on the 2 points of view (schools/VET centres and employers) and present varied examples of good practices from several European countries.

Dissemination strategy and activities

The dissemination strategy of the project has been set up from the beginning of the project and has identified 9 main dissemination sub-strategies:

- Project website
- Leaflets/promotional materials
- Local networking and attendance at external events
- Presentations at internally organised events and/or external events
- Submission to field-specific and general interest regional, national and international journals, newsletters, magazines, websites
- Email update using stakeholder database contact details
- Social media
- National and International VET networks (e.g. EQAVET, CEDEFOP, EFVET)
- Final dissemination conference

In addition, the short and long term target audiences were identified:

Short term target audience: Students currently undertaking VET; Local/national VET institutions; Local/national VET teachers/trainers/practitioners; Organisations which train VET teachers/trainers/practitioners; Employers, particularly SMEs; Regional and national Chambers of Commerce and other employer-focused organisations; Industry networks, policy making and disseminating channels.

Long term target audience (able to maximise the network's impact and sustainability): National/EU-wide networks and VET organisations (e.g. EQAVET, CEDEFOP, EFVET); Sector skills councils; Professional organisations; Local Educational Authorities; Policy makers in government/practitioners.

From the beginning of the project, the partners have implemented dissemination activities, covering the main strategies above.

The project website (www.elvete.eu) was set up early in the project, providing information on the network, contact details, as well as hosting the main deliverables.

The leaflet of the project was produced and translated in all partners' languages, including additionally in French, for reaching a wider audience. The leaflet has been used by the partners in different events attended.

Three press releases have been produced so far in the project, at key milestones, providing updates about project progress. The press releases are available in all partners' languages.

Partners have made use of their social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) in order to disseminate the results of the project.

Additionally, partners have attended many events (e.g. conferences, seminars) where the results of the ELVETE network were disseminated. Examples: Birmingham Made Me conference (19.11.2014 – UK), DIDAMATICA Congress: Studio ergo lavoro (15.04.2015 – IT), 13th edition of the International Conference on Sciences of Education (29.05.2015 – RO).

3. Project Outcomes & Results

During the first 18 months of the network, the following results have been achieved, which link to the following objectives:

1. Overall project management and quality:

- 1.1 Establishment of management team
- 1.2 Kick-off meeting
- 1.3 Project management, administrative and operational guidelines
- 1.4 Management plan and timeline
- 1.5 Coordinator operational and financial management meetings
- 1.6 Budget review and Financial Reporting
- 1.7 Monitoring and project controls report
- 1.8 Internal project reporting
- 1.9.1 Project partner meetings – Bulgaria
- 1.9.2 Project partner meetings – Lithuania
- 1.10 Interim report
- 5.1 Quality assurance and evaluation plan
- 5.2 Audit trails
- 5.3 Partner evaluation reports
- 5.4 Internal project evaluation report
- 5.5 External project evaluation report
- 7.3 IPR agreement

2. Networking - Engage partners with experience of working with both education and industry in the design and provision of 14-19 VET:

- 5.6 Network Advisory Steering Board
- 6.1 Dissemination Plan
- 6.2 Promotional materials*
- 6.3 Stakeholder and event attendance database
- 6.4 Network website*
- 6.5 Creation of online-repository for case studies*
- 6.6 Dissemination events and presentations*
- 6.7 Press releases and public relations*
- 7.2 Networks and Partnerships

3. Case studies - Draw together existing good practice in participating countries, as well as harvest national and EU policy frameworks and evidence of effective employer driven curriculum development:

- 2.1 and 3.1 Case study report structure, template and guidelines
- 2.2 and 3.2 Collection of case studies*
- 2.3 and 3.3 Case study report findings*
- 2.4 and 3.4 Impact report*
- 2.5 and 3.5 Training needs analysis
- *(two of each of the above produced, one focusing on the VET provider's viewpoint and one focusing on the employer's viewpoint).*
- 5.7 Impact Evaluation Report
- 6.5 Creation of online-repository for case studies*

4. **Recommendations** for policy makers at national and EU level
 - 2.3 and 3.3 Case study report findings*
 - 2.4 and 3.4 Impact report*
 - 2.5 and 3.5 Training needs analysis

There are two further objectives which will be covered during the second half of the project:

5. A quality-assured system for the development of a model vocational curriculum to be delivered for 14 -19 year olds;
6. Standardised guidance for the engagement of employers in curriculum development

Results which were created to be publicly available (highlighted with an asterisk above) can be accessed via the network website <http://elvete.eu>. These results are all freely downloadable. Results not highlighted with an asterisk above are only available to project participants and are therefore not available online.

The produced case studies, case study report findings, impact report and training needs analysis have already produced an impact in the VET and industry sector by raising awareness on the importance of engagement between education and business community.

4. Partnerships

Average European unemployment has risen to 20% (with a particular problem amongst the young population of Europe), which is a serious issue for many EU countries. It is therefore worthwhile approaching the problem at an EU level through a network where all the partners are committed to pooling knowledge and to the objectives of competitiveness and employment.

The network also addresses a common area of development amongst countries within Europe and therefore the benefits, which will be shared via a planned dissemination programme, will impact outside the confined consortium and will reach policy makers across Europe. This network widely supports European policy and therefore it addresses issues beyond national boundaries; hence making the impact wider and more sustainable. These include: meeting European priorities, supporting the development of a robust economy, supporting and enhancing new skills and job chances.

Identifying the skills, knowledge and competences required by employers in curricula, framed within the EQF, needs an integrated European approach and dimension. European cooperation is essential due to the difference in the degree of approaches to VET and employer engagement achieved by member states, which indicates that there remains significant scope to reduce disparities in the EU. While each Member State's situation is different, European cooperation can help to identify ways to promote cooperation between VET and the world of work, while not compromising excellence. Within this network, partners in countries where VET is currently an issue of concern (e.g. Romania) will be able to learn from partners who have a high standard of VET (e.g. the Basque Country).

The European dimension of this network is represented through the geographical and cultural diversity of the countries participating. This adds value to the contextualisation of VET, the values that will be generated by knowledge transferred and the new knowledge acquired during the development of the study. The geographical spread across 10 countries in Europe ensures that partners will share experiences and expertise. Their local cultural knowledge will filter through the contextualisation of the study and will encourage understanding of the various multicultural societies within Europe.

In order to widen dissemination and impact it is proposed that output summaries be translated into the main EU languages of English, German (both already partner languages) and French.

Each partner has now formed partnerships outside the consortium with the organisations who were part of their case studies and/or the members of their Advisory Steering Board (ASB). The production of case studies facilitated the direct involvement of target users (VET schools, students, companies) who were interviewed/questioned and who will continue to be updated on the progress of the project. In a similar way, ASB members will be directly involved and will have opportunities to provide their insight and feedback throughout the project. In the case of Italy, the two Italian partners, AICA and Forema, have worked particularly well together and have joined forces to run focus groups and hold ASB meetings, allowing them to create a national rather than a regional partnership. These groups benefit the partners of the consortium by widening their reach and dissemination. They benefit the target users by putting them in contact with other interested and motivated target users either in their own or complementary areas (e.g. getting to know about other local VET providers and/or employers).

In the first half of the project, three partner meetings have taken place. Evaluation by the partners has indicated that these are an excellent way of facilitating working at a European level, with many of them citing the opportunity to discuss aspects of the project in person as a key benefit of these events. In addition, partners have been in touch throughout the project through a variety of means, such as direct email, the project management platform Wiggio, skype calls and even meetings in person for some participants. These have all contributed to an excellent working atmosphere and a good, collaborative relationship between the partners.

5. Plans for the Future

Research within the second half of the project will focus on workpackage 4 - Development of the VET training, strategies and model of implementation. The purpose of this work package is to bring together the knowledge, experience and expertise of the consortium and the findings from WP2 and 3 to develop a model of employer-led 14-19 curriculum. This could be used by school/VET centres and employers who wish to follow this route and work more closely together. Rather than a set curriculum it would be a general guide and starting point that would allow others to develop their own. It will focus on the area of IT/technology and will set out suggested topics to be studied and practical skills required by employers, as well as recommended training methods where applicable. This work began during the third partner meeting in Vilnius, when partners held a number of discussions and brainstorming sessions to agree a potential structure for deliverable 4.1, the draft curriculum.

Following the development of the draft curriculum, due in month 20, consortium partners will be tasked with testing and obtaining feedback from stakeholders via focus groups held by each partner (or jointly in the countries where two partners are based). The focus groups will have participants from VET providers and companies, who will be asked for their view of the draft curriculum and for their suggestions of any improvements based on their experience. In addition to these focus groups, further in-depth piloting of the draft curriculum will be used to gain a deeper understanding of its suitability to meet user requirements. HTL will arrange for a group of their VET trainees to produce an in-depth review of the model curriculum and a comparison to their existing curriculum as part of their "diplomarbeit" project (school-related activity). Walsall College will look at ways to adapt novel elements of the draft curriculum into their actual curriculum so that these can be tested on students, and that students can be evaluated on elements which they have incorporated from the draft curriculum. These three modes of feedback will be used to produce the final model. Alongside this model will be implementation guidelines and standards which will allow others to use this in other regions, countries and other contexts (industrial and educational setting). Recommendations for policy makers will also be produced.

Aside from the research element of the project, management and quality work will of course continue throughout the second half of the project. This will include regular individual partner meetings, two further consortium meetings, six-monthly evaluation by the partners, and production of an internal and external evaluation report towards the end of the project. Project management tools such as a gantt chart, management and project control report, impact indicators, risk register and issue and change control log will also be regularly updated and distributed.

Dissemination will increase for the second half of the project, following the availability of the outputs from the first 18 months, and considering the enhanced access to target users through focus groups and testing activities. This will culminate with the project final multiplier conference, at which the partners will join to present the results of the research and the outputs to an audience of European target users, stakeholders and policymakers.

6. Contribution to EU policies

Objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme

To contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field: Closer links between employers and VET will encourage curricula and training that is better suited, and quicker to respond, to the European labour market. Ultimately participants will develop the skills and experiences that employers are looking for and as such be more aware of the requirements that are needed to participate.

Specific objectives of this action

To support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices:

Closer links with employers will improve the quality of the training provided and through effective dissemination also lead to better systems and practices. Also, the model proposed will lead to innovative curricula and engagements between VET and employers.

Operational objectives

To facilitate the development of innovative practices in the field of vocational education and training other than at tertiary level, and their transfer, including from one participating country to others:

The project will bring together diverse organisations from a wide variety of countries that will act to exchange ideas and good practice, aiding the development of innovative practice.

One partner in particular, TKNIKA, is very experienced in this area and as such will provide invaluable guidance to partners and expertise to the project.

Priority

Development and transfer of mobility strategies in VET:

The core theme of this project is to encourage and celebrate cooperation between VET and the world of work. This will be done by providing case studies, but more importantly using these to develop a workable model of engagement and recommendations for policy makers.

Complementarity with other policies

Education and Training 2020 Work Programme - ELVETE is closely aligned to the strategic objectives of the Education and Training 2011 (ET2011) framework. The nature of partners involved will ensure that case studies of good practice will relate to the strategic objectives, for ease of systemization, and will include those on more flexible progression pathways, key competencies and, given our focus on employer-led curriculum development, the enhancement of creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) - CEDEFOP's aim of sharing information on developments, experience and innovation in VET is closely aligned to the aims of the ELVETE project. We will ensure that synergies are exploited and that ELVETE derives maximum benefit of the activities described by CEDEFOP. We are particularly keen to contextualize the good practice that will be identified through the ELVETE network against intelligence gathered and analyzed by CEDEFOP in terms of the national characteristics, priorities, developments.

