



European Centre for the  
Development of Vocational Training

## **DEVELOPMENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) AT EU-LEVEL, IN THE MEMBER STATES AND IN ACCEDING AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES**

**JULY 2005 TO MARCH 2006**

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### **I EU LEVEL: CALLING FOR A COHERENT STRATEGY:**

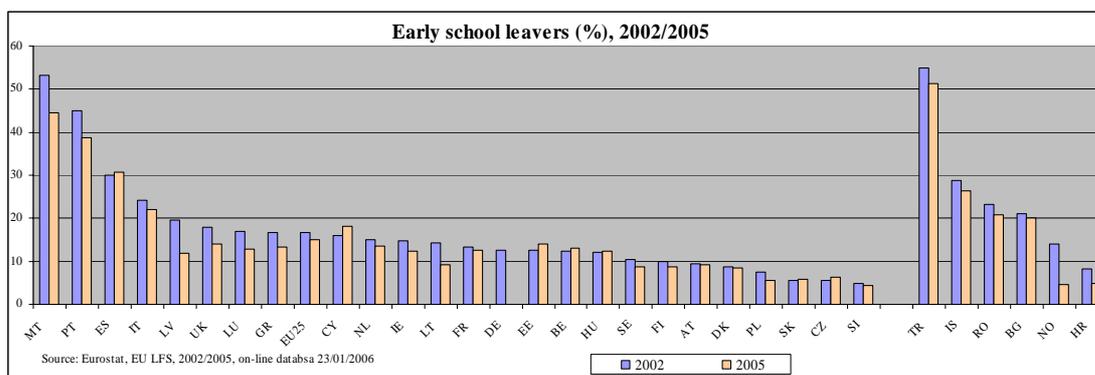
#### **Progress in education and training and employment - key messages in tune**

1. *'Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe'*

The progress report on **the 'education and training 2010' work programme** refers to the specific role of education and training at the heart of economic, employment, youth, social and LLL policies. It stresses the **links** between the education and training work programme, the employment strategy and the Youth Pact.

The section of the report devoted to vocational education and training (**VET**) shows that national priorities broadly reflect those of the Copenhagen process. However, it provides only little information on the progress made in implementing the common references and principles for the validation of non-formal learning, quality assurance or guidance. Generally, this section recapitulates the issues emphasised in the Maastricht Communiqué, agreed shortly before the streamlined progress reporting commenced. The report highlights the following five main areas for action in VET: improving the quality and attractiveness of VET at secondary level (access to apprenticeships and reforming standards); enhancing the relevance of VET to the labour market, improving relations with the social partners; the professional development of teachers and trainers; forecasting skill and qualification needs and involving all stakeholders; and VET as a means of reducing early school leaving.

Almost 15 % of young people in the EU leave school early; nearly 20 % of 15 year-olds have serious reading difficulties. Despite progress in some countries, the average of 77 % among the 18-24 year-olds who have completed upper-secondary education indicates there is still a long way to go before we reach the 85 % benchmark.



Apart from those in the Scandinavia, **many countries** – and in particular those in southern Europe and the new Member States - **still lack comprehensive and balanced lifelong learning (LLL) strategies**. Among 25–64 year-olds in Europe, 11 % benefit from LLL<sup>1</sup>, but participation rates vary significantly between countries. According to the report, too little is done to improve education opportunities for adults, in particular older workers and the low-skilled.

Despite slight improvements, **private investment** in human resources is still too low, in particular at enterprise level. The common drive towards cost-efficiency is laudable, but risks pushing aside concerns about equity. Hence, the progress report 2008 will focus on **equity and efficiency**.

Private investment is also lagging behind in the university sector, where reforms and emphasis on quality assurance seem largely driven by the Bologna process. While the links with industry still seem underdeveloped, universities are increasingly opening up to continuing training and new target groups and also recognising non-formal learning. Again, the report underlines the equity issue, in particular in the context of the drive for excellence.

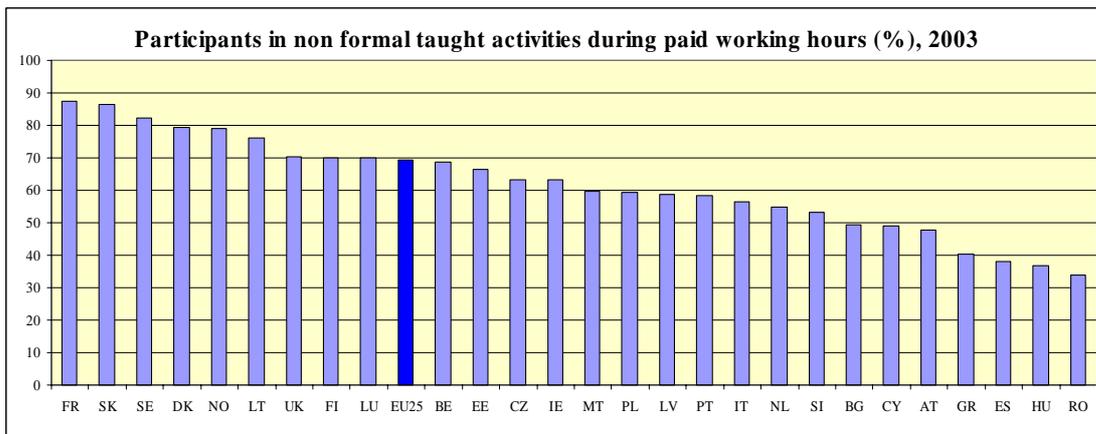
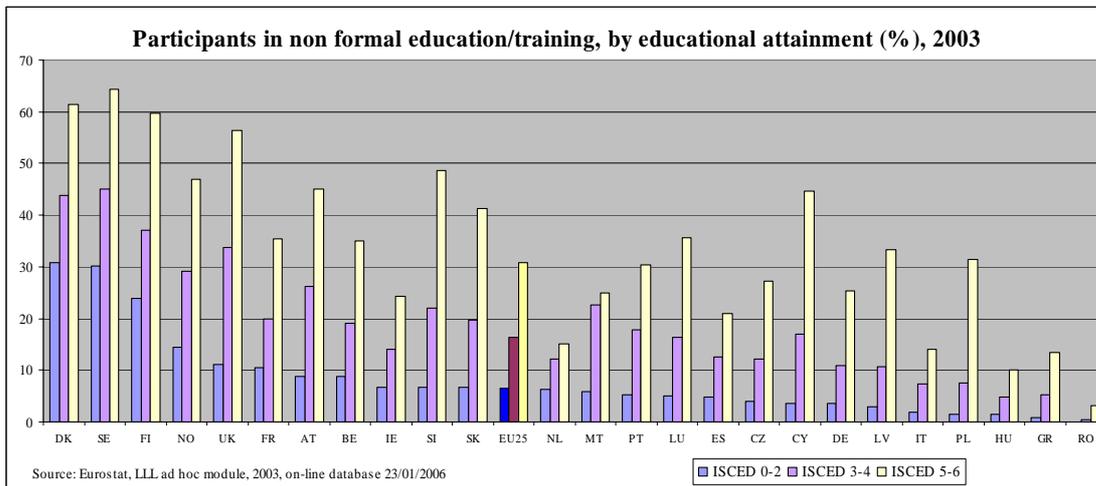
Countries are implementing the Europass and consider mobility important from primary to higher education and for learners and teachers/trainers alike. The main support comes from EU programmes while national strategies are lacking, despite some initiatives to promote, for example, the quality of mobility.

Generally, the progress report advocates **learning partnerships** at all levels and between all actors and bodies concerned, with teachers and trainers as the potential drivers of change. This would foster closer cooperation and **speedier implementation** of the priorities and reforms at national level required to meet the Lisbon objectives.

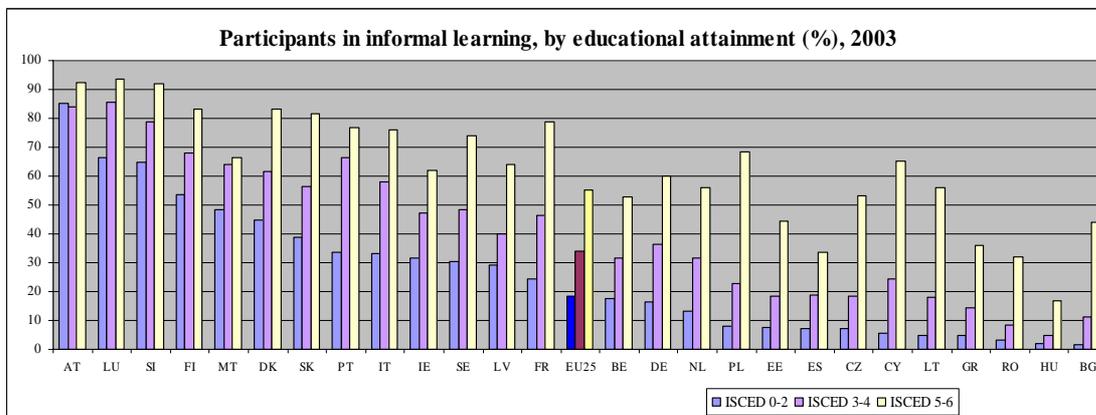
(For more information see

[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/europass/index\\_en.html](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/europass/index_en.html)).

<sup>1</sup> N.B. this figure refers to the four weeks preceding the survey; the graphs below based on the Eurostat LLL ad-hoc module 2003 are intended to provide complementary information. They relate to training attended in the year preceding the survey and give a more nuanced picture of participation rates by different groups of people based on their educational attainment



Source: Eurostat, LLL ad hoc module, 2003, on-line database 23/01/2006



Source: Eurostat, LLL ad hoc module, 2003, on-line database 23/01/2006

These data clearly show that the previous level of educational attainment is a key source of inequality in access to continuing education and training, especially in access to taught learning activities (non-formal education and training). For people with a high level of education (ISCED 5-6), in 14 EU Member States participation rates in non-formal education and training exceed 30 %. In Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the United Kingdom the rates are even above 50 %. On the other hand, in 18 EU Member States participation rates for people with a low level of education (ISCED 0-2) are below 10 %. The disparity in participation rates between people with high and low levels of education is especially striking in Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland. Whereas participation rates for people with a low level of education are far below the EU average, rates for those with a high level are above average.

Informal learning seems to be more common among people with a low level of education, but it is questionable whether it would have a lasting effect on their employability by improving their level of knowledge and skills more broadly and reducing the risk of unemployment.

The study on '*Access to Education and Training*', contracted out by the Commission, provides further insight into access to pre-school, higher education and adult education and training in Europe. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/doc/reports/doc/access.pdf>

## 2. '*Time to move up a gear*'

is the key message of the **draft joint employment report 2005/2006** and the title of a Commission Communication to the Spring European Council <sup>(2)</sup>. It calls for a coherent overall strategy to achieve the Lisbon goals and more efforts to increase economic performance while strengthening social inclusion and social protection. The European Employment Strategy and three priorities for action, that also relate to VET, are considered important in this context: attracting and retaining more people in employment [...]; improving adaptability of workers and enterprises; and increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills.

While the EU employment rate has risen to 63.3 % and unemployment has remained at around 9.0 %, long-term unemployment has risen to 4.1 %. Youth unemployment is about twice the overall rate (18.7 %). The report refers to Member States' efforts to build employment pathways for young people by combining work with education and training and/or extending apprenticeships. It criticises that the fact that labour-market inclusion policies focus on specific disadvantaged groups while neglecting others, such as non-EU nationals or minorities. It calls on countries to **integrate their policies on education and training, employment and social inclusion, and to set specific targets and objectives**. It also urges them to realise the full potential of the European **Youth Pact** and strengthen the involvement of youth organisations.

The employment report includes references to education and training 2010 issues. Both reports highlight the lack of **truly coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies**.

Investment in education and training tends to concentrate on qualitative reforms rather than on encouraging adult learning, in particular for the low-skilled, or on comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. Budgetary information on specific measures is rare, as are clear signs of greater contributions from the private sector and employer investment in continuing training. Few countries address fair and transparent sharing of costs and responsibilities between actors, but a number focus on the quality and efficiency of investment in education and training. The role of the **Structural Funds**, in particular the ESF, in supporting national policy is highlighted in a number of NRPs, but without providing specific details.

The employment report calls upon the Member States to provide the right (financial) incentives for lifelong learning and to increase the efficiency of human capital investment. They are also called on to use EU funding to support these enhanced efforts,

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<sup>(2)</sup> The report is based on the assessment of the Member States' national reform programmes (NRP) in response to the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs 2005. The streamlined National Reform Programmes cover the EU Charter for small enterprises, the Environmental technologies action plan, eEurope/2010 and the R&D Action plan.

as also advocated by one of the Maastricht priorities. Again, the employment and the education and training reports and the respective Commission Communications are consistent in their conclusions and recommendations.

The report concludes that the Integrated Guidelines and the agreed benchmarks and targets should remain unchanged, to allow for implementation. It urges all actors, including the social partners, to fully assume their responsibilities with respect to the Lisbon strategy.

### **Supporting the drive to achieve the Lisbon objectives**

3. *'Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning'*  
COM(2006) 33 final of 13 February 2006

To promote a more **entrepreneurial culture** in Europe and to create a supportive environment for SMEs and business start-ups, this **Commission Communication** suggests fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning.

It underlines that **entrepreneurship** is not limited to starting up and running a business, but is included in the list of key competences for lifelong learning within the **Education & Training 2010 Work Programme**, as it enables young people to be more creative and self-confident and to act in a socially responsible way.

[http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006\\_0033en01.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0033en01.pdf)

4. *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*  
Commission proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council, COM(2005)548 final of 10 November 2005  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/keyrec\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/keyrec_en.pdf)

The working group on basic skills, established in the context of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, has developed a **framework of key competences** needed in a knowledge society comprising **eight key competences**: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression.

5. *Developing a knowledge flagship: the European Institute of Technology*  
Communication from the Commission to the European Council, COM(2006) 77  
final of 22 February 2006

This Communication was preceded by a public consultation on the idea of creating a European Institute of Technology (EIT) to strengthen the capacities of higher education, research and innovation in Europe and the links between them. The EIT is to attract and pool human, financial and physical resources, promote an innovation and entrepreneurial culture in research and education and translate R&D results into commercial opportunities. Combining the three sides of the knowledge triangle – education, research and innovation – the EIT will have an edge over traditionally organised universities. The EIT will have its own legal personality and independence from national regulation and set up a Governing Board drawn from the highest levels of the scientific and business communities. Funding will come from different sources including the EU, the Member States and the business community.

### **Learning by leaving – 2006 the European year of mobility**

6. *'[...] Moving to another job or country involves constant learning [...]. So mobility is an important driver of lifelong learning'*

claimed José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, at the *European Year of workers' mobility* launch event *'Workers' Mobility: a right, an option, an opportunity?'* held in Brussels on 20 and 21 February 2006. The year's EUR 10 million budget will be dedicated to awareness-raising activities and increasing understanding of the benefits of working in a new country and/or occupation.

46 % of the Europeans see mobility positively, but only around 2 % of the population of working age live in an EU country other than their own. Mobility between regions, however, is much higher. Around 21.3 % of the EU population have lived in another region or country, as revealed by the recent Eurobarometer. Attitudes towards mobility vary among countries, with the Nordic countries in the lead (around 40 %), followed by Ireland, the UK and France (around 30 %), but only around 20 % in Central Europe. Lagging behind are southern European countries with an average mobility level of less than 15 %, and the new Member States with around 10 %. What makes a huge difference is educational background: highly educated EU citizens are twice as mobile as less well-educated citizens.

The fear of losing one's social network (family and friends) appears to be one of the main discouraging factors, while the main incentives relate to jobs and income. Mobility policies and related initiatives need to take people's motivations into account, which is one of the conclusions drawn by **Eurofound** (the European Agency for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions).

On 29 and 30 September 2006, job fairs and meetings will take place in over 70 European cities; a mobility road-show will travel through eight EU countries over 45 days. Awareness-raising activities in trans-border regions will focus on cross-border opportunities. A European Year Award is also envisaged. For further information see:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/workersmobility2006/;](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/workersmobility2006/)

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/areas/populationandsociety/migration.htm>

Europeans and mobility: first results of an EU-wide survey (Eurobarometer)

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/workersmobility2006/pdf/survey\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/workersmobility2006/pdf/survey_report_en.pdf)

7. *Fit to take to the road in a multilingual Europe*

In a Europe where mobility and cooperation are increasing, mastering languages is not just a daunting challenge but a vital necessity. To tackle this challenge, initiatives were launched in the 1990s to enable learners acquire subject-area knowledge and language skills at the same time: learning through another language or **CLIL (content and language integrated learning)** is the motto. Eurydice has published a study which takes stock of CLIL provision in 30 European countries and discusses the recruitment and training opportunities of teachers in this area. It also considers existing pilot projects, current debates and barriers to this approach:

[http://www.eurydice.org/accueil\\_menu/en/frameset\\_menu.html](http://www.eurydice.org/accueil_menu/en/frameset_menu.html)

Also available is a special Key Data report on language teaching.

### **The hot potato - Financing VET**

8. *'Financing vocational education and training in the EU, new Member States and candidate countries - Recent trends and challenges'*

is a study published by the ETF. It is based on national reports prepared by the National Observatories in seven of the new EU Member States – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Cyprus – and in the four candidate countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia.

To provide a more comprehensive and up-to-date overview, more recent work on investment in education and training as well as data and indicators produced by Eurostat and the OECD on education and training were fed into the analysis.

(For more information, see <http://www.etf.eu.int/>, publications).

## II CEDEFOP – MULTI-FACETED SUPPORT FOR VET ON ITS WAY TO LISBON

### 1. *Assisting the Commission and the stakeholders - in a nutshell*

The Maastricht Communiqué (2004) underlined Cedefop's specific role in the Education and Training 2010 work programme ('E&T 2010') of supporting the Copenhagen process. Between 2003 and 2005, Cedefop contributed to 'E&T 2010' through **policy analysis** (monitoring progress in VET) and participation in meetings of: EU-level coordination groups and provided intensive and **continuous support to the working groups** set up to enhance cooperation in VET (e.g. Quality assurance in VET, Credit Transfer, Validation of non-formal learning, Transparency, Lifelong Guidance, and VET teachers and trainers); ad hoc scientific advice was given on broader education and training aspects, such as: 'Making learning more attractive', 'Social Inclusion and Active Citizenship' and 'Making more effective use of resources'. In the areas of the validation of non-formal learning, credit transfer and the European Qualifications Framework, the Centre has played a key role in shaping the conceptual framework, policy focus and operational methodology of the Expert and Technical Working Groups.

For the current year Cedefop's support for cluster activities, peer learning, platforms and working groups is focusing on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF; see also reports in Cedefop Info 1/2006), credit transfer, quality assurance in VET, lifelong guidance, VET teachers and trainers, non-formal learning, sectoral LLL initiatives, social inclusion and financing VET.

At the Commission's request, Cedefop is also developing a **Knowledge system on lifelong learning** (EU-KSLLL) which is intended to provide regularly updated quality information on national lifelong learning policy initiatives and which will encourage and facilitate peer learning. Following the presentation of an online prototype to the cluster group on teachers and trainers in October 2005, and the introduction of the concept and design to the EU-level Education and Training Coordination Group (ETCG), the EU-KSLLL will be presented to all cluster groups. For more information see: <http://kslll.trainingvillage.gr>.

### 2. *The forgotten army is moving to the fore*

Cedefop's Training of Trainers Network, TTnet, has not only contributed to the working groups and cluster activities, but also carried out a number of studies and projects to raise awareness of the role of VET teachers and trainers and their qualifications and learning needs: '*Identification of learning needs for VET teachers and trainers*' with examples from 10 TTnet countries and information on quality criteria and approaches to identifying learning needs; the study on '*Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning for VET teachers and trainers*' has 30 examples from nine TTnet countries. The TTnet pilot project on '*Defining VET professions in line with the EQF*' may form the starting point for the Commission's work on teacher and trainer profiles. An Agora event in November 2006 marked Germany's entry into the network.

[http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/projects\\_networks/ttnet/](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/projects_networks/ttnet/);  
<http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/news/default.asp?idnews=986>

### 3. *Never too old to learn*

Traditional views are that older people are less productive and less able to learn and/or adapt. Hence, companies were glad to replace those older than 50 with younger people. Traditional approaches to retraining often do not take the experiences and resources of learners into account. Today, new life-cycle approaches to working and learning call for

a change. This entails a shift from seeing learning as a passive – ‘being-trained process’ – to a continuous active one in which people engage in different forms of learning in the different periods of their lives.

To raise awareness of and foster debate about ‘*older workers and lifelong learning*’, Cedefop launched a project on this issue within its Research Arena, Cedra. The first product is a book ‘*Promotion of lifelong learning for older workers – an international overview*’ to be published in spring 2006. Although this book focuses mainly on European experiences, it also includes contributions from Australia, Japan and the US to review the European perspective in a broader international context. One of the envisaged highlights of phase 2 of this project (2005-06) will be a symposium in the Netherlands in May 2006. For information on the conference see:

<http://www.tilburguniversity.nl/faculties/fsw/departments/HRS/hrdconf/>

#### 4. *Stepping up efforts to anticipate skill needs*

was included in the Maastricht priorities so as to enable VET to respond to changing labour-market needs. As awareness of skill needs is considered crucial to drive the Lisbon agenda forward, Cedefop’s project on early **identification of skill needs** and the international ‘**Skillsnet**’ network have attracted the Commission’s attention following a workshop in October 2005. Experts from 14 European countries agreed to embark on a European skill needs forecasting exercise and asked Cedefop to coordinate the initiative. Two main paths will be pursued: setting up a pan-European forecasting model with the available data, and – in the longer term – aligning the sources used for skills forecasting in the European countries so as to allow for activities that are complementary to skill needs forecasting at national level. For further information, see:

<http://www.trainingvillage.gr> (go to list of projects and networks and click on Skillsnet).

#### 5. *Why do sectoral social partners get involved in education and training issues?*

is the subject of a paper which Cedefop is currently preparing. It analyses sectoral education and training policies in seven European countries (BE, DK, DE, LV, RO, ES and UK) and also provides the theoretical elements and a provisional typology of sectoral approaches. The discussion paper is aimed at policy-makers, researchers and stakeholders in the field.

Cedefop is also preparing an on-line database on sector-specific training initiatives and has established contacts with EU sectoral federations in banking and finance, textiles, metal industry, etc. to discuss the sectoral approach and to present trends and developments in sectoral training in different EU countries.

#### 6. *Promote better understanding of VET in its diversity within the EU*

Cedefop’s project reporting on **national VET systems (eKnowVet)** provides information on national VET systems in all EU Member States plus Norway and Iceland. Information is structured thematically and can be viewed across one, some or all countries. There are three different products: annually updated *thematic overviews*; *detailed thematic analyses* on each individual theme; and the *comparative presentation* of thematic information. Collected from Cedefop’s national network (ReferNet), the information for each product is stored and presented by country and theme, based on a common structure to facilitate comparison. Information is available on initial VET, CVET, training VET teachers and trainers, the validation of learning, guidance and counselling, and financing in Cedefop’s European Training Village and can be viewed at:

[www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Information\\_resources/NationalVet/](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Information_resources/NationalVet/). Users can select one or a number of countries on a range of themes or sub-themes. As the project will be undergoing some changes in the coming period, user feedback would be welcome.

Taking the thematic overviews as a point of departure, Cedefop also published **Short Descriptions** on the Presidency countries (UK and AT). *Spotlight on VET* is a new product allowing readers to obtain a rapid overview of the most distinctive features of a country's VET system.

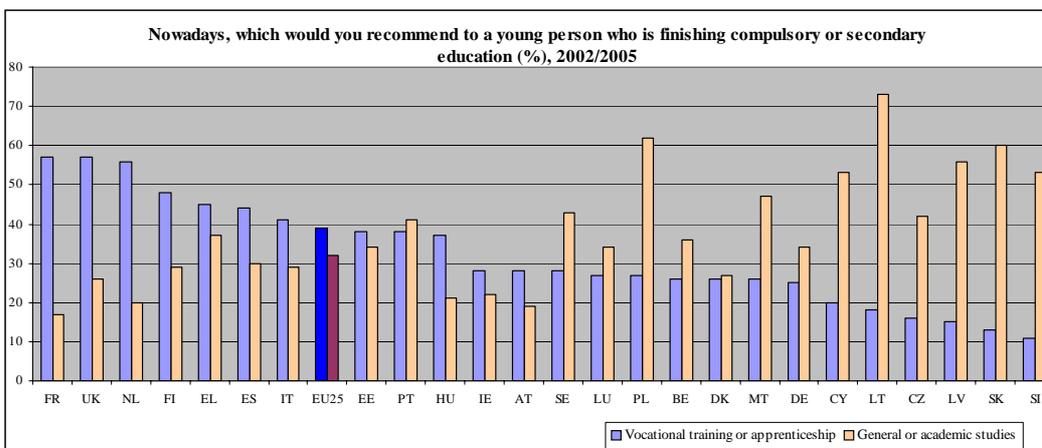
7. 'Would you recommend a young person to take up VET?'

is one of the questions asked in a **Eurobarometer survey on vocational training** carried out in autumn 2004. At first sight, all seems well for VET, as a majority of EU citizens would advise a young person who is finishing compulsory or secondary education to take up vocational training/apprenticeship: 39 % would tend to recommend VET in preference to general or academic studies (32 %). However, opinions vary significantly between citizens in the EU-15 and those in the new Member States where 53 % seem convinced that general or academic studies are a better option, as compared to 28 % in the EU-15. Conversely, in the EU-15, 42 % would recommend VET to a student after compulsory or secondary education as compared to 25 % in the new Member States.

People's advice seems highly influenced by their own educational background. People who stopped their full-time education by the age of 15 or 16-19 tend to recommend VET/apprenticeship. But unexpectedly, people who stopped their full-time education later in life do not tend to recommend general or academic studies (35 %) rather than vocational training/apprenticeship (33 %). Those most likely to suggest general or academic studies are still studying themselves.

Responses from people in employment vary according to their employment status, and are thus also influenced by their own educational level. Manual workers and the self-employed tend to recommend vocational training/apprenticeship (45 % and 42 %), whereas no clear preference was observed among managers. It is worth mentioning that the unemployed tend to recommend vocational training/apprenticeship.

Access to educational institutions seems to play a role for people living in rural villages as they are more likely to recommend vocational training/apprenticeship than general or academic studies.



Although effective **guidance** is considered as a key to encouraging people to participate in education and training and supporting them in their choice of realistic and meaningful careers, the Eurobarometer indicates that only one in four citizens of the Union received

help, advice or guidance on training and job issues during the year preceding the survey. However, this figure masks huge differences across countries (from 10 % in Portugal to 55 % in Finland).

Receiving guidance and advice is negatively influenced by age and educational background: older people and the less well-educated tend to receive less. This is worrying because they are ones most likely to need advice on how to update their skills. Results also show that guidance provision is inadequately distributed by working status. The proportions of self-employed people, manual workers and even the unemployed that have received advice or guidance on training and job issues during the reference period are lower than those for managers or other white-collar workers. Finally, guidance focuses on new skills development (63 %), on specific job or career opportunities (12 %) and on finding a new job (11 %).

From the analysis, it appears that there is a positive correlation between advice or guidance provision and participation in training, mainly in vocational training courses within the context of work. Also, those who received advice or guidance tended to benefit more from training and to have a more positive attitude towards training. This confirms that guidance is an important element in the policy package in support of lifelong learning. However, only 15 % of EU citizens consider career guidance to be an incentive to do **more** training. Moreover, it may be worth better targeting the lower skilled or those at greater risk of skill obsolescence. This may not only help them make better learning and career choices but may also have spill-over effects by developing future positive attitudes to training and skills development.

Almost two in five European citizens say that financial support would be an **incentive to undertake more training**, but on average it matters more in the new Member States (50 %) than in the old (37 %). Other possible useful incentives are the time made available during working hours by employers (30 % of EU-25 citizens) and recognition of certified skills and qualification (24 %). Tax relief schemes appear to be a key incentive for the self-employed (30 %). The attractiveness of training seems to diminish with age as 33 % of those older than 55 do not know what would encourage them to undertake more training. The results confirm the importance of obstacles such as lack of time or funding that are also given as reasons for undertaking **less** training in the near future.

For more info on recent Cedefop activities to support VET developments, please consult: <http://www.cedefop.eu.int> and <http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/default.asp>.

### III VET ON THE NATIONAL ROADS TO LISBON AND BEYOND

2005 was characterised by the national consultation process on the European Qualifications Framework. As a specific conference in February 2006 was devoted to discussing the countries' feedback, this document does not report on the results of the national exercise so as to avoid repeating the information available on: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/eqf/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html)

Following the relaunch of the Lisbon strategy, countries had to respond to new and streamlined reporting procedures and requests for development and reform programmes in different policy areas, so as to improve their contributions to the Lisbon objectives. The examples included in this report try to capture the trend towards multidisciplinary and comprehensive approaches and concerted action.

#### *National strategies paving the way to Lisbon*

In spring and summer 2005, the **Czech Republic, Estonia and the Slovak Republic** adopted the national strategies and development plans which are to take them towards Lisbon and beyond.

The **Czech** Economic Growth strategy for 2007-13 sets out to turn the country into a European centre of knowledge and technology with 'Human resources development – education and employment' as one of its priority areas. A more accommodating education system, a more flexible labour market, and older citizens with higher educational attainment levels feature among its major goals. Making higher education more easily accessible to disadvantaged people through state scholarships, and expanding the provision of secondary pathways with *maturita* (higher education entry qualifications), figure among the recommended actions, as do closer cooperation between employers, schools and higher education institutions and work placements for students. Presentation and management skills, teamwork and entrepreneurship, foreign languages and ICT skills are to become standard features of the curricula.

In **Cyprus**, the preparation of the National Reform Programme provided a platform for a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders on the broad reform agenda. The social partners, political parties and the private sector were informed and consulted extensively. Developing a comprehensive national framework for lifelong learning, improving the links between the educational system and the labour market, and upgrading people's skills to meet labour-market needs constitute the country's key challenges in the sphere of human capital development. Hence, Cyprus has committed itself to developing a competence-based vocational qualifications system and has made this task a high priority.

Drawn up in line with the Lisbon Strategy, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Maastricht Communiqué, the **Estonian** National VET system Development plan 2005-08 seeks stakeholder cooperation, labour-market relevance and better quality VET with a better image to ensure young people's smooth transition into the labour market.

Having put macroeconomic stabilisation first, **Slovakia** is now turning to investment in human resources, with education and employment as one of the priority areas.

*Minerva* <sup>(3)</sup> ([www.iminerva.sk](http://www.iminerva.sk)) is the tool used to translate the national Lisbon strategy for 2010 and its action plans into practice and to ensure the coherence of the activities to be carried out. In January 2006, the government also approved the implementation of the European Youth Pact and its integration into the national competitiveness strategy. The relevant document specifies the following objectives for education: by the end of 2006, VET school curricula should provide for entrepreneurial skills; by the end of 2007, policies should ensure that graduates can better adapt to labour-market needs and young people can more easily benefit from mobility. Also, a new policy for the recognition of non-formal learning is envisaged by then.

**Belgium's** National Reform Programme 2005-08 highlights the responsibilities shouldered by each of the different authorities. Access to employment, in particular for low-skilled young people, is one of the two priority objectives for the Region of Brussels-Capital. In terms of training and employment, the main reform priorities in the Brussels-Capital region are to offer young people, especially the low-skilled, their first 'work/training experience'; to raise jobseekers' standard of training by setting up reference centres in sectors with employment potential; and to strengthen the 'language vouchers' initiative (see below) and introduce 'training vouchers' and 'information and communication technology vouchers'.

Given the federal structure of the Belgian state, political responsibility for future developments lies with the regions. In August 2005, the Walloon Government presented the 'Priority actions for the future of **Wallonia**'. One of the priorities set in relation to VET is to create centres of competitiveness in specific sectors in which the region excels (e.g. avionics, agrofood, mechanical engineering and transport), setting up cluster groups with enterprises, training establishments and research units. Through the priority actions for the future of the Walloon Region, a new scheme was developed to stimulate the competitiveness of Walloon enterprises. Wallonia has 260 000 jobseekers and Flanders is its leading trading partner, but those looking for jobs lack the skills required. The *chèque formation langues* is considered one of the ingredients in the recipe for success. The language-learning voucher for the self-employed and SMEs is equivalent to an hour's language class. The Walloon Region will grant a subsidy of EUR 15 for each voucher. To address the skill shortages, a comprehensive action plan has been developed: Job Focus. For a period of four years FOREM, the Walloon employment service, will analyse 40 different occupations to identify skill shortages, screen job seekers' skills and offer training or support services to remedy the situation.

'Together for more jobs' is the leitmotiv of the **Flemish** Government. The prime aim is to help youth, older people and immigrants to find a job. An employment premium has been introduced for employers who hire people over 50. Within a period of six months every unemployed person must receive a guidance or training offer from the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB). The VDAB is also seeking contacts with immigrant communities to build up know-how for better-targeted measures. In January 2006 the training and orientation centres for disabled people found a place 'under the wing' of the VDAB, another opportunity to pool expertise. The so-called Limburg plan aims at tapping young people's potential and comprises a number of different projects to support transition from initial training to working life (e.g. the 'backpack project', which aims at keeping young people in jobs, or the 'ferry project' in

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<sup>(3)</sup> Not to be confused with the EU programme of the same name – the acronym in Slovak stands for Mobilisation of innovation in the national economy and the development of scientific-educational activities.

which the sectoral body for the construction industry acts as ‘ferryman’ between education and employment).

‘Is **Italy**’s education and training system on the right way to Lisbon?’ is the question the 2005 annual report by ISFOL (Institute for the development of workers’ vocational training), seeks to answer. While participation in education and training in the 20-24 age-group is approaching the European average, the report identifies shortcomings in attainment levels and in reducing dropout rates. The intake in initial VET is on the rise, vocational training provided by the Regions and Provinces is comparatively popular in Northern Italy. A first evaluation of IFTS courses (higher technical education and training) after the pilot phase indicates that 60 % of graduates are in jobs within a year of completing their courses, which is considered to be a success. The 2005 report on continuing training by the Ministry of Labour and ISFOL stresses the importance of the progress made in creating a national system for CVT, even if only one-fifth of workers participate in training activities. Continuing training is beginning to benefit from the multi-sectoral funds administered by the social partners and initially financed by the Ministry of Labour to the tune of EUR 190 million: to date 350 000 companies with a total of 5 million workers are involved. Large companies have made better use of available public support for training than smaller ones. Individual training (training plans, catalogues and vouchers) is successful in Central and Northern Italy. There are hopes that the evaluation of the 2005 exercise will reveal different results, given the increase in available resources.

### ***Lifelong learning strategy***

In November 2005, the **Estonian** Government approved the ‘Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005-08’ which focuses primarily on adult learners. It aims at increasing the share of 25-64 year-old learners to 10 % by 2008 (6.2 % in 2003 and 6.7 % in 2004). The strategy provides for the development of a transparent funding model for adult education. Non-Estonian adults will get the opportunity to acquire the level of Estonian necessary to participate actively in society and work. If they so wish, they can learn their native languages and develop their native cultures. Another aim of the strategy is to develop a national qualifications system comparable to similar systems in EU countries so as to ensure free movement of labour force. The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for implementing the strategy and the Adult Education Council will monitor the process.

With its action plan on ‘*Learning and Working 2005-07*’, published in December 2005, the **Dutch** Government intends to drive the lifelong learning agenda forward. This joint project of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, with contributions from other ministries, is to kick off activities by employers, employees and other citizens, education providers, local government and regions. It is up to the different parties to commit themselves to implementing the project along three different strands of programmes: ‘work-based learning’, ‘learning-working desk’ and ‘remove obstacles, promote and innovate’. To help people integrate into the labour market or acquire occupational qualifications, the aim is to establish 15 000 work-based learning programmes by 2007 through cooperation agreements between employers, employees, education providers and local governments. Learning-working desks should provide low-threshold one-stop shops that offer career counselling and information on education and training opportunities as well as validation and recognition of prior learning. The third strand aims at providing examples of good practice (e.g. results from EQUAL/ESF projects), identifying and disseminating information on available funding (instruments) and piloting a new two-year associate degree programme

in higher VET (HBO). A total of around EUR 40 million was foreseen for the activities in 2005 and 2006.

Sector-based perspectives linked to existing institutional structures are outdated, the **Hungarian** LLL strategy advocates a comprehensive approach in response to social and economic challenges. It defines six priorities and seven key areas for development. Emphasis is placed on appropriate coordination between the different ministries and the coherence to the National Development Plan for 2007-13. Of the various measures foreseen, the most characteristic are modularised training programmes to make access easier, a national adult training data base as a tool for information and planning and an indicator system to allow for impact evaluation, as an integrative part in the Lisbon process.

In June 2005, the **Irish** Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) published a policy document on lifelong learning. The European Commission has commented on the limited nature of the government's response to this issue in successive national employment plans. The ICTU document provided a number of policy recommendations: (a) introducing paid learning leave would enable workers to ensure that their skill levels kept pace with innovation in their sector, as most of the other European countries have some form of learning leave entitlement; (b) opening up the National Training Fund (NTF) to individual applicants and adding resources from employees' insurance (c) paying fees for part-time students; (d) establishing an 'Open University' based on the model of the Open University in the UK, blending classroom, distance and e-learning, and thus making it attractive for those in work

The **Norwegian** 'competence account' (*Kompetanseberetningen*), which is financed by the Ministry of Education and Research, gives an annual overview and assessment of CVET activities, participation and training needs. An annual Learning Condition Monitor (*Lærevilkårsmonitoren*) was also introduced. Comparative studies between countries within key areas will be included. The annual findings form the basis of further policy decisions on LLL. The Competence Account 2003 shows that more than 70 % of 16-74 year-olds participated in some form of activity with learning effects, formal as well as non-formal. Organised non-formal learning in the workplace and learning through daily work were considered the most important types of CVET. People with a strong education background and groups in tertiary production were the most positive towards organised formal and non-formal training ([www.kompetanseberetningen.no](http://www.kompetanseberetningen.no)). The first issue of the Learning Condition Monitor showed that 54 % of the economically active 22-66 year-olds take part in some form of education and training each year. While 11.3 % attended some kind of 'formally recognised CVET' during the year preceding the survey, 57.2 % attended some kind of 'courses and other organised training' and 58 % said they had learned through their 'learning intensive' work. Work-related motivations seem to have been the main incentive for individuals to participate in formally recognised CVET and other types of organised learning.

IESE, the **Portuguese** Institute for social and economic studies has carried out an analysis of the country's lifelong learning policies, analysing in particular the relevant measures included in the national employment plans. The study, commissioned by the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity, assessed *inter alii* the synergies between education and training and employment policies, evaluated the effects of LLL on the organisation of the labour market and on beneficiaries' employability. The study provides recommendations on policy measures for education, training and employment, in particular as regards individual training demand and the contribution of enterprises to promoting continuing training.

### ***Modernising education and training in terms of structure and legislation***

In the last few months of 2005 a new programme for Developments in Secondary Education (2006- 2015) was elaborated which was presented to and concerted with the **Bulgarian** Council of Ministers in February 2006 to be adopted by the Parliament. The main principles of the programme are as follows: balance between traditional and modern approaches, transparency and planning, sustainable developments. Some of the structural changes foreseen, refer to shortening basic education from eight to seven years and dividing secondary education in three plus two years. At the end of year ten, students will receive a certificate; at the end of year twelve, secondary education will be completed with national exams and a diploma (*matura*). In year eight, intensive foreign language learning, computers and/or VET will be offered. Quality is to be assured through internal evaluation (i.e. exams at the beginning and the end combined with continuous skills and competence assessment during the school year, and test systems) as well as external evaluation (compulsory assessment and evaluation at the end of each educational stage).

2005 also saw a number of amendments to the **Bulgarian** Vocational Education and Training Act. The changes involve introducing training programmes for regulated professions. They relate to the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications, which constitutes considerable progress in transferring European Directives 89/48/EEC and 92/51/EEC (now Directive 2005/36/EC) into Bulgarian legislation. The responsibility will lie with the Ministry of Education and Science and the relevant sector authorities (in line with the list of regulated professions). The Ministry is about to finalise the ordinances regulating the award of licences to people who have acquired skills and competences in an EU Member State or the European Economic Area so as to entitle them to practise the respective regulated professions.

In **Croatia** several measures were taken to improve legislation and the support structure in education. Following the introduction of the 'Law on the National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education' in January 2005, the Centre was entrusted with preparing national *matura* exams and conducting the external evaluation of the system. These changes were reflected in the amendments to the 'Law on Secondary Education' adopted in 2005.

The Agency for VET established in 2005 needs to step up reform efforts to meet the new labour-market requirements and prepare for lifelong learning, as the **Croatian** VET system has not seen any major changes for more than a decade. An exception was the complete overhaul of all crafts trade programmes. The main challenges are: to streamline the programmes and the school network, develop national qualification standards, revise curricula and teaching aids, upgrade workshop equipment, improve cooperation with the private sector and launch comprehensive school and teacher development schemes.

The 2010 education and training objectives and the Bologna and Copenhagen processes have served as references for the reform of the **French** education system and training system. Three major initiatives were launched: the modernisation and reform of the education system adopted in April 2005, which focuses on modern language learning (two foreign languages are mandatory in all general and technological paths at secondary level), gender equality, the mastery of information and communication technologies through the so-called B2i Certificate (IT and Internet Proficiency Certificate) for pupils and adults, and support for at-risk students; the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy which includes a right to training for all employees; and the structural reform of education and training institutions as part of the ongoing decentralisation process. To make access to training easier for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a

regulation of August 2005 lowered the contributions of enterprises with 10 to 19 employees from 1.60 % to 1.05 % of their gross annual wage bill. Skills auditing, implementing a training passport and accrediting life experience were key topics covered by the amendments to the National Interprofessional Agreement on CVET issues in summer 2005.

To foster quality in VET and strengthen the links with the working world, the label *lycées des métiers* (profession-based high schools) was created in **France**. A decree of November 2005 outlines the most recent conditions for the award of the label. Schools that qualify provide educational paths and training programmes relative to a certain profession or group of professions, grant qualifications from the vocational training certificate to the higher-education level and serve all populations from pupils and apprentices to young people/adults on alternating work-study contracts or continuing training programmes. They offer services to validate prior learning and transition to work, and cooperate actively with business and industry, higher education institutions and local community bodies. A quality approach was launched as part of a certification procedure based on a thorough set of specifications. During 2005, 195 schools received the label.

A new **German** Vocational Training Law entered into force on 1 April 2005. Among other things, the new Law allows for young people coming out of school-based VET to take exams organised by the chambers, thus strengthening cooperation between schools and industry. The exam regulations also make it possible for trainees to complete periods of training abroad and allow for the recognition of preparatory courses towards training outcomes. However, the social partners raised some concerns: by putting school-based training courses on an equal footing with apprenticeship ('dual system'), VET may become 'too academic and bookish' and put the 'dual system' at risk; allowing the transition from apprenticeship training to higher education to be regulated by the individual *Länder* could reduce the appeal of the dual system in the European and international context; and uniform admission requirements would be preferable.

The most significant VET policy developments and initiatives in **Hungary** relate to the goals and objectives defined in a package of strategies and action plans which were developed for VET and other education sectors linked to it: higher education and adult training. Providing quality VET for everyone and developing a more cost efficient financing and governance system lie at the heart of '*szakképzés*', the VET strategy. Fourteen steps have been developed to reach the objectives. One of them is to set up 22 regional VET centres (TISZK) as a remedy for the currently fragmented structure of VET institutions. Consultation with employer and employee representatives, economic chambers, and VET providers and institutions is to be institutionalised with the aim of aligning training with labour-market needs. A feasibility study has been launched for employees' training cards that would help to track people's training paths. A decree was endorsed in October 2005 which stipulates that the 50+ generation receive training free of charge. To boost quality, a specific award is being created to reward those VET providers that empower large numbers of graduates to secure jobs.

In December 2005 the **Italian** Council of Ministers gave the green light to a reform of the rules governing access to regulated professions and admission to state examinations for professional accreditation. The reform will also extend to the composition of exam boards and the conduct of the examinations. In some professions the required qualification levels have been raised to a degree obtained after three years of study, while work placements or traineeships have become a general prerequisite.

An innovation box for VET is on the policy agenda in the **Netherlands**. As of 2006, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science provides EUR 200 million annually to support innovation schemes in addition to the EUR 81 million provided from the Economic Structure Enhancing Fund. A similar approach will be used for VET in the agricultural sector. This is part and parcel of the country's mid-term agenda 2005-10 for VET with a number of measures agreed between the senior secondary VET sector (MBO) and the Ministry in November 2005. In line with the agreements, MBOs are implementing competence-based training to increase young people's motivation and to strengthen the links between enterprises and educational establishments. Loosening school inspection has been agreed for those MBOs that have implemented transparent governance and internal monitoring procedures. To renew the participatory structures, the social partners will elaborate proposals which will serve the Ministry as a starting point for developing regulations for joint management.

In July 2005, the **Spanish** Council of Ministers adopted a draft Framework Law on Education to be debated in parliament with the aim of providing high quality education for all. To achieve this, the draft Law includes measures to enable all students to complete compulsory schooling successfully and to promote lifelong learning, equal opportunities and social cohesion. To ensure quality, educational achievement will be tested at the end of year four in primary school (age 9) and the second year of secondary school (age 13). Their aim is to provide precise data on the overall functioning of the education system so as to steer the decision-making process in the right direction and upgrade student learning. As regards VET, greater flexibility is envisaged in terms of access and links between the different sub-systems. Various bridges are foreseen between general education and vocational training streams.

Under the EU programme on 'Strengthening Vocational Education and Training' (SVET), a reform was introduced in **Turkey** in 2002 to increase the system's flexibility and to open pathways between general, technical and vocational education. Accordingly, common curricula started to be implemented in the academic year 2004/2005 in year 9 in 65 pilot upper secondary VET schools and 40 upper secondary general schools. In June 2005, the Ministry of Education decided to mainstream the outcomes of the SVET programme. Secondary education was extended to four years and a common 9th grade was introduced as an orientation year for both general and VET schools.

A skills revolution is required if the **UK** wants to have a world-class skills base by 2020, this – in a nutshell – reflects the interim findings of a skills review commissioned by the Government in 2004 and published in December 2005. The final report '*Skills in the UK: The long-term challenge*' and recommendations to the government will follow in 2006. The purpose of the review was to identify the UK's optimal skills mix in 2020 to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice, and to consider potential policy implications. Although the skills profile of the UK has improved due to its higher education system, reforms to vocational training and an increasingly effective school system, the poor skills of the nation's workforce constitute a threat: e.g. half of all British adults do not have functional numeracy and one in six adults lacks the literacy skills expected of 11 year-olds; more than a third of working age adults lack basic school-leaving qualifications; and five million adults have no qualifications at all. The UK's current targets to upskill the workforce, though considered very ambitious, would still not suffice, the author concludes. In a first response to the interim findings, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) suggested that a policy framework to boost skills should build on a consensus around the obligation of employers to train their employees and the joint responsibility of employers, employees and government to meet the wider needs of the

workforce. Collective agreements between employers and unions could help deliver such a strategy.

In November 2005, a review of the future role of further education (FE) colleges in **England**, *'Realising the Potential'*, was published after being commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in the previous year. The remit of the review was to identify the distinctive contribution of FE colleges to their local economies and to social inclusion, and what needs to happen to transform them. The report outlines the many achievements of FE colleges, highlighting the vast number of learners (over 3 million), the wide range of activities, which also include employment training and higher education, and their role in facilitating social inclusion. However, there is a need for innovation with a clear 'learner focus' as a key element to ensure that students receive impartial advice, financial incentives are used to steer students on to courses valuable to the economy, to offer a greater choice between courses and learning modes and to streamline qualifications and learning pathways. The review points out that FE colleges are only one part of a system, with FE having suffered from 'too many initiatives'. A coherent and managed framework spanning schools, FE and higher education and a new funding methodology are required. It also proposes a simplified inspection regime, a greater focus on the learner experience and value for money. Based on the report, the Education and Skills Secretary concluded that FE colleges 'need a clearer purpose, improved leadership and a sharper focus on the specific needs of learners and businesses'. The report is available on <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/fereview/index.shtml>.

The role of CVET in **Poland** is gaining in importance, but it is usually seen in the context of labour market and unemployment and does not fully embrace the concept of lifelong learning set out in the Lisbon Strategy. Having identified the areas of concern, various legislative initiatives are being considered, including an overhaul of the Law which governs the education system. The 'Development Strategy of Continuing Education until 2010', for instance, identified 'cooperation and partnership' as one of the priority areas that need speedy implementation to remedy problem issues such as vocational placements organised by employers or training and job opportunities for people with disabilities and learning difficulties. Given the dynamic developments on the CVET market, ensuring the quality of provision has become a major concern. The Superintendent's offices therefore launched an accreditation system for providers. To widen access to continuing training, a National Distance Learning Centre, as well as regional and local centres are in the pipeline. Validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET is an issue that calls for immediate action. The recently developed national model of vocational qualifications standards is considered a potential starting point, provided they are linked to the existing examination and curriculum standards. An electronic database provides access to modular vocational training curricula and the national vocational qualifications standards: [www.standardyiszkolenia.praca.gov.pl](http://www.standardyiszkolenia.praca.gov.pl).

### *National qualifications frameworks/systems*

Parallel to the debate on **Cyprus**'s position on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) held by government departments as well as public and private actors, including the social partners, a discussion on a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning was launched. So far, the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) has been in charge of establishing a vocational qualifications system. In 2006 it will revise and apply the existing vocational qualifications standards for the five occupations waiter, cook, receptionist, construction mason and sales person (retail trade). Employees as well as trainees participating in the HRDA's initial training programmes will be able to

benefit from the new system. In the period 2007-13, standards for 25 occupations at various levels are to be developed for manufacturing, the hotel industry, the construction sector, the trade and repairs of motor vehicles as well as for cross-sectoral occupations, mainly administrative ones.

In addition to the National Adult Training Board which also acts as National Qualification Authority, **Romania** established another body which is to focus on higher education: the ACPART agency, whose main task so far has been to promote university enterprise cooperation. With a common framework for qualifications in preparation, the collaboration between the two bodies and the sectoral committees, which have been established to support the development of qualifications, will be important to ensure coherence. ACPART will operate within the Bologna framework and is committed to the promotion of outcome-based qualifications in higher education.

The latest legal regulations adopted in **Spain** in December 2005, leading to the integration of its different vocational training subsystems, follow on from a series of measures, mainly conceived in the 1990s with the aim of providing differentiated vocational training which is at once varied and standardised. The aim pursued by the new regulation of the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications is to provide everyone – students, workers in employment and unemployed people – with access to high-quality vocational training and lifelong training and the possibility of acquiring the respective qualifications. In the amended National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications, the definition of qualifications outlines the training required for each skill unit, and provides benchmarks for the assessment and accreditation of vocational skills acquired through work experience or non-formal training pathways.

### ***Financing VET***

The **Estonian** Government revised its funding mechanism for VET in autumn 2005 to align the coefficients applied to study areas and study forms as well as to students with special needs with their actual costs. The regulation provides for an increase in funding studies in resource-intensive areas whereby the lowest coefficient is 1.0 and the highest 4.0. Prior coefficients ranged from 1.0 to 3.6 with the weighted average being 1.15, which meant that the minimum coefficient group applied to a large number of students. Resource-intensive areas were under-funded; VET schools received the same whether they were training welders, turners, builders, joiners or sales persons, secretaries or accountants. With the adoption of the new regulation, the budgets of most VET institutions will increase. It is hoped this will help to boost the quality and image of VET and improve the competitiveness of graduates on the labour market.

Through the One Step Up initiative, FÁS (the **Irish** National Training and Employment Authority) has committed EUR 35 million to upskill the workforce and encourage lifelong learning in Ireland. It includes low-skilled and older workers, where the greatest need lies. Management skills in SMEs will also be targeted for assistance. Courses will be drawn up in conjunction with SME representatives and will be delivered locally in short modules outside business hours. In its recent “Training Strategy” FÁS supports the introduction of a national paid learning-leave scheme and the extension of tax relief for individual expenditure on training courses.

### ***Increasing efficiency***

Making efficient use of its human resources and making VET school management more effective, these are the objectives of the **Estonian** ‘Development Plan for the State Vocational Educational Institutions Network 2005–08’. The VET schools network is to be reorganised following an economic, social and labour-market analysis carried out at

national and regional level. Part of the analysis was forecasting the volume and regional set-up of training provision. In cooperation with employers, employees, local municipalities and the state, further assessment will be made on training opportunities, teachers' potential and the suitability of programmes in view of regional development needs. The ultimate aim is increase the quality of training by saving resources at the same time.

### ***Making VET more attractive....***

2005 was the National Year of Vocational Skills in **Finland**. During the year, VET and the significance of vocational competence were promoted through various initiatives and events organised in cooperation with VET providers, educational institutions and the world of work and business. They have a competence-based qualifications system in place where qualifications are demonstrated in competence-based tests independent of the way in which the skills were acquired. In addition to initial vocational qualifications, the competence-based qualifications system also includes further and specialist qualifications that support vocational development. Finland also held the World Skills event.

### ***... by improving its quality***

In **Austria**, quality assurance processes have been under way for several years in all types of schools and colleges. The VET Quality Initiative (QIBB), launched in 2005, is built on a comprehensive approach which integrates school and college activities into a quality management system. It aims to ensure and enhance the quality of teaching and administration by making use of established good practices. QIBB forms the common framework for a quality network which covers every category of VET institution, the inspectorates and the Directorate-General for VET in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It is to foster the development of common strategies but at the same time leave scope to allow for the specific features of individual establishments. QIBB takes account of the common quality-assurance framework (CQAF) for VET developed at the European level as part of the Copenhagen Process.

The 'National Education Quality Control and Evaluation Centre' established in mid-2005 is responsible for assessment, evaluation and quality assurance in **Bulgaria's** education system. The centre is a governmental research and information service, subsidiary to the Ministry of Education and Science. Its range of activities includes developing and assessing quality control systems for upper secondary and higher education institutions; building up external and internal evaluation models and mechanisms; designing examination materials; and analysing quality indicators in upper secondary and higher education.

The Vocational Education Centre of the **Latvian** Ministry of Education and Science is implementing a national programme to develop a unified methodology to increase vocational education quality and the participation of social partners. The strategic approaches developed in 2005 cover the following areas: sectoral research, development of occupational standards, VET curricula design, quality assessment and assurance for VET institutions, and a set of measures to assess non-formally and informally acquired skills. Support and training for social partners is also being prepared with the aim to increase the quality of VET.

A document entitled 'Vocational Education Standard' has been prepared in **Estonia** which will be used as a basis for the design of national curricula and those in VET institutions, the registration of curricula the issuing of education licences. Another standard – to be approved in the first half of 2006 – comprises a single set of

requirements for upper secondary and post-secondary (non-tertiary) VET, training of persons who have not completed lower secondary education and for VET components in basic school and upper secondary general education.

Given their twofold mission of vocational training and general education, **Austrian** VET schools and colleges are required to adapt rapidly to new demands while providing high-level skills that are comparable and portable. In 2005, the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture therefore launched a project with the aim to develop quality standards for core elements of general education and specialised vocational training. These standards will define target outcomes in the form of specialised and cross-curricular skills to be achieved by a particular year of schooling. While national tests will be used to check whether the targets have been met, they will not be used to assess individual student performance or to rank VET institutions. Standards for general subject areas are developed jointly with the general education sector. For the core vocational elements, close cooperation has been established with the neighbouring countries. Part-time schools for apprentices show a tendency towards appraisal models based on problem-solving and practical skills instead of target-based standards.

A specific committee has been set up – chaired by the State Secretary within the **Swedish** Ministry of Education and Culture – to improve the quality in VET. Its task is to advise on reasons for success and glitches in developing VET. Strengthening the links between different subject areas, and improving the collaboration among schools and between schools and the workplaces are seen as potential remedies. Better cooperation between municipalities and pooling resources to offer fewer but better VET programmes are also considered ingredients for better quality. Seeking first-hand information, the committee appointed around 20 so-called ‘Idea-schools’ in different parts of Sweden. During Spring 2006, each school is to form a network with others, which will lead to a total of 100-200 schools sharing a common goal: broader and speedier efforts to develop VET. The objective is to attract more young people into VET and to reduce the numbers of those leaving education without certificates or qualifications. The committee will analyse and evaluate the different measures and disseminate research results and ‘learning examples’ through the network of networks.

### *... by amending VET provision*

**Estonia** aims at providing appropriate VET opportunities and flexible forms of study to meet the different needs of learners. A new range of pathways was set out in an amendment to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act which came into force in January 2006: ISCED 2B vocational training programmes without general education components; ISCED 2C VET programmes for people who have not completed basic education; ISCED 3B with the opportunity to add on a year of general studies for those who want to take the national exams and progress to higher education; work-linked training (**apprenticeship training**), originally piloted in form of a Phare project (2002) targeting early school leavers. 16 VET institutions all over Estonia and approximately 150 enterprises are involved in this new form of training, which will also receive **ESF** support as approved in September 2005.

By 2015 95 % of an age cohort should complete youth education, this is the objective set by the **Danish** Government in a consolidated statement presented in August 2005. Facing the challenge to prevent students from dropping out, VET is being restructured. The idea is to attract and retain young people with different skills and ambitions through a new graduation system, i.e. pre-defined exit levels. Thus, VET should maintain its high status by opening doors to higher education for those who want to continue their studies, while also catering adequately for those who leave the system earlier. The government and the

social partners also agreed on the need to find more work placements for VET students not just in the private but also in the public sector. Two committees were set up to develop future-oriented strategies for the Danish VET system and to explore new potential areas for training.

Despite recommendations in the 1990s to reduce the number of study and training branches in secondary VET in **Slovakia**, there are still 1032 officially recognised ones available to date. A decree in 2005 which amended the study and training branches by abolishing more than 500 and establishing 200 new ones, constituted another important step in this process.

Mechatronics is a fusion of mechanics, electronics and informatics, i.e. intelligent computer control. The people operating such systems need to combine skills in these three areas. Forecasts indicate that, by the year 2007, the **Slovenian** economy will need about 1 600 trained people trained in this field. Following the initiatives of Slovenian asking for people to be trained at secondary and higher education level, the Centre for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) prepared occupational profiles, occupational standards and some catalogues of standards for professional knowledge and skills. Based on the occupational standard for mechatronic operators, the CPI started to prepare a new education programme for secondary VET. The new programme, which also integrates general subjects and key qualifications, was launched in the school year 2005/06. A higher education programme was launched in parallel. A complementary programme (four years) for mechatronic technicians at secondary level is in preparation. For further planning, however, more precise information on the labour-market requirements would be needed.

#### *...by setting up new apprenticeship programmes*

Rely on tradition to pave the way into the future. This is one of the messages put forward by a committee composed of different Ministries and social partner representatives to the **Danish** Ministry of Education in summer 2005 to meet the government's objective of attracting more young people into VET. The reintroduction of the traditional apprenticeship would increase companies' responsibility for training. Contrary to the current Danish system, where VET colleges provide basic training and specialised training takes place in colleges and companies alternately, apprentices would acquire their skills in the workplace, supervised by skilled workers. The level of skills acquired would be equal.

In **Sweden** a new apprenticeship system at upper secondary level is ready for take-off in 2007. Built on the same national courses as school-based VET, it devotes at least twice as much time on work-based learning (minimum of 32 weeks in a three-year programme as opposed to a minimum of 15 weeks). The responsibility of finding the workplaces and ensuring that work-based learning meets the demands set, lies with school boards.

To support apprenticeship, the **Italian** Ministry of Labour has published a document which explains the applicable regulations and procedures. Apprenticeship is designed as a work contract which includes a mandatory training component and leads to a secondary school or IFTS (higher technical education and training) certificate. The duration of apprenticeship contracts and the responsibilities of those involved are to be defined and agreed upon at regional level.

In **France**, a national framework agreement was signed in spring 2005 to develop apprenticeship, mobilising vocational training establishments, networks of chambers of commerce and industry, and management bodies of apprentice training centres.

### *...by reducing barriers to mobility*

**Germany** and **Austria** show that VET can open up gateways beyond national borders. In September 2005, the countries reached an agreement on the comparability of VET certificates, a result of the long-standing cooperation between the two countries, and on mutual trust. Since 1990 more than 200 individual vocational training certificates had been recognised. Following a similar agreement signed previously with **France**, **Germany** has provided the basis for easier occupational mobility with two neighbouring countries.

### *Making VET more relevant to labour market needs*

Agreements with five sectors related to training policy, approved by the **Flemish** Government in December 2005, are to ensure better links between education and the labour market. The building sector, for instance, offers 3 000 work places to students in secondary education. The other sectors involved are the hotel and catering industry, passenger transport, assembly as well as the hair and beauty sector.

‘Learning Entrepreneurship’ partnerships got the go-ahead in the **Netherlands** in November 2005 to encourage educational establishments and business and industry to cooperate more closely and to boost business start-ups. To this end, specific ‘ambassadors’ have been designated, and a website and a specific award have been created. Although the focus is clearly on VET at all levels (VMBO, MBO and HBO), educational institutions of all types and levels can participate in the activities and compete for the EUR 5000 Learning entrepreneurship award.

In the White Paper, ‘*Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work*’ published in 2005, the **UK** Government announced one of its latest initiatives to boost workers’ skills levels: *Skills Academies*. To provide various industries with skilled and entrepreneurial employees, the 12 Skills Academies will be established in partnership with employers and the [Sector Skills Councils](http://www.ssda.org.uk) ([www.ssda.org.uk](http://www.ssda.org.uk)) by 2008. Each academy will be designed for a different sector of industry or business. In the words of the White Paper, they will become ‘national centres of excellence for the post-16 sector working closely with schools and colleges.’ In early November 2005 it was announced that four industries in the UK manufacturing - construction, food and drink, and financial services - were to get a major boost through National Skills Academies (NSA) to be open by September 2006. They stand to benefit from a share of up to EUR 56 million of investment from both the government and industry.

### *Fostering labour market and social inclusion*

Fostering basic skills through CVET, is a concept piloted by seven major **Danish** vocational training centres in summer 2005. The initiative is based on the experience that a number of adults have difficulties in following CVET, or even drop out. Workshops geared to meet the individual needs of less-educated adults offer VET with supplementary and supportive education in reading, writing and numeracy, whichever may be relevant to the CVET programme followed.

Within the framework of the **Flemish** job plan, EUR 5 million are dedicated to additional part-time learning and working opportunities for low-skilled young people with the aim of providing a bridge to employment.

The emergency employment plan launched in **France** in June 2005 targeted long-term unemployed young people, 60 % of whom received a job or training offer. In December 2005, the French government created a professional transition contract (*contrat de transition professionnelle CTP*), which will be piloted during 2006. This contract is

offered to people made redundant in companies of less than 300 employees. They can sign a contract with a public entity ensuring them training and a remuneration equal to 90 % of their former salary. This is linked to an occupational activity in public bodies or private companies. In January 2006, the government created two new types of work contracts for young people below 26 which both propose a trial period of two years in a permanent work-contract. During this time, the employer can dismiss the employee without any explanation and without redundancy payment, but only a kind of ‘severance pay’.

Half of all **UK** prisoners have no qualifications, and more than a third have poor reading skills. Two thirds were unemployed before prison and many have no prospect of finding jobs when they are released. Hence, in December 2005, the UK Government unveiled plans to improve training and education to help offenders find jobs when they leave prison, thus reducing re-offending. A consultation on the proposal also began and will finish towards the end of May 2006. The plans are outlined in a new ‘*Green Paper: Reducing Re-Offending through Skills and Employment*’, published jointly by the Department for Education and Skills, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions. Key proposals include more relevant skills training, designed by and responding to employers’ needs, a new ‘employability contract’ to motivate offenders to participate, and a ‘campus’ model to ensure continuity of education from prisons into the community and to improve the links with mainstream education and training. The idea is to provide education and training which will lead to skills and qualifications that are meaningful for employers and lead to real jobs, as evidence from existing employer-led training and employment schemes shows that the right training and opportunities for sustained and satisfying employment can turn ex-offenders away from crime.

### ***Guidance and counselling***

‘50+ clubs’, 50 consultants and 50 job coaches are to cater for job-seekers over 50 within a EUR 5million initiative launched by the **Flemish** government in **Belgium** with the aim of providing targeted information and training. Also disabled people and employees faced with company restructuring are to receive better guidance and counselling.

The **Bulgarian** National Paedagogical Centre ([www.npc-bg.com](http://www.npc-bg.com)), a government service unit set up in 2004, started operating in 2005. As an out-of-school paedagogical institution it organises and coordinates activities to implement the Ministry’s policy on paedagogical support and student, parent and teacher counselling in the following areas: teaching-staff qualification and training, student retention and drop-out prevention as well as career guidance and counselling. The centre works in coordination with the Ministry and cooperates with the Regional Inspectorates for Education, trades unions, employers’ associations, municipal administrations, universities and other higher education institutions, qualification departments and non-governmental organisations.

[www.utbildningsinfo.se](http://www.utbildningsinfo.se) is the portal into the **Swedish** educational system. It is a new website for students, parents and professionals which offers a description of the Swedish school system from pre-school to university, a search facility for educational programmes, a web-based career guidance tool and the opportunity to create personal folders. A specific entry for career counsellors aims at supporting them in their daily work.

### ***Validating non-formal and informal learning***

In **Wallonia** and **Brussels**, all citizens over the age of 18 have the right to have their skills and competences validated, irrespective of how they acquired them. Priority is given to people who do not possess any formal certificates or diplomas. The validation is

done through competence-based assessment and leads to a title. It also constitutes an entry ticket into training modules. At the request of the social partners, reference systems for 12 occupations were developed by the end of 2005; by the end of 2006 validation for about thirty occupational areas should be possible. A consortium and accredited validation centres set up by the five public CVET providers are in charge of the activity.

In August 2005 the **Czech** government approved a draft Law which, as of August 2007, will make it possible to acquire a generally recognised certificate of a specific professional competence level regardless of how it was acquired. To obtain the certificate, those interested have to take an exam with an authorised commission (or individual). A list of full or partial qualifications which can be validated and recognised along with the relevant evaluation standards will be part of the National System of Qualifications (*Národní soustava kvalifikací*) being developed by the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education – NÚOV.

### ***Europass***

**Cyprus** launched the Europass in December 2005. The Cyprus Productivity Centre has been designated as National Europass Centre. All participants in the launch event, which was also attended by representatives of the European Commission and Cedefop, social partners and other stakeholders, including representatives of education and training organisations, public employment services and community and voluntary interest groups, received information on the five Europass documents on a USB memory stick. In **Latvia**, where the National Europass Centre was established in May 2005, four of the Europass documents have already been implemented while the Certificate Supplements are being prepared.

**Polish** educational authorities are fully aware of Europass' potential to strengthen mobility but they also see its role in encouraging young people to officially confirm their qualifications gained in VET. To ensure the consistency of the teaching process, comparability and transparency of qualifications, and thus better quality and a higher standing for VET, external vocational exams were introduced in 2004. However, only a little over 67 % of two-year basic vocational school-leavers and 50 % of three-year basic vocational school-leavers took the external examination in 2005. To make the exams more attractive, the Ministry of National Education and Sport decided not to issue the Europass Certificate Supplement automatically together with the school leaving certificate, but with the diploma obtained upon successful completion of the external exam. This way the Europass Certificate Supplement will become an incentive. It will bear the number of the corresponding vocational diploma and the name of the holder, which will give the document more importance and will make it more attractive to the school-leavers.

### ***VET teachers and trainers***

For historical reasons, teacher training in **Austria** has taken place in dedicated post-secondary establishments. The type of training institution largely depends on the category of school where the trainee teacher will subsequently work and – within VET – also the subject area. Specific colleges have been devoted to in-service teacher training. With the 'Tertiary Colleges of Education Act 2005', which will enter into force in spring 2006, these different training courses, including those for VET teachers, will be brought under one roof in tertiary colleges of education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) – with the exception of those offered at universities (e.g. teachers for general subjects, business administration, engineering theory in fully school-based VET programmes). The new colleges can provide training for all educational professions, including training in areas

such as school management and adult education. They will offer internationally comparable degrees as envisaged in the Bologna Process.

Following a survey conducted by the **Bulgarian** Ministry of Education and Science on the needs of qualification and training for teaching staff in upper secondary education, the National Pedagogical Centre ([www.npc-bg.com](http://www.npc-bg.com)) developed a plan for the training about 23 000 teachers by the end of 2005. 3 080 of them were trained in computer laboratory management.

In November 2005, an AGORA, co-organised by Cedefop and Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB), marked the official launch of TTnet **Germany**, the German consortium of the Training of Trainers network, which Cedefop set up in 1998 as a pan-European forum for key players and decision-makers in training for VET teachers and trainers. The event provided the opportunity for representatives of teachers' and trainers' interest groups and the social partners to discuss the wide variety of teaching and training professions, the changing paradigms in the profession as well as the current situation of pre-service and in-service training activities for the different groups in Germany as against the European context.

In line with the **Latvian** Law on Vocational Education, people with occupational qualifications who have received or are undergoing pedagogical training can be given a teaching post in VET. For those who are interested in working as VET teachers but who lack training in education, a regulation adopted in October 2005 established a specific programme with a maximum duration of three years. Its 10 modules (320 hours) cover issues such as education science and research methods, different aspects of the teaching process (including the use of ICT), information on the education system and legislation, characteristic features of VET in terms of administrative structure, content and methodology, and the particular role of social partners in VET.

A nation-wide teacher training activity was launched in **Slovakia**. Having met with considerable criticism, the recently reformed secondary school leaving exams needed amending in 2005. To implement the change and to assist teachers to acquire the skills and methodologies needed to identify exam themes and set appropriate assignments, a training the trainers initiative was conducted in December 2005 and January 2006. The National Institute for Vocational Education also provided training to more than 100 multipliers from respective ISCED 3A programmes.

**Turkey's** 'Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training' (MVET) project, which started in 2003 and is still continuing with EU support, aims at modernising VET teachers training. Occupational standards are being developed to update VET teachers' competences. A policy document to define the strategy for the future development of the sector will be ready by the end of the project. As the VET teachers training faculties constitute a peculiarity of Turkey's higher education system as compared to EU countries where there are no parallel institutions, this might be an area to reflect upon in a medium-term perspective.

### ***Tapping EU funds...***

Elaborating the priorities and measures within the operational programme for 'Human Resource Development', one of the instruments to implement ESF type projects after Accession, also moved to the top of the agenda in **Bulgaria** during the second half of 2005. In line with the National Reference Framework, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is going to be the managing authority for the programme. The Ministry of Education and Science, the Employment Agency and the Agency for Social Assistance will act as intermediate bodies for specific operations.

Learning from the past to prepare for the future, characterises the preparation for the ESF in **Romania**. While completing the operational programme for 'Human Resource Development (HRD)' in the 'National Development Plan 2007-13', the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family is, as managing authority for the ESF, becoming more and more involved in Pre-ESF type Phare activities. One of these projects aims at advising on employment policies and assisting the Ministry with its strategic planning for the ESF. As existing evaluation procedures for the structural funds and Phare are not well suited to the specificity of HR activities, the ETF supports the evaluation of Phare HRD grant schemes. In partnership with the Ministries of Labour and European Integration and the National Employment Agencies, the EC Delegation and the ETF promote better use of Phare experience to prepare for the involvement in ESF activities. Given the active dialogue with and among Romanian stakeholders, the third annual meeting since the Joint Assessment Paper on Employment Policies was signed in 2002 showed significant progress in analysing the issues.

#### *....to implement national priorities*

Following the evaluation of the STARegio programme, which aimed at providing additional training places and implementing sustainable regional training provision and networks in **Germany**, the Ministry of Education and Research has decided to invest EUR 100 million in a new programme. Jobstarter will focus on analysing the regional training potential and supporting regional and thematic training networks and associations. This will include cross-border activities with neighbouring countries. Cooperation between enterprises, economic chambers and VET schools is to promote innovation in VET. The initiative will be co-financed by the ESF.

The ACCEL – Accelerating in-company skills – scheme will apply to training in **Irish** private sector companies for the period 2006–08. EUR 26 million have been made available through the National Training Fund and the ESF. Irish companies invest about 2 % of turnover in training while international research suggests 5 % could be considered a benchmark. ACCEL is to target mainly SMEs and those who have to date not benefited from government and ESF support. It will also be directed at areas where skill shortages have been identified and could play a role in skills development of immigrants. ACCEL is complementary to other initiatives under the 'Employment and Human Resources Development' operational programme. Companies of less than 250 employees can receive up to 75 % of funding, while larger companies can be funded up to 50 %.

In 2005, a number of ESF-supported projects to develop VET systems were launched in **Lithuania**. A project launched by the Ministry of Education and Science focused on competence-based assessment with the aim of developing assessment methodologies and setting up a model for regional exam centres. It is also planned to train employees' representatives so that they can play a role in the exams; as things stand, it is the employers' side of the social partnership which is responsible for the final exams and for awarding qualifications. At the same time, the Methodological Centre for VET placed on the agenda the development of VET standards, skill needs forecasting, and a common quality assurance system for IVET and CVET, which will be consistent with the 'Common quality assurance framework' agreed at EU-level. The Labour Market Training Authority has made a start on implementation of a 'National Qualifications System', a project which will last until February 2008. Its objective is to create a uniform and transparent but flexible qualifications system which would cover all levels of qualifications. Transition between the levels should be possible. Based on a model of the qualifications system, lists of competences and qualification structures are to be drawn

up in the construction and hotel and catering sectors. Explanatory and accompanying documents as well as training on how to use the framework are also foreseen.

As **Portugal**'s biggest employer, the public service has decided to become an example of good practice in human resource investment and employment policy. It offers remunerated traineeships in a number of different areas within its operational programme for public administration under the Second Community Support Framework III, thus also benefiting from ESF funding.

Following the approval of the 'National Strategic Reference Framework' in October 2005, the **Slovak** Ministry of Education defined its implementation framework for the 2007-13 ESF projects. EUR 700 million from EU sources and EUR 233.3 million from national public sources are foreseen to support activities within the priority area 'Modern education for the knowledge society'. These measures comprise support for regional schools in their efforts to provide learners with labour-market and lifelong learning skills; improving the adaptability and quality of higher education, research and development; implementing a lifelong learning strategy, improving access to LLL as well as guidance and counselling; and fostering social inclusion of marginalised groups.

### ***... to validate non-formal and informal learning***

The **Czech** Ministry of Education (MŠMT) has decided to tackle its comparatively low participation rates in continuing education. Building on the experience of two 'pioneering' regions, secondary and tertiary VET establishments in six regions will form networks and extend their programmes to include adult learning. The increased offer will be combined with a new approach to validating non-formal and informal learning, which will apply evaluation standards developed by the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV). The three-year project, launched in September 2005, receives support from the European Social Fund (ESF), as does a similar **Estonian** project carried out within the national VET development plan.

### ***...to improve guidance and counselling***

*VIP Kariéra* (Education – Guidance – Information) – is a three-year ESF supported project launched by the **Czech** Ministry of Education in 2005 with the aim of developing a user-friendly system accessible on the Internet which links information on available education and training programmes (including subject areas or specialities) with employers' skill needs and labour-market prospects (ISA). The system to be developed by NUOV will include targeted information for learners at risk of dropping out and a multimedia guide to education and career opportunities.

In **Latvia**, training for school marketing managers was organised in 2005. This was part and parcel of the ESF supported project '*Fostering vocational guidance provision and careers education in the educational sector*', which aims at providing high quality guidance in all types and levels of education. To this end, the state-run VET Development Agency implements initial and continuing training for guidance personnel and develops training materials and information resources. In a first step multipliers are trained (72-hour courses), who will then train teachers and other personnel involved in guidance and counselling on issues such as: marketing for VET establishments so as to attract more students; helping students acquire the skills needed to find and hold a job; familiarising newly enrolled students with the VET programme, further education opportunities and labour-market perspectives; assisting first-year students to adapt to the new environment and study methods so as to increase their motivation and prevent them from dropping out.

## ***VET and higher education***

In **Croatia** an agency for science and higher education was formally established as long ago as July 2004 and it still has to find its place within the higher education reform. In the context of the Bologna process, some 900 study programmes from all Croatian universities and polytechnics were assessed and the majority of them approved in the four months preceding the academic year 2005/2006.

In September 2005 the **Czech** Government approved an update to the 'Higher Education Reform Concept'. Its main objectives are to complete and assess the transition to the three-level structure of higher education (bachelor's, master's and doctorate), support the establishment of public non-university higher education institutions, promote assessment of higher education institutions, support their internationalisation, their research and development as well as their share of lifelong learning programmes. It also foresees an increase in funding by 2008: 1 % of the GDP as compared to 0.8 % in 2005. These additional resources, as well as EU funds, are to be used efficiently to help implement the planned measures. The reform priorities are reflected in the long-term plan for the 'Development of Education, Science, Research, Development, Artistic and other Creative Activities of higher education institutions' for the period 2006-10, as required by the Higher Education Act. The long-term plan adopted by the Ministry of Education covers three areas: internationalisation, quality and excellence of academic activities, and the culture and quality of academic life. To carry out relevant projects, higher education institutions can receive state grants, possibly supplemented by EU funds. In addition, an amendment to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which came in force on 1 January 2006, has changed the funding system so as to allow appropriations to be carried over to the following financial year, which is designed to facilitate implementation of the different measures.

As tertiary professional schools are an integral part of tertiary education, their programmes also have to be accredited. A specific accreditation commission, the AK VOV, was set up. However, they should aim for synergy with the accreditation commission for higher education. The best of the tertiary professional schools can apply to have their bachelor programmes accredited and thus become public non-university higher education institutions.

During 2005, significant progress was achieved in **Latvia** in developing VET in higher education, as 14 new colleges were accredited. Since 2000, in line with the *Law on Vocational Education*, previous post-secondary VET programmes have been restructured and reorganised to be integrated into higher education.

To unify the regulations governing academic studies and VET in higher education, **Poland** introduced a new Law in September 2005. The *Law on Higher Education* applies to all areas and sectors of higher education, public and non-public, academic and vocational. It allows for the two-tier bachelor-master structure as well as for uniform five- or six-year programmes, and regulates eligibility of higher education institutes to provide doctoral studies. In first-level programmes leading to a vocational *licencjat* or an engineer diploma, work placements have become mandatory. Moreover, following the ECTS philosophy, studies are to be organised so as to allow the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes from different higher education institutes in Poland and abroad.

*The above note has been prepared by Cedefop as background information for the meeting of the Directors-General for Vocational Training (DGVT) to be held in Vienna on 27 and 28 March 2006. It is based primarily on information received from members of Cedefop's ReferNet and the National Observatories (NOs), established by the European Training Foundation (ETF), and in particular their contributions to Cedefop Info issues 2/2005, 3/2005 and 1/2006. Given the nature of this report, the information provided is exemplary and does not claim to be exhaustive.*

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*These reports on recent developments have been prepared on a regular basis for the meetings of DGVTs since 1997.*

*Taking over from Michael Adams, this is the first one for which the present author is responsible. It is also the first report that follows a new structure and includes sections on EU-level developments in the framework of the Lisbon process, the education and training work programme 2010 and the Copenhagen-Maastricht process as well as on Cedefop activities. As the reporting period for the second meeting of the Directors-General for Vocational Training in 2005 would have been too short, it was decided to have only one report. Hence, this time the reporting period has spanned nearly a year, making the task rather challenging and the text longer than usual.*

*I would like to thank the Cedefop colleagues and the members of the ReferNet who have contributed, for their support and tolerance in this exercise. I would also like to thank Michael Adams for sharing his expertise and the on-the job training opportunity. I hope readers and particularly the main target group, i.e. the Directors-General for Vocational Training in the Member States and their colleagues will find the new approach useful and the document informative. Cedefop would, as always, be pleased to receive your feedback and reactions to the note, which is also available in French and German.*

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