



Meeting of the Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training

12-13 October 2009 in Västerås, Sweden

C. Designing VET systems that are responsive to labour market needs

The transition to a knowledge-based economy requires modernisation and continuous improvement of vocational education and training (VET) systems in response to rapid change in the economy and society. The goal is to increase employability, social inclusion and to improve access to lifelong learning for all. Moreover to fuel economic growth by ensuring that dynamic, growing sectors of the economy have access to the skills they need. The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs call on Member States to develop accessible lifelong learning systems responsive to the changing needs of the economy.

Future skill needs

The lack of information about future skill needs is a challenge in all countries but there are several initiatives to ensure that VET systems are responsive to the labour market. Cedefop provide a platform for dialogue and information exchange and present research outcomes for informed policy development. In 2008, Cedefop published a medium-term forecast of skill needs in Europe and is developing a system for regular European skill forecasts.

In most countries there are ambitious efforts. In Sweden, the new Swedish Agency for Advanced Vocational Education has a mandate to map sector skills needs and ensure that post-secondary training is responsive to labour market needs. Also in Sweden, the adult VET initiative (*Yrkesvux*) is designed to address both the learning needs of adults and labour market skills needs.

The increasing mobility in Europe makes the provision and availability of information about trends in the development of skills and competences critical. The economic crisis underscores the importance of ensuring that VET systems meet both the short-term and longer-term needs of individuals and the labour market. Old occupational areas are disappearing and new ones are emerging. This presupposes an ongoing process of renewal and updating of knowledge and skills as well as a need to include the local labour market in planning and conducting education and training as to ensure up-to-date content.

This complex of challenges gives rise to a number of questions:

- How can we ensure a better linkage between vocational training outputs and real labour market needs?
- What role should social partners have in designing VET systems that are responsive to labour market needs?
- Are decision makers at different levels willing and able to modify VET systems considering the results from studies and research?
- Is it true that young people often are the first to identify future trends and that their interests often give a good indication of the future? If so, how can VET providers take advantage of this?

