



European Economic and Social Committee

Going local event on

EWSA im Fokus: Für eine attraktivere berufliche Aus- und Weiterbildung

Tuesday, 13 September 2001, 11:00-13:00

Vertretung der Europäischen Kommission in Deutschland

Europäisches Haus, Unter den Linden 78, 10117 Berlin

KEY POINTS

The need for a better mix of academic and vocational education and training

The percentage of students in universities is by many seen as a measure of modernity and progress. However, universities alone cannot ensure economic growth and social inclusion. We need a stronger focus on how to balance education and training systems; exploring the right mix between general, vocational and academic provisions. Post secondary vocational education and training illustrates the challenges involved in balancing education and training policies and systems.

Dangerous pre-conceptions

- The term higher education is frequently used as a synonym for academically oriented, university education;
- Higher education is often contrasted with vocational training – the latter understood as being at a lower level;
- This mixes up institutional levels with the content, profile and orientation of education and training;
- Vocationally (or professionally/labour market) oriented education and training is already an important although ‘invisible’ part of higher education.

Why is there so little focus on VET in higher education?

A lack of clarity as regards key concepts (vocationally, professionally, occupationally, practise and/or labour market oriented education and training)

A diversity of institutional solutions creates confusion

- Dual system/combinations of education and work
- Fully integrated in Universities
- Distinct academic and vocational pathways (universities/polytechnics)

Low esteem and status

- Tension between theory and practise orientation
- VET subject consider weaker as regards research-basis
- VET programmes do not fit the ‘Bologna’ three cycle model (Bachelor, Master, Doctor)

European VET – change and development

- A growing consensus that vocational education and training need to be developed at all levels – also the highest;
- We can observe that vocational education and training at higher levels are getting more attention – not least by enterprises and sectors;
- Examples: Meister, Fachhochschulen, Berufsakademien, Polytechnics, Advanced Vocational Education and training, Associate Degrees, Foundation Degrees, Higher level apprenticeships.

European and national qualifications frameworks and their impact on vocational education and training

- The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was adopted and introduced in 2008
- All EU countries have welcomed the recommendation
- All EU countries have developed or are developing national qualifications frameworks in line with EQF
- The work on qualifications frameworks has resulted in a renewed and intensified debate on the profile and levelling of vocational education and training

Knowledge vs. skills and competence

- A high qualifications level is not only dependent on the level of theoretical knowledge, but just as much on the level of skills, autonomy, responsibility etc.
- Learning outcomes express the expectations as regards what somebody knows, is able to do and understand
- The new frameworks criticize the tendency ‘academisation’ of practical skills

Towards ‘parity of esteem’ between theoretical and practically oriented subjects

- The new frameworks can be used to strengthen the position of VET in the education and training systems;
- The new frameworks can be used to identify areas where new qualifications should be developed
- The focus on learning outcomes offers an alternative way to judge the level of a qualification and thus its value in society - independent of institutional setting and pre-conceptions

The need to balance education and training systems

- National and European educational policies must focus much more on the mix of systems and in particular the balance between academic and vocational subjects
- The assumption that VET is lower level than academic subjects must be challenged
- Lower level of theoretical knowledge can be balanced by higher levels of skills and competences