



Jongeren Organisatie Beroepsonderwijs

Position Paper: Enhancing Equality and Recognition for Vocational Students in the European Union

The European Union's commitment to education and mobility is fundamental to fostering a skilled workforce, promoting cultural exchange, and ensuring the continent's global competitiveness. During the current European Year of Skills it becomes apparent big labor shortages exist in VET sectors the European economy greatly relies on. It is not without reason SMEUnited calls in its position paper to improve the image and visibility of Vocational Education and Training in our societies. Jongerenorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs (JOBmbo), the Dutch national representative organization for vocational education students, has developed a set of recommendations to improve the image and attractiveness of VET. It is imperative to address the disparities that exist between students in vocational education and their counterparts in universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS). This position paper outlines a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at providing equal rights, recognition, and opportunities for vocational students across the EU.

1. Equal recognition and rights: Vocational education students deserve equitable treatment alongside university and UAS students, including the recognition of their title as 'student'. This recognition not only validates their educational pursuits but also ensures that vocational students are entitled to the same rights, privileges, and benefits. The European Commission, Council & European Parliament should take this into account when designing new policies. Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of educational background should become enshrined in EU law.

2. Inclusive student sports programs: Efforts should be made to ensure that vocational students have the same access to international student sports events as their university and UAS counterparts. Inclusivity in extracurricular activities enhances the overall experience and sense of belonging for vocational students on the global stage. At present it is not possible for vocational students to participate in international sports events, as they are not recognized as students in every EU country. This limits their ability to participate in sports associations in their respective countries.



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3. Facilitating collaborative partnerships & strengthening mobility agreements: To enhance student exchange programs, collaboration between vocational institutions should be further encouraged. Streamlining administrative processes, including inter-school contracts and securing adequate budgets, will institutionalize student mobility and create a more accessible platform for cross-institutional cooperation. Complementary to this, the development of comprehensive agreements covering aspects such as credit transfer, quality assurance, and recognition is vital for fostering student mobility. These agreements will enable seamless transitions between vocational institutions, thereby contributing to equal position of vocational students vis-à-vis university students and therefore promoting VET as an attractive learning pathway.

4. Vocational education should be more prominently represented in the European Education Area actions: We applaud the progress made across education sectors through the various EEA actions, but would welcome more dedicated resources to the strengthening of the VET sector. The persisting labor and skills shortages across the EU need to be collaboratively tackled by investing in the VET sector, boosting the attractiveness and recognition of VET and encouraging lifelong learning. By putting too much emphasis on increasing the number of tertiary graduates, Europe will not be able to realise the big transitions it is facing. We are concerned that there is limited centralised overview of the Commission initiatives to address skills shortages and that consequently no coherence exists between objectives, target-setting and activities addressing skills development. Synergies between education sectors should actively be sought through better collaboration between DG EAC and other Directorates-General, such as DG EMPL as well as the various Council committees.

5. Improving citizenship education in VET: Citizenship education in VET should be greatly improved across the EU and JOB recommends the EU institutions and the member states step up their efforts, for example by stimulating professionalization of teachers and adding an EU dimension to citizenship education via the Jean Monnet actions. Furthermore, extending the right to vote to 16 years, like Belgium, Germany, Austria, Greece and Malta have already done,



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will empower vocational students to actively participate in society through informed civic engagement. It could also give a big push to EU citizenship education.

6. Strengthening EU representation of VET students: To improve the representation of vocational students and professionals at the EU and international level, mechanisms for networking, advocacy, and sharing best practices should be established. At present not all EU countries have effective student and apprentice representation structures, while other countries have effective structures. Creating a European network would stimulate peer learning and could serve as a way to give VET students a voice when designing new EU policies and programs such as Erasmus+. To achieve this, the EU should gather more knowledge on representation of VET students in its member states and support the creation of a European network for representation of VET students. This will ensure that their unique perspectives are taken into account.

7. Adequate funding for mobility: Sufficient national and European-level funding, both through the Erasmus+ program and other sources, should be allocated to support student mobility initiatives in VET. Adequate financial resources will incentivize participation and remove financial barriers for VET students seeking international experiences. Although efforts have been made in the current Erasmus+ program to make it more inclusive, the statistics show that students of EQF levels 3 and 4 have more access to international experiences than students from EQF level 1 and 2. Doing an internship or study period abroad is not the only way to get international experience. For students on level 1 and 2, programs like Internationalisation @home by Nuffic are a good starting point to develop international skills and the short group visits promoted in the current Erasmus+ program greatly widen the access to a bigger group and should thus be continued and expanded.

8. Promoting internship options for VET students: JOB wants to make it easier for students and for companies abroad to connect with each other through a European network. Initiatives such as Euro App Mobility should be supported in order to promote European mobility schemes and



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remove obstacles. This should not only be done for apprenticeship education pathways, but also for internships in the school-based pathways. Another way to stimulate internships is to create a European database of (internationally oriented) companies in the different EU countries. The database with international companies in the Netherlands from S-BB can serve as a best practice example.

9. Integrating internationalization in curricula & international course options: The option to pursue internationally-oriented courses should be available to all students across the EU, including those enrolled in vocational education programs. Governments should stimulate their schools to integrate internationalization in curricula, both as elective courses as well as streamlining internationalization in courses in general. Every study nowadays has international dimensions requiring international competences, ranging from intercultural skills, knowledge of languages and promoting international orientation to understanding EU policies and laws in the respective sector. International competences also lead to personal skills such as flexibility, tolerance and autonomy. The EU and its member states should stimulate the integration of internationalization in VET, both via national as well as EU policies.

10. Integrating interculturality in EU programs and national curricula: In today's increasingly diverse classrooms, promoting intercultural competences is of paramount importance. The EU should proactively embed interculturality within the Erasmus+ program and European Education Area, fostering mutual understanding and inclusivity through peer learning and exchanging best practices. The EU should stimulate teacher training in intercultural competences, for example through the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, as educators play a pivotal role in shaping students' perspectives.

This position paper underscores the imperative of providing equal rights, recognition, and opportunities to VET students within the European Union. By implementing the outlined recommendations, the EU will take significant steps towards creating an inclusive and dynamic European Education Area that empowers all students to thrive on both local and global fronts.