

Joint Declaration on the Design of Regional Centers of Excellence in Vocational Education and Training in Europe

The trade unions of teachers at vocational schools in Germany BvLB, Austria BMHS and Switzerland BCH participate since 2019 in the Erasmus Plus vocational education network "Digital unterstützte und nachhaltigkeitsorientierte Exzellenzzentren Beruflicher Bildung in Europa gestalten" (DunE-BB-EU 2019-2022) (*Designing digitally supported and sustainability-oriented centers of excellence in vocational education in Europe*) to concretize the design of regional centers of excellence in vocational education in Europe.

We welcome the exemplary key initiative of the EU Commission from 2021 to 2027 to support more than 100 regional centers of excellence in vocational training and related vocational training networks (cooperation platforms) with up to 4 million euros each and a total amount of 400 million euros. The EU Commission, through Erasmus Plus, is promoting these new platforms for centers of professional excellence to meet the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy and the digital and green transformation - "Green Deal" - sustainable growth as well as social justice and inclusion.

The common concern is to advocate for high-quality - excellent - vocational education and training in the interest of young people, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.

We recall the Osnabrück Declaration for Vocational Education and Training in Europe of the EU Council of November 25, 2020, which describes four main goals and measures to successfully shape the "European Education Area 2025" by 2025, including regional centers of excellence in vocational education and training:

1. *Resilience and excellence through high-quality, inclusive, and flexible professional education*
2. *Establishing a New Culture of Lifelong Learning - The Importance of Vocational Continuing Education and Digitization*
3. *Sustainability - a green perspective in vocational training*
4. *European vocational training area and international vocational training*

...

Particular areas of focus include quality assurance, centers of professional excellence, or governance of EU policies for vocational education and training.

The recommendation formulates six goals:

1. *vocational education and training adapts flexibly to changes in the labor market*
2. *flexibility and opportunities for further development are the focus of vocational education and training*
3. *vocational education and training is an engine for innovation and growth, and it prepares people for environmental and digital change as well as occupations that are in high demand*
4. *vocational education and training is an attractive choice, based on modern, digitized training and skills offerings*
5. *vocational education and training promotes equal opportunities*

6. *vocational education and training is based on a culture of quality assurance*".

Source: <https://www.bibb.de/de/133318.php>

We, the VET teachers' representative bodies, remind policy makers that national governments also need to invest in transforming vocational schools into regional digitally enabled centers of excellence in vocational education and training with 360 degrees of sustainability education.

Europe needs more than 100 centers of excellence in vocational education and training to achieve the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the international-national climate change targets by 2045/2050.

Since November 2019, European VET stakeholders have been exchanging ideas in the DunE-BB-EU VET network. The following insights have been gained:

Regional centers of excellence in vocational education and training are places of knowledge and innovation. Here local-, regional-, national- and international partners and providers of education, vocational training and higher education come together to use all competences for the design of high quality - excellent - vocational education in a learner-centered way. Learners have the opportunity to obtain general and vocational education qualifications from EQF 1 to EQF 8 - doctorate, see Vocational Training Center MCAST Malta.

Together, strategies are developed for the transition from school to work. Sustainability-oriented business models and entrepreneurship are tested in student companies and, at best, these are further developed into real startups. The associated job creation promotes regional sustainable growth and also increases social cohesion.

- At regional centers of excellence for vocational training in all German-speaking countries, learners and trainees must be entitled to 100% educational time and instruction!
- The educational mandate is currently not being fully realized in Europe's vocational schools, for example in value-oriented, foreign-language and vocational teaching. More positions for vocational school teachers are urgently needed!
- Digitization, sustainability and internationalization are already changing living and working environments. The places of learning in vocational education and training, including vocational schools, must at any rate adapt to the new conditions in terms of organization and structure. Political decision-makers at all levels of government must invest in sustainability-oriented and modern equipment and buildings as well as in the cooperative training and continuing education of vocational school and university teaching staff.
- In addition to the Erasmus Plus investments, the national states must promptly set up their own investment and support funds for the design of regional digitally-supported centers of excellence in vocational education and training with 360 degree sustainability education https://www.bneportal.de/files/BNE_Handreichungen%20Bildungsbereich%202018_Nachhaltigkeit_berufliche%20Bildung_web.pdf.

- Regional Centers of Excellence for Vocational Education and Training enable members of the school community to engage in local-regional-national and global learning in the spirit of Education for Sustainable Development (in German: Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung = BNE). The Berlin Declaration for BNE of 2021 is also a guideline for action in this context. https://www.bneportal.de/files/berliner_erklaerung.pdf
- School laws, training regulations and curricular specifications must describe binding framework conditions for digitization, sustainability and internationalization so that excellent digitally supported and sustainability-oriented vocational education and training can be reliably organized at the learning locations.
- For a systematic organization, sustainability management must be implemented and an annual sustainability report must be prepared.
- The work in regional and cross-border partnerships or education and vocational training networks enables an intensive exchange of excellent teaching practice and learning site organization. Digitally supported and sustainability-oriented excellence projects - also in the direction of applied vocational training research - are developed jointly. Corresponding work
- time budgeting must take place for these valuable collaborations.
- Regional centers of excellence in vocational training need an efficient and coherent vocational training administration. To this end, federal and state institutes of vocational education and training must be established throughout the country and must cooperate in a more networked manner to enable administration that is low in bureaucracy and provides the best possible support.
- Excellent vocational education and training is characterized by flexibility and high adaptability, therefore lifelong learning is a key to success for a sustainable future.

Uelzen, 30.06.2021

BCH, Vocational Education and Training (Switzerland)

signed
Dr. Christoph Thomann
Former president and
Member of the Central
Board

BMHS-Trade Union of Teachers at Middle and Higher Schools (Austria)

signed
Mag. Roland Gangl
Chairman

BvLB, Federal Association of Teachers e. V. (Germany)

signed
Stefan Nowatschin
Deputy Federal Chairman