



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Higher vocational qualifications to meet the skills needs of SMEs

Promoting Quality Assurance in Higher Vocational Education & Training

Brussels, 16th May 2017 – In the context of the Erasmus+ project QA HiVETnet, UEAPME⁽¹⁾ organised a European conference "Qualifications We Need, Quality We Want". The aim of the project is to reinforce trust in Higher Vocational Education and Training (VET) through the elaboration of European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET. Higher VET, as defined in the project, refers to tertiary vocational training outside the traditional academic system. It is mainly used for upskilling learners with initial VET qualifications and/or with a long-standing work experience. There is a real skills gap on the job market resulting in a skills shortage, and therefore a crucial need for aligning the education and training programmes toward the labour market needs. This means getting the right balance between theoretical, professional and vocational skills combined with transversal ones (e.g. leadership, teamwork, problem solving, innovation or social skills). The Higher VET Quality Assurance approach of this project should help ensure the parity of esteem between Higher VET and academic education and contribute to better recognition of Higher VET and VET excellence.

Nowadays on the job market, there is a real fight for getting the best talents as they represent the main assets of crafts and SMEs and companies' success largely depends on staff knowledge and skills. On one side Crafts and SMEs are struggling to recruit people with the right competences, and on the other side youth unemployment is still very high. In most cases, their knowledge, skills and competences do not fit the labour market needs. There is a real mismatch between the skills and the competences SMEs ask for and the skills and competences people have acquired through their education. This leads not only to a skills gap, but more importantly to a skills shortage.

UEAPME and five partners⁽²⁾ initiated the "QA HiVETnet" project to elaborate the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET. These Guidelines take into account the needs of learners and businesses for a higher VET pathway. The goal is to present quality features for tertiary VET in a uniform manner throughout Europe and characterise the Higher VET as defined by the economy for situations outside the traditional academic system.

Secretary General Véronique Willems opened the conference and stated that *"We aim at skills valued by businesses because they are designed by professionals for future professionals and future entrepreneurs. Higher VET refers to competences directly applicable and useable in the labour market."* She went on to underline that *"this Higher VET approach should help ensure the parity of esteem between Higher VET and academic education."*

(1) *the European SME Employers' Association*

(2) *The partners of the project are: IBW, IFAPME, UEAPME, APCMA, ZDH and IME GSEVEE*

Project website: <http://www.qa-hivet.net/>

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing Crafts and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 64 member organisations covering about 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information please visit <http://www.ueapme.com/> or follow [@UEAPME](https://twitter.com/UEAPME) on Twitter.

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