

C3 - Supporting high quality skills and competences through Centres of Vocational Excellence

About this session...

In the 2018 Communication on “Building a stronger Europe”, the Commission announced an initiative to “support the development of trans-national platforms of centres of vocational excellence”, closely embedded in local and regional strategies for smart specialisation.

This initiative defines a bottom-up approach to excellence where VET institutions are capable of rapidly adapting skills provision to evolving economic and social needs. It aims to foster transnational collaborative platforms, which would be difficult for isolated member states to establish in the absence of EU incentives, technical support, and mutual learning.

The concept of vocational excellence that is proposed is characterised by a learner centred holistic approach in which VET: a) is an integrative part of *skills ecosystems*, contributing to regional development and smart specialisation strategies. b) is part of *knowledge triangles*, working closely with other education and training sectors, the scientific community, and business, c) enables learners to acquire vocational and key competences through *high-quality provision* that is underpinned by quality assurance, and is supported by the continuous professional development of teaching and training staff, innovative and inclusive pedagogies, mobility and internationalisation strategies.

The European Commission proposed to support the establishment of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) operating in a given local context, through transnational cooperation Platforms bringing together partners from various countries, with the ultimate goal of “upward convergence” of VET excellence. CoVEs are not intended to build new VET institutions and infrastructure from scratch. Instead they aim to bring together a set of local/regional partners (such as initial and continuing VET providers, tertiary education institutions, research institutions, companies, social enterprises, chambers, social partners, etc.). Partners will share a common interest in *specific sectors* (e.g. e-mobility, green technologies, ICT, healthcare, tourism, etc.), or develop together innovative approaches to tackle “horizontal challenges” (e.g. integration of migrants, digitalisation, Sustainable Development Goals, upskilling people with low qualification levels, etc.). The platforms will be open for the involvement of countries with well-developed vocational excellence systems, as well as those in the process of developing similar approaches.

Preliminary actions to prepare the initiative are already taking place. A first pilot call led to the selection of 5 projects to be implemented in 2020 and 2021 and focusing on advance manufacturing, water sector, cultural and creative industry, cloud-based services. A second call for piloting CoVEs was published in October 2019 to support 5 more projects that closely resemble the future model that is proposed to be supported under the Erasmus programme 2021-2027.

Something to think about...

1. *What are the key factors and activities that should characterise effective CoVEs? What are the tools, instruments and technical expertise to be made available to the Platforms’ partners?*
2. *How can the EU support CoVE development (reinforce synergies with other European and international initiatives supporting excellence in VET; exchange of good practices and peer learning activities at European level; facilitate the sharing of innovative methodologies for teaching and learning with other VET initiatives and projects like Sector Skills Alliances; etc.)?*
3. *What actions can be taken at national level to ensure the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in the CoVE projects?*