

Internationalisation vision document – VET institute, January 2011

1. Introduction

The VET institute created the Internationalisation policy network in 2010. The role of the policy network is to develop internationalisation activities and policy, and it is made up of three directors of VET institute colleges, a representative of the works council and the Internationalisation project employee. The policy network has created a working group comprising a wide range of teachers and team managers from various colleges run by the VET institute. This working group carries out activities for the policy network and serves as a sounding board. This document is the VET institute's definitive internationalisation vision document, for which the working group served as a sounding board.

2. Why internationalisation?

The VET institute's mission statement includes the following:

'The VET institute aims to prepare young people and adults for a suitable occupation and accompany them in their vocational pathway, so that they can develop and make a contribution to a sustainable society.' (1) VET institute strategic plan 2010-2012)

The goal of its internationalisation policy is to produce trainees with a qualification and an international orientation which broadens their horizons and thus makes them more employable on the European labour market and more prepared for subsequent education and training.

Internationalisation is becoming ever more important for all further education and intermediate vocational education students, teachers and the organisation as a whole in the context of, among other things, the development of the multicultural society, European integration and increasing globalisation.

Ongoing European integration and the integration of the European labour market are forcing the international standardisation of qualifications (how much is a Dutch diploma worth abroad?) and make it possible to import and export knowledge. The internet allows competition and cooperation between educational establishments which are located far apart geographically.

'European integration will continue towards a single European labour market (...) At the same time we are also seeing cross-border joint ventures developing in our region. In the interests of a balanced European labour market, it is important that we, in our region, actively look over the border and prepare ourselves to offer European vocational qualifications for our trainees and students.' (2) VET institute strategic plan 2010-2012)

From academic year 2012/13 onwards, the Ministry of Education made it compulsory to add an EQF (European Qualification Framework) level to intermediate vocational education qualifications.

Internationalisation contributes to improving the quality of vocational education (see the comment by the current Minister for Education in the introduction to the Intermediate Vocational Education Council Internationalisation Agenda 2008-2011)

'In my view, an international orientation to intermediate vocational education is becoming increasingly important. Training courses in hotels and catering, tourism, retail and economic and financial services are becoming ever more international because of increasing globalisation.'

Training courses in care and welfare, sport and movement, technology and security are also becoming increasingly international. It is important to support this development in order to maintain an effective tie-in between education/training and the labour market. We can do this by taking internationalisation into account in the development of curricula and encouraging the mobility of students and teachers, for example by increasing the number and improving the quality of placements abroad.' (3) Ms van Bijsterveld in the introduction to the Intermediate Vocational Education Council Internationalisation Agenda 2008-2011)

Finally, on 7 December 2010, the EU's Education Council adopted an agreement on how Europe aims to cooperate more effectively over the coming ten years in the area of vocational education and training. The aim of the Bruges Communiqué is to move towards quality assurance and transparency as an interface between vocational education and training, colleges and higher education in order to promote mobility and lifelong learning, and with the following priorities for vocational education and training:

more attention must be paid to learning outcomes and competences, and we must work to better recognise skills acquired outside formal training (EVC);

there must be more cooperation between training providers (including teachers) and industry, including the social partners;

vocational education and training must be seen as a fully valid way of learning a trade and of acquiring the skills necessary to continue in education, even at university level;

information about career prospects and the needs of the labour market must be well used;

there must be the necessary support for trainees, students and employees;

trainees and students must be encouraged to study or work abroad;

specific vocational education and training objectives will be developed in collaboration.

The four main European associations of vocational education and training providers (EUproVET, EVTA, EVBB and EfVET) collaborated on this joint declaration.

3. Three levels

The VET institute works on the basis of three levels on which internationalisation activities play out: the participant, the teacher and the organisation. Policy in this field is thus described in terms of these three levels.

3.1 The participant

It is very important for our trainees to look and gain experience beyond physical, cultural and linguistic borders in order to broaden their minds and see the world through different eyes. This can happen within the class or the college, as the college population is becoming ever more diverse in terms of background and origins, by means of online projects with trainees from other countries (e-twinning), college trips and exchanges, by inviting teachers from other countries and by means of placements in Europe or further afield. International mobility is very important for our students and their education.

A number of aspects deserve special attention in this context:

- the role of internationalisation in civic education;
- international work placements (IBPV);
- the position of internationalisation in the new skills-based training and occupational profiles.

Many trainees have, for example, by way of an international placement been able to work for a company or institution abroad and learnt at first hand the importance of foreign language skills. This made them even more motivated in their studies and work. The experience abroad contributed to their personal growth and they learnt to see the world and other people through different eyes.

Specific target groups constitute a recurring theme for the VET institute. Social inclusion and mobility, equal opportunities, removing obstacles for students at risk of premature school drop-out and recent leavers are all mentioned in policy documents and will also be given special consideration in the internationalisation vision.

Objective: Ongoing policy will, where possible, be strengthened by means of internationalisation activities. An important point here is for teachers to be well-integrated in policy and activities, so that they can make optimum use of the international opportunities created by the EU for their target group.

3.2. The teacher

International mobility and international experiences for teachers help them to encourage and support students in their placements abroad. Teachers can become acquainted with companies offering placements abroad and actively search for new contacts. Study trips to various countries in Europe are organised; in the context of projects; for example, teachers can learn about educational innovations, and training programmes can be developed and implemented together with other institutions.

"Internationalisation at home" is developed by means of various projects and the "transfer of innovations" whereby, for example, methods and structures are placed in an international context (C2CC, Web Log Trade, Romeo and partnerships). This knowledge and experience should be further disseminated within the organisation. Increasing use will be made of the VET institute academy and the digital media at our disposal.

Participation in international projects and cooperation with international partners offer teachers and other staff the opportunity to update education and training and become acquainted with new insights in the field of didactics and methodology.

Goal: participation in internationalisation activities/mobility supports the international orientation of staff and enhances their teaching skills and knowledge of their subject, as well as offering them new, different perspectives.

3.3 The VET institute

The new Internationalisation policy plan gives direction to developments and activities in this area within the regional training centre.

Further investment in existing and new international networks is taking place at organisational level, with the aim of finding partners who can contribute to, for example, the mobility of trainees/students and staff and knowledge sharing. The VET institute wishes to enter into both training-specific and cross-subject alliances with partners from the networks. More often than we imagine, collaboration partners turn out to be interested in not just one but several courses.

The VET institute aims to be a modern, innovative institute where students have the possibility of going on international placements or receiving training in English. A sound internationalisation policy is an important condition for this and contributes to the positive image of the regional training centre. The VET institute is thus positioning itself as part of the European Community, a player in the global world.

The VET institute contributes to organisations in the Netherlands and Europe working to enhance the position of intermediate vocational training in Europe. These include EUproVET (European Providers of Vocational Education and Training), EFVET (European Federation of Technical and Vocational Educational Training) and IVS (International Vocational Studies) Alliance. The latter alliance is a joint venture with regional training centres offering English-language education and training.

Another subject is the EU's language policy. It is essential, if a democratic Europe is to work well, that language education be supported. Special arrangements have been developed to this end.

The objective: the VET institute encourages the international orientation of students and staff and aims to achieve this by means of a sound modern languages policy (teaching especially English but also *ab initio* German and Spanish for students taking part in international projects). The European language portfolio, the European CV and the Europass Mobility are used where possible for students.

4. Facilities

4.1 ICT

It goes without saying the ICT takes centre stage when it comes to innovation in education. Current technological developments are very dynamic. This is especially gratifying as it offers new opportunities; however, it does raise the problem of the accelerated obsolescence of teaching materials, for example (methods, books and, above all, programs). Training is therefore always on the agenda. Elements of internationalisation can be grafted onto all the activities mentioned in this paragraph:

- the development of (digital) teaching resources and teaching environments (transfer of innovation);
- experimenting with and implementing teaching resources (partnerships and mobility actions);
- training and being trained (transfer of innovation; mobility; thematic actions);
- participating in networks and forums on encouraging links between education/training and society.

These examples show clearly that there is an overlap with the national subsidies from the Ministry of Education, such as the '*Innovatiearrangement*' (innovation package). This overlap calls for good policy coordination between internationalisation, ICT and education/training.

4.2 Prerequisites

The prerequisites for enhancing internationalisation within the VET institute:

- communication: the organisation must be well informed about EU policy on internationalisation. The '*Projecten en Internationalisering*' section on the website of the VET institute college is therefore important, as are working groups, policy networks, other digital media and traditional media such as the 'WIJ' (We) staff newsletter;
- the regional training centre is developing its expertise in the procurement of funding, in order to promote international and innovative projects. The project office offers support in the areas of: finding sources of funding and training in the financial and practical aspects of project management. Financial Affairs and project administration also provide support where necessary, by way of the college planning and coordination departments and controllers;
- resources to fund this international policy include mobility subsidies (students and staff) and subsidies for innovative projects and partnerships. These could include: Leonardo da Vinci, BAND, Comenius and Grundtvig funding, as well as funding from Intereg IV. Also, making own funding available and investment by the regional training centre and/or the colleges;
- the VET institute's internationalisation policy ties in with the internal organisational policy of the VET institute (the strategic plan), the policy of the Ministry of Education, the strategic goals formulated by the National Agency, and the European objectives set out in the Bruges communiqué, EfVET and EUproVET.

The VET institute hopes that this vision document will encourage the various colleges to embrace internationalisation, and that each college will strive to "deliver trainees with a qualification and an international orientation which broadens their horizons and thus makes them more employable on the European labour market and prepared for subsequent education and training".