



UNESCO Virtual Conference Briefing Note: Towards UNESCO's TVET Strategy 2016-2021

1. Your Opportunity to inform UNESCO's new Strategy for TVET: The Virtual Conference

This virtual conference will take place over the period Monday 28 September through to Saturday 3 October. It will be held on the UNESCO-UNEVOC e-Forum.

The virtual conference focuses on the development of UNESCO's strategy for TVET over the next 5 years. This new strategy will replace the [current 2010-15 strategy](#), which organised UNESCO's work in TVET in three core areas:

1. provision of upstream policy advice and capacity development;
2. conceptual clarification of skills development and improvement of monitoring; and
3. acting as a clearinghouse, information exchange and contributing to global debate about TVET.

The new strategy will guide UNESCO's work over the coming years (2016 to 2021) as it seeks to strengthen TVET. This virtual conference is your chance to help shape its direction and content. It is your opportunity to contribute to UNESCO's thinking, on the framework which will drive the Organization's work in the near future. It will inform the work UNESCO will undertake with you in your country; the work it will do with other international bodies; and, perhaps most importantly, the global TVET agenda for action as part of [UNESCO's roadmap for education until 2030](#), adopted at the Incheon World Education Forum 2015, as well as the larger 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This is an open consultation, where the UNESCO-UNEVOC e-forum members, nearly 4,000 of you in 180 countries, can help to shape UNESCO's future work. It is also an opportunity for other experts, policy makers, practitioners and TVET teachers/trainers and learners to contribute to this process. We want insights from experts and practitioners across the globe; we want to encourage knowledge sharing and dialogue as input for the preparation of the strategy, which will be presented to the UNESCO Executive Board in the first quarter of 2016.

The virtual conference will be structured around the following 4 key questions:

- What should be the guiding principles of the Strategy?
- What are the emerging issues and trends in TVET to which the strategy should respond?
- What are the most important elements that should be included in the strategy?
- What other relevant issues you wish to raise including the role(s) of UNESCO in delivering the strategy?

2. Why a new strategy? Emerging Issues and Trends

The development of a new strategy, and indeed our discussion about it at this virtual conference, is timely. So much has changed since the current strategy was unfurled in 2009. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is now largely in place. The Sustainable Development Goals and targets are close to final agreement¹. Globalisation and technological development have proceeded apace. Patterns of economic development, jobs and skills have changed rapidly resulting in opportunities, but also unemployment and inequality have also been rising. The nature of work-occupations, workplaces and goods/services produced- is changing too, as well as Government policies and the wider political landscape.

In this changing context TVET is not, and cannot be, simply an onlooker; it is an integral part of the 2030 agenda. TVET both affects the outcomes of these changes for people, economies and societies and is deeply affected by them. TVET must adapt and respond if it is to remain, let alone become more, relevant and valuable. Simply 'scaling up', more of the same, even if it were possible, is not desirable.

New times require new skills. Indeed, this theme of responding to change and strengthening the capacity and capability of TVET to do so effectively and in a way which adds real value to people's lives and to the economy and society in which they live, is perhaps the key dimension of TVET development in the coming years. UNESCO have just published an excellent new book, '[Unleashing the Potential: Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training](#)' which, building on the Shanghai Consensus emanating from the Third international Congress on TVET in 2012, considers this very agenda: **What is driving change? How should TVET respond? How can we strengthen TVET capacities? How can TVET be transformed so as to be able to unleash its full potential?**

So, how indeed do we transform TVET systems? What are the tools and paradigm shifts required to do so? What would a successful TVET system look like? How can we ensure that TVET secures an enhanced reputation, position and value, both in individual countries and across the globe, one more consistent with its promise and potential?

Indeed we need to find some answers to what I call 'The TVET Paradox'.

TVET has the power and potential to transform lives. It can, and should, be the key to prosperity for all and inclusive, sustainable societies. It is 'technical and vocational education and training': education and training for the world of work. It is both, of education and of work. It should raise employability, enhance people's access to job opportunities, enable labour market progression and increase people's incomes. It should reduce exclusion from the world of work and wider society. It should drive the economy through greater productivity and innovation. It should meet the changing needs of economies, including transitions to low carbon and sustainable economies, to the benefit of individuals and employers alike – unfortunately so often it fails to do so.

¹ In fact, the SDG's will be discussed and adopted at the [United Nations Sustainable Development Summit](#) taking place in New York on 25-27 September 2015, i.e. immediately before our virtual conference starts.

But TVET should do more as well. It should enable all, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability and social position to have opportunities to access to learning, knowledge and know how throughout their lives. It should empower people and improve their lives. Indeed, it has the potential to increase equity, reduce poverty and diminish social inequalities. It could be harnessed in the cause of a more sustainable and peaceful future. It can help develop respect for the environment, better informed citizens, better able to fully participate in civil society.

Yet, in reality too much of TVET does not result in these benefits. It often offers poor 'returns' to the individual, to businesses, to Government and taxpayers, to the economy and to society. It is often seen as 'second best'. It often has low status, low prestige and little power. It is often perceived as failing to deliver on its promise and potential. There is indeed a paradox here. Too often there is a gap between TVET's potential and its current performance, between what is and what could, and should, be.

While these problems inhibit TVET to realise its full potential, the gap can also be exacerbated by the demands and expectations placed on the TVET system by policy makers. For example, in many countries TVET is expected to drive competitiveness, as well as sustainability, two potentially contradictory processes. The development of the new UNESCO strategy for TVET presents an opportunity to close that gap if we work to realise the potential of TVET for sustainable development.

The answers we give to these questions and issues outlined above will in large measure influence how we can develop TVET in the future and what should be the main contours of UNESCO thinking and strategy. What answers will our virtual conference provide? What direction will you aim to take us in? What are your priorities and your organizations' and countries' priorities, based on your expertise and experience?

3. Challenges and Opportunities facing TVET: What is to be done?

TVET is not a homogenous entity, and there is no one suitable framework which is applicable to all countries. Having said this, there is a global shift in the nature and role of TVET and this is reflected in, for example, the increase in institutions providing TVET. From Koranic schools in Senegal to Higher education institutions in some European countries, the increase in multiplicity of institutions providing TVET reshape how it is delivered, perceived and what it is expected to do.

With these transformations in mind, here we set out the key themes which could set the agenda for TVET development in the coming years and as such could provide key elements of the strategy. These themes are likely to shape the direction of travel and evolution of TVET systems, policies and institutions, as well as determining how successful they are. Of course, the balance of these challenges and opportunities will differ across countries and regions and priorities will vary according to the specificity of particular situations.

Strategically the global agenda recognises that many of these issues are faced across many countries and so should inform the future development of international collaboration and dialogue, as well as

the promotion of effective networks to rise to the challenge. An international organization with Member States like UNESCO needs to operate within this 'global agenda', so adding value to the activities of individual countries. In consultation with Member States, UNESCO's Secretariat has recently prepared a draft text of a new international Recommendation concerning TVET.

What would be your particular priorities from this agenda? What are the key issues that you would want the agenda to address, and how can the agenda transform TVET and enable it to make a significant contribution to the post 2015 Sustainable Development agenda?

Alternatively, in order to make sure that no unjust pressure is put on the TVET agenda, how can the agenda reflect what is essential and what is desirable? Indeed, it must be remembered that resources are scarce in many countries, and whilst this can encourage change and innovation to seek to secure 'more with less', diverse sources of funding, efficiency and prioritization, it can also reduce the capacity to respond to an exciting but challenging agenda.

4. The Role of UNESCO

The new UNESCO strategy for TVET not only needs to focus on the agenda for TVET transformation, it also needs to specify the Organization's role in implementing this. In other words it needs to determine not only what to do, but how and where to do it. UNESCO can stimulate and facilitate international co-operation and debate. It can provide policy advice and capacity development. It has a standard-setting role, through the development and monitoring of its normative instruments. It can collect, disseminate and develop knowledge, and also advocate for TVET. Are these roles all important? Which of them are seen by you as especially valuable? How relevant are they to your needs? What is the value added of UNESCO's work on TVET, compared to other international organisations? How could this work be strengthened in the future and how UNESCO foster partnerships to expand outreach and drive the agenda?

5. The Questions for the Conference

The conference will run from **Monday 28 September to Saturday 3 October** and you can join us on any or all of these days, because we are organising the event around 4 topics which will run **in parallel** throughout all 6 days. This means you don't have to 'wait' for the topics of greatest interest to you, you can contribute to one or more or indeed all of them throughout the week. However when you make a contribution, please use the topic number and title as below so as to keep things simple and so that we can group appropriate comments under the same thread:

1. Principles: The first topic will broadly focus on: What should be the guiding principles on which the Strategy should be based and what role(s) should UNESCO principally play?

2. Issues and trends: The second topic asks: What are the key emerging issues/trends in TVET to which the Strategy should respond?
3. Key Elements: Here we want to consider what are the most important elements that should be included in the Strategy?
4. Role of UNESCO: What working arrangements should UNESCO adopt to implement the strategy as well as the identification of suitable partners to expand the outreach and drive the agenda. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relevant to the strategy?

I will be chairing/moderating the conference, intervening in the discussions occasionally and also summarising and offering comments and suggestions. The report of the conference will be published online in late October.

I encourage you to take this important opportunity to influence UNESCO's new Strategy for TVET across the world.

Professor Mike Campbell

September 2015

References

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Final Report containing a draft text of the Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002325/232598e.pdf>.