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### Innovation and Excellence in TVET Teacher Education

» In order to approach or sustain excellence in TVET teacher education, innovation is needed. In the European Union, the development of a European policy framework for TVET has been under way since the beginning of the new millennium.

Until the mid-1990s, legal restrictions imposed clear demarcation lines between educational and training policies. This prevented a common European approach to TVET teacher education and training. Education was seen as an issue under the exclusive authority of national governments (and/or regional authorities), whereas training was perceived as a focal area of common European policy development.

In the new millennium, more ambitious goals for joint European policies were set. The Lisbon Summit (March 2000) outlined an overarching policy agenda which aims to develop Europe into the world's leading innovative, competitive and socially cohesive region by 2010. In this context, framework-shaping processes for joint European educational policy were established: the overarching agenda "Education and Training 2010", the Bologna Process (higher education) and the Copenhagen Process (TVET).

These framework processes are based on open and voluntary intergovernmental cooperation through the so-called Open Method of Coordination. Such cooperation is sometimes called "indirect harmonisation", since it tends to increase pressure on governments to apply common formats when shaping education and training structures, and to introduce common quality standards and benchmarks.

#### Education of TVET Professionals in the European Higher Education Area

Due to the current conceptual and institutional

diversity, it is rather problematic to implement common formats and quality standards for the education of TVET professionals. Contrary to higher education, TVET cannot build on two centuries of international discourse and exchange of ideas. Currently, the respective educational institutions are developing strategies to position themselves in the area of European higher education. The debates focus on three strategic "avenues":

- » **Avenue 1** suggests strategic integration of all forms of teacher education (including the hitherto separate education of TVET teachers) under the umbrella of educational faculties. This approach would most likely consolidate the Bachelor degree as the mainstream solution for pedagogic expertise in TVET.
- » **Avenue 2** advocates a strategic alliance between departments or higher education institutions that accommodate sub-programmes for "subject didactics" in specific professional areas (e.g. technical, commercial or agricultural). This approach would likely link vocational teacher education to the respective faculty-based Bachelor's level or Master's level programmes.
- » **Avenue 3** is emerging as a strategic alliance between university departments and centres of excellence that promote the development of pedagogics of TVET (including vocational disciplines) as research disciplines and as core aspects of professional expertise. This approach seeks to develop Master's programmes as a common foundation for TVET teacher education and a TVET research culture.

All three "avenues" aim to upgrade current models of TVET teacher education. However, there is a counter-tendency that seeks to introduce

more flexible solutions based on the biographies of teacher candidates and new paradigms of governance of TVET colleges. This approach advocates continuing vocational training and continuing professional development (on the recent developments, see Loney et al 2005).

#### The transition of the debates to broader international contexts

In recent years, discussions on the education of TVET professionals have expanded and are now an issue that is addressed in European-Asian cooperation. Some Asian countries are interested in exploring concepts that are based on "vocational professionalism" ("Beruflichkeit"). In China, for example, the following matters currently need to be addressed:

- » "Core occupational profiles" leave defining needs and the according adaptation of curricula up to regional/local authorities and local experts at vocational colleges.
- » Competition between vocational education and training institutions is increasing. Financing of TVET programmes increasingly depends on school fees, which in turn are highly dependent on market forces (i.e. on the ability of graduates to obtain employment).
- » The increasing demand for higher education in China. To cope with this and reduce the pressure on higher education institutions, so called "higher vocational education institutions" were established. These institutions are in need of professional staff to deliver education and shape curricula, and they are subject to the same market pressures as vocational colleges.
- » International corporations are establishing production sites throughout China and require a workforce that is able to work and communicate according to international



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standards. In addition, local industries are increasingly forced to tackle international markets and therefore need qualified staff to be competitive and adhere to quality standards.

What is needed now is a framework that provides a structure for research and links research findings and conclusions to curriculum development. The pedagogic and professional expertise of TVET professionals should cover the whole chain of knowledge production from work process analysis to curriculum development and to shaping workplace learning (see Zhao, Z., 2003). Additionally, TVET-related expertise must be consolidated throughout the system, and issues such as academic recognition and quality of innovation need to be addressed.

**The Hangzhou Conference**

Increasingly, Master's degree courses for TVET professionals are being set up in China, as well as in other Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. In November 2004, UNESCO-UNEVOC and UNESCO Beijing, in partnership with the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO and the Chinese Ministry of Education, jointly organised an international seminar on „Innovation and Excellence in TVET Teacher/Trainer Education" in Hangzhou, China. The preparations for the conference were supervised by a scientific committee that consisted of invited experts from different regions. The outcomes of the seminar offered a new perspective for debates on international cooperation in the education of TVET professionals.

The conference discussions analysed current needs for TVET-related expertise. Also, a common curricular framework for Master's level programmes was prepared, progression strategies related to short-cycle models were discussed, and a common approach to promoting professionalisation and quality awareness was outlined. Shaping the common curriculum framework was the crucial task. The working document on this issue was discussed intensively, presented for approval and then put forward as the "Hangzhou

Framework" (see the conference report, Veal et al 2005). The Hangzhou Framework specifies the following core points regarding knowledge development and international cooperation among TVET professionals:

- » Areas of professional specialisation ("vocational disciplines") as core structures for pedagogic and professional knowledge development;
- » A limited number of vocational disciplines that cover the whole field of TVET and cater to discipline-specific knowledge development and exchange in related vocational subject areas;
- » Vocational pedagogy as a platform for communication and knowledge exchange between vocational disciplines.

The Framework was not designed for a stand-alone Master's programme. One requirement for involvement in the programme is that institutes must be entitled to bestow doctoral degrees – or the institutes must be members of a consortium that offers doctoral degree programmes – to ensure sustainability of research and development in TVET. The framework also emphasises the importance of international research cooperation to support the programme.

Participants at the Hangzhou meeting agreed that further cooperation on innovation and excellence in TVET is important. For this purpose, they formed an open network, the "United TVET Network on Innovation and Professional Development (UNIP)". Since then UNIP has, in cooperation with UNESCO-UNEVOC and national hosts, organised regional follow-up conferences in Asia (Tianjin 2005) and in Europe (Oslo 2006).

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**Conclusion**

In this article, we did not discuss innovative concepts in TVET that have a strictly local approach, e.g. vocational colleges as regional centres of competence. We acknowledge, however, that the establishment of such centres of competence is important and requires highly competent and flexible staff at vocational education and training institutions.

We believe that international discussions have, until now, suffered from a lack of understanding of the different contexts in which TVET professionals are educated/trained. In light of the conceptual and organisational diversity around the world, it has been difficult to promote international cooperation that could facilitate innovation in TVET. In addition, the reputation of TVET is low among many countries around the world. The Hangzhou Conference and Framework are a first step towards new international cooperation that may lead to fresh view on TVET and an improvement of TVET worldwide.



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