

THE ETF NETWORK FOR EXCELLENCE

An International Network for Centres of Vocational Excellence

A concept note

SUMMARY

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is establishing an international Network of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and/or clusters of CoVEs. The launch event of the Network will take place in autumn 2020. The network will be known as the ETF Network for Excellence, hereafter referred to as ENE.

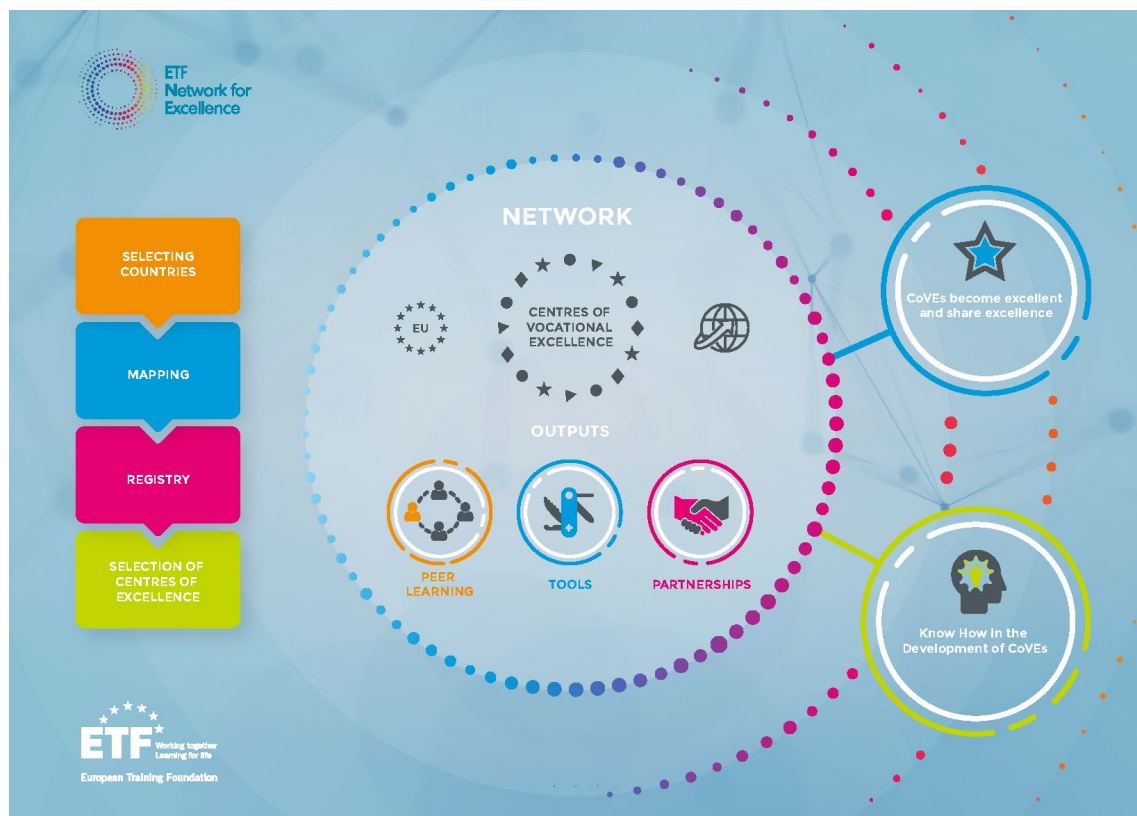
ENE is planned as a response to the call from the EU to support the development of CoVEs and to strengthen partnerships between CoVEs across EU. Through ENE, the ETF aims to expand this initiative to countries outside the EU and open up more opportunities for transnational partnerships and platforms. The ETF Network for Excellence will provide member CoVEs with opportunities to collaborate with one another nationally and internationally, both with CoVEs that operate within European Member States and those that operate in partner countries. Facilitated by the ETF, the ENE will enable groups of CoVEs to come together to identify development needs, to share practices, to design tools, to create partnerships, to share know-how and experiences and to inspire innovation at the level of Vocational Schools and Training Centres. ENE will empower its member CoVES to help lead the improvement and enrichment of vocational education and training in their own nations, regions, clusters and networks.

The network will bring together appointed representatives from these CoVEs. The first phase will run from 2020–2022 and will be followed by an evaluation.

This note is addressed to decision-makers in ETF partner countries who will be invited to nominate CoVEs, subject to criteria relating to their status, their development needs and their commitment to work with the ENE. Each participating CoVE will be expected to identify a member of staff who will participate directly in ENE activities and who will mobilise engagement in their own institution and networks. This Note outlines the concepts underlying the Network, the reasons for establishing it, the draft plan, and timeframe for the Network, and the procedure for nominating members.

CENTRES OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND THE ETF APPROACH

Centres of Vocational Excellence are commonly understood to be schools or training centres that provide high quality training. Recent research into the current practice of CoVEs shows that many CoVEs offer services in addition to initial vocational skills training, for example, incubation, curriculum development, adult education.¹ Furthermore, many also offer services or collaborate with other schools and training centres, for example, developing assessment materials or offering professional development. Mapping work shows that the purpose, structure and functions of CoVEs vary greatly from one context to another. Differences and similarities are often disguised by the use of specific terminologies. CoVEs are assigned different roles in policy-making and enjoy different levels of political commitment and prioritisation of resources. Quite often, CoVEs exist in isolation without partnerships with other educational institutions at national and international level. Sometimes CoVEs are fundamentally skills providers – vocational schools or training centres – but sometimes they are coordination or development centres or networks rather than providers. The ETF through its work on Centres of Vocational Excellence tries to do justice to the contested understanding of vocational excellence, to the diversity of institutions that present themselves as CoVEs and to the varied and dynamic policy-making contexts where CoVES are developing.



¹ EC (2019) *Mapping of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)*: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/566920f4-ee2d-11e9-a32c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>; ETF (2019) *Centres of vocational excellence: an engine for VET development?*: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/centres-vocational-excellence-engine-vet-development>

The research suggests that there are two kinds of driver for the development of CoVEs: firstly, there is the pressure to make skills provision more responsive to the changing needs of industry, which typically favours more specialist skills providers that are deeply and extensively tied to the world of work, and secondly, there is the need to improve the performance of the whole skills provider network, which places emphasis on coordination, cooperation and strategic development of that network. The research shows that different countries are using CoVEs to pursue different strategies and it can help policy-makers to consider some of the choices and trade-offs they must confront. It also sharpens our focus on the challenge of how and under what conditions these strategies can be combined so that CoVEs can both deepen their engagement with the labour market and cooperate with other skills providers to form part of a comprehensive, inclusive, high quality network.

The ETF's research implies that CoVEs can become engines of improvement for national skills provision if there is an understanding of the range of functionalities that CoVEs can develop and if CoVEs have the capabilities, resources and processes required. Policy makers need a vision of how, over time, CoVEs will enhance national skills provision, for example, by acting as hubs or beacons or models, and how CoVEs can serve the national Human Capital Development strategy, for example, by addressing emerging smart specialisation or extending lifelong learning.

The ENE will enable CoVEs to learn from one another and to address their own development collaboratively. It will also help policy makers to understand the needs and opportunities better so they can construct strategies that are informed by diverse international practices and by the experiences of practitioners over many years.

The ETF Network for Excellence (ENE) will empower the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) through international collaboration

ENE is founded on the principle that a CoVE is an institution that wants to take greater responsibility for its own growth, improvement and mission. To do that it is important to be both an inward and outward looking institution, an institution that is ready to learn, collaborate and enter networks and construct partnerships.

Many of the challenges and opportunities that face vocational education are international: new technologies, environmental change, migration, changing skills needs. It make sense for vocational skills providers to come together to address these issues, where appropriate, other actors such as university research centres, business, local government, investors, local communities should also participate. CoVEs in partner countries also collaborate in partnerships and international peer learning, particularly when there is a chance to work with high quality, innovative organisations from which they believe they can learn. Similarly, there is an appetite from CoVEs in EU member states to expand and forge international partnerships and alliances with CoVEs outside the EU. The recent Erasmus + pilot call for proposals of the European Commission (EACEA 33/2019) opens opportunities for “partner countries to be associated partners to the extent it is demonstrated that their participation brings an added value to the CoVE”.

ENE will complement the platforms that will be funded through Erasmus +. It will ensure that the needs and priorities of CoVEs in partner countries are voiced and understood and it will help CoVEs in partner countries to seize the opportunities for enhanced visibility, collaboration and support.

The ETF's approach reflects that of the European Commission: it supports what the Erasmus + Call for Proposals for Centres of Vocational Excellence calls a ‘bottom-up approach to excellence’ through

'transnational cooperation'². The immediate beneficiaries and contributors to ENE will be the CoVEs themselves and their partners. However, the network has been designed so that, over time, it will generate improved knowledge about the how CoVEs develop in different contexts and how CoVE development can be supported and coordinated at system level. This knowledge will sometimes take the form of instruments and guidance, which will support application.

What needs does the Network address?

1. ENE will directly address the needs of CoVEs:
 - a) Opportunities to learn directly from practice in relation to the functions or services that they wish to improve or develop, e.g. as lifelong learning providers, as incubators
 - b) Better understanding of the structural preconditions and the capabilities they need and how they may be developed, e.g. operation of financial autonomy, self-governance
 - c) Access to useful tools and instruments, for example, assessment tools, planning tools
 - d) Helping to find partners for international projects or peer learning
 - e) Support for critical reflection
2. ENE will indirectly address the needs of policy makers in EU and in partner countries:
 - a) Improved understanding of variety of CoVEs, their development and their relevance for Human Capital Development
 - b) Monitoring of how CoVEs develop over time
 - c) Informing a critical understanding of how CoVEs can contribute to the national provider network and to the national HCD strategy

The role of the ETF

The ETF will facilitate the ENE and provide human and financial resources. A Steering Committee will monitor and review the Network work plans.

To support the Network, the ETF, subject to available resources, will:

- In consultation with network members, define priority themes that will be the focus for the network's activities at various times
- Establish and maintain a digital platform that will enable communication between network members, sharing of resources and active collaboration
- Regularly collect, analyse and report on information relating to the starting point and the development, activities and interactions of member CoVEs
- Contribute expertise to help to organise and communicate knowledge and practice and to research, design and test tools
- Organise regular meetings and particular conferences and seminars (some of which may address particular themes and/or particular groups or regions)
- Disseminate the activities and learning of the network and of member CoVEs internationally (supported by ETF Communication department)
- Help to set up partnerships and peer learning opportunities for Network members
- Help network members to be aware of and to prepare for funding and development opportunities
- Engage other networks and institutions with the work and outcomes from the ENE, for example, European Union, UNEVOC, etc.

² European Commission, *Call for Proposals – Centres of Vocational Excellence*, EACEA/33/2019 (2018) Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2019:349:TOC>

The digital platform will be an information repository and tool for planning and cooperation. ENE is likely to make use of Open Space and of other digital tools.

To facilitate communication across partner countries, the working language of the Network is English. However, for particular meetings and documents, additional working languages will be employed subject to need and budget.

Activities 2020 (Indicative)

Types of Activity	2020
Theme Identification	ETF: Identify a long list based on existing mapping. Form a short list through on-line consultation: approximately 3 themes.
Partnership Formation	Recruit local brokers or use country organisers or other international brokers to set up for 2021
Digital Platform	Established by ETF
Data Collection and Knowledge Development	ETF publication 'An Engine for VET development' Data collection tool Database and Baseline Analysis
Tool Development	Develop 2/3 proposals and recruit member participants – share progress at Launch Event
Meetings	Towards more focused international cooperation in VET Turin Launch Event
Peer Learning Events	1 event in 2020
Funding and Development Opportunities	Session within frame of Launch Event.
Other Networks	Exchange and, where appropriate, agreements to cooperate
Dissemination	Web-news, Blogs on Open Space, Use of other events

ENE Membership Criteria

The membership to the ENE will be based on 3 criteria:

1. Endorsement
2. Engagement in specific Themes
3. Commitment to the ENE

The process of applying the 3 membership criteria will be executed in 2 steps:

Step 1: Ministries nominate individual skills providers that have (or will have) national status as CoVEs to join the ENE. The members of the Network will be individual vocational skills providers that have the status of a CoVE nationally (based on the the Template of 19 criteria, see Annex “Criteria for identification of COVEs”) or they will be a cluster of vocational skills providers that are coordinated by a particular CoVE. Exceptionally they may be a cluster or network of CoVEs – however, in this case there will need to be a lead institution. The initial identification of CoVEs will need to be endorsed by the relevant national authority.

Step 2: ETF selects 50 skills providers on the basis of their commitment to collaborate and their developmental priorities

Though it is envisaged that the number of members will increase gradually over the years, the initial number of members for 2020 will not exceed 50. The CoVEs that will be endorsed by the relevant national authority but will not become members of ENE will be part of the Registry (information repository), which will offer also opportunities for partnerships with other CoVEs.

In order to focus the work of ENE it is proposed to select members, in the first year, that are committed to working on a limited number of priority themes. These themes are:

- Lifelong learning in VET – from IVET to CVET and adult education
- Smart specialisation – Mobilising Innovation, ecosystems and SMEs
- Industry 4.0 and digitalisation
- Education-business collaboration and cooperation
- Autonomy and Institutional Development (financing, leadership, governance)
- Going green – supporting sustainable goals
- Pedagogy and professional development
- Social inclusion

ENE aims to provide support to its members but also to increase knowledge about CoVEs. It is therefore expected that all members commit themselves to share knowledge about their own development and to share and reflect critically upon their practices.

ENE members will usually be based in partner countries; however, associate membership will be open to CoVEs located in EU member states and other countries.

Peer learning activities

Peer learning is a mode of learning from each other. In this specific case, it is about learning from another centre in order to unpack its expertise/practice in a specific field of excellence; to learn from it, and to see if it could possibly work also in another country (even with some contextualised changes).

ENE will facilitate peer learning opportunities among members of the network. Those who wish to know more about best practices in another country can refer to other network members to discuss the possibility of organising a peer learning activity.

For example, two or more CoVEs may decide to organise a peer learning activities based on selected thematic topics (e.g. improve WBL practices, governance and financing dimensions, updating methods for teachers professional performance, learning practices, etc.).

ENE can support peer-learning activities in a variety of ways:

- Assisting with brokering, design and implementation
- Providing an ETF designed and implemented activity
- Engaging other brokers, for example, E-twinning, TAIEX, European CoVEs
- Assisting with funding
- Wider dissemination and application of outcomes from peer learning, e.g. reports, videos

Partnerships

Members of the ETF network have the opportunity to create partnerships between themselves and as a member of the ETF Network; they can liaise with each other in order to create the necessary consortia to apply Mobility/Learning agreements offered by the EU (and beyond). ENE can help its

members to find suitable partners, for example, other providers that share a development need or interest.

For example, members can work together in order to apply for Erasmus+, E-Twinning, TAIEX calls. This will allow bringing forward the EU practices and values to the network. The ETF can facilitate the creation of those partnerships, not only by inviting its Network's members to apply to those programmes, but also by supporting collaboration

The composition of different partners within CoVEs might be public authorities (national, regional/local) employers/unions/chambers, companies, methodological centres/experts, parent associations etc.

ENE can support partnerships in a variety of ways:

- Assisting with brokering, design and implementation
- Organising events which support partnership formation, for example, in relation to particular themes or calls
- Providing examples, information and tools to support partnerships
- Engaging other brokers, for example, E-twinning, TAIEX, European CoVEs
- Assisting with funding
- Wider dissemination and application of outcomes from partnerships, e.g. reports, videos

Tool Development

Tools will be developed to meet concrete development needs of multiple members of the network. The tools will be financed or co-financed by ETF and ETF experts will contribute expertise and coordination. However, it is expected that network members will have the opportunity to contribute to tool development and in some cases take ownership of them. Where additional expertise is required, outside expertise will be brought in. In some cases existing tools can be adapted the needs of CoVEs or can serve as the basis for development.

Indicative tools

- Employers' survey
- Training needs analysis
- Foresight instrument
- Instruments for institutional development
- Instruments for regional educational planning
- Instruments for analysing teachers' skills needs
- SELFIE
- EQAVET
- Human resources management
- Monitoring and evaluation instruments, e.g. indicators of excellence
- Financing tools
- NQF (National Qualifications Framework), GOV (Governance multi-levels), TRP (Torino Process) toolbox
- 3S Tools (Smart Specialisation)