

The ETF Network for Excellence (ENE): An International Network for Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)

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: **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 2020–2023 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

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>

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.

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. This analysis confirms 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.

ENE will empower 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 and to collaborate to 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 want to participate 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

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>

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 COMM)
- 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.

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. Please see Annex for indicative language options as per outcome.

Indicative ETF intervention logic:

ETF Inputs

Around 383 man days/year

Around 250K€/year for 3 years

Activities (Indicative)

Types of Activity	2020
Theme Identification	ETF: Identify a long list based on existing mapping. Form a short list through on-line consultation: 3 themes.
Partnership Formation	Recruit local brokers or use country organisers or other international brokers to set up for 2021
Digital Platform	Establish Q2 ETF
Data Collection and Knowledge Development	Q1 ETF publication 'An Engine' Q1 – Q2 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 (Differentiation Event) Turin Q1 Launch Event Q3
Peer Learning Events	1 event in 2020, Q3 – Q4
Funding and Development Opportunities	Session within frame of Launch Event.
Other Networks	Exchange and, where appropriate, agreements to cooperate
Dissemination	Webnews, Blogs on Open Space, Use of other events

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
- Financing tools
- NQF, GOV, TRP toolbox
- 3S Tools

Membership Criteria

The members of the Network will be individual vocational skills providers that have the status of a CoVE nationally 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.

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. In order to focus the work of the network it is proposed to select members, in the first year, that are committed to working on a limited number of themes. These themes will be formulated in terms of both services (what CoVEs do, e.g. adult education) and process (how CoVEs provide these services, e.g. self-governance).

ENE aims to provide support to its members but also to increase knowledge about CoVEs. It is therefore expected that all members will be ready 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.

Selection Process (provisional):

1. ETF agrees which partner countries to invite and identifies priority themes for first year and supplies simple definition of CoVE to inform selection

2. National level interlocutors are invited to nominate CoVEs to join ENE
 - a. Should have status or provisional status of CoVE nationally or regionally
 - b. Should have support of national authorities to participate throughout 3 year action
 - c. Should be ready to address priority themes and to contribute fully to ENE
3. ETF, in consultation with national governments, selects suitable members from the nominated CoVEs and invites them to complete application form committing them to:
 - a. Participation of senior staff member plus associates
 - b. Providing baseline and ongoing information
 - c. Identifying Needs and Expectations
 - d. Offering services, e.g. peer learning activities
 - e. Expressing readiness to participate in projects, e.g. development of particular tools
 - f. Identification of other vocational skills providers that it supports, e.g. the CoVE may be a regional hub or a sectoral beacon or a national centre etc and of their other local partners, e.g. businesses or universities.
 - g. Participation in self- and peer-evaluation
4. Invited CoVEs decide to apply. ETF will then decide what kind of membership is most appropriate based on needs, commitment and current capability and informs all stakeholders.

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 for several Mobility/Learning agreements offered by the EU (and beyond). They are already considered as Centre of Excellence active in ETF Partner Countries and can therefore get together to respond to those types of calls. For this purpose, the Network works as a facilitator in order to set connections and synergies for work.

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. In this specific case 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 them in preparing their first applications and in launching the related activities.

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 partnership 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

Thematic topics

It will not be possible to work on all of the following themes. It is expected that each year the ENE will address 3 or 4 themes but not all members will participate in all themes. Work on a theme will connect multiple activities: partnership formation, peer learning activity, tool making. It is essential that members are able to agree on which themes they wish to work together.

Some examples of possible themes:

What? In which areas do CoVE work?	How? What is needed to become/operate a CoVE?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CoVE for specific sectors, technologies, e.g. medical sector, AI ■ CoVE for digitization in/of VET ■ CoVE for innovation ■ CoVE for business start up and incubation ■ CoVE for smart specialisation ■ CoVE for teacher training ■ CoVE for learners with special needs ■ CoVE for adult education and training ■ IVET for adults ■ CVET for adults ■ Analysing skills needs of adults ■ Preparing teachers and trainers for adult education and training ■ Andragogy ■ Apprenticeship for adults ■ Key competences for adults ■ VET for adult migrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legal framework for CoVE ■ Cooperation and collaboration at the national level (e.g. between MoE and MoL; in a region; among CoVE etc.) ■ Quality management of CoVE ■ Financing of CoVE, e.g. through PPPs ■ Management of CoVE ■ Leadership ■ Human resources management in CoVE ■ Institutional planning ■ Monitoring and evaluation of the achievements of CoVE ■ Institutional models for CoVEs ■ Engagement with employers and other stakeholders

Outputs and impact:

The activities described above are intended to result in the following Outputs:

<p>Output (intended result of the project):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Practitioners in CoVEs and other actors within ENE improve their capability how on to develop appropriate CoVEs, e.g. improved understanding, readiness for choices and collaboration, wider experiences ■ Policy makers develop critical understanding of how policy can assist development of CoVEs that bring about improved national provider network and fit with national HCD strategy in partner countries. 	<p>Sources of verification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of CoVEs participating in diverse ENE activities ■ Evaluations of events and tools ■ Manner in which needs, objectives and activities of CoVEs develop over time ■ Response of policy makers to outputs of ENE
<p>Use of output (not in the scope of the project):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local stakeholders (e.g. MoE, management of CoVE, social partners) develop strategies, action plans ■ Local stakeholders (e.g. MoE, management of CoVE, social partners) set up CoVE ■ CoVE offer improved services to students, adults, businesses, municipalities etc. ■ Policy makers and donor organisations apply learning to develop CoVEs 	
<p>Indicative Outcome/impact (not in the scope of the project):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Graduates of CoVEs are (self-) employed ■ Businesses increase productivity ■ New businesses formed ■ Drop out falls ■ Improved performance across the provider network 	

Annex 1 – INDICATIVE LANGUAGE REGIME PER ACTIVITY

Activity	Languages	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, FR, RU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are a key components of the project – we don't see any other way of doing them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-networks events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, FR EN, RU FR, RU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For these events (workshops, peer learning visits, study visits) we can ensure that two languages are enough to cover all countries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-line platform (open space) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We plan to use the automatic translation functionality of open space to make sure that discussions can go on and being facilitated without the needs of any translation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, FR EN, RU RU FR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation / interpretation will be needed for country work, too. In exceptional cases ETF staff can do without (e.g. Aziz, Romaine in Morocco)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country work deliverables (development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, FR EN, RU RU FR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country teams will work in local language when they can (see example above)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country work deliverables (finalisation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, FR EN, RU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> However, resources have to be allocated for translation of any tangible deliverable produced once they are finalised.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVE's key deliverables (development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies, toolboxes etc.. will need to developed in EN only. All members of the network will be able to contribute but not "ongoing" translation will be possible. Contributions from non-EN speakers' stakeholders can be collected through direct contact with ETF experts in the context of country work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVE's key deliverables (development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, FR, RU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final version of key deliverables to be translated and disseminated in three languages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EN, with exceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is the most problematic aspect and need to be further reflected upon. Regular communications (outside the context of the events) will be in English. Automatic translations will be used for all communications going through open space. In exceptional cases (little text but high relevance e.g. infographics) translations can be done.

Annex 2 - CoVEs NETWORK OUTLINE WORK PLAN (2020-2023)

Network	2020				2021				2023			
Activities	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1			
■ Publication of ETF paper <i>Centres of Vocational Excellence – an engine for VET development? An international analysis</i>												
■ Differentiation event with Israel, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Turkey												
■ Launch of the Network event (Turin)												
■ Network meeting and peer learning visit in XXXX												
■ Set up a digital platform on CoVEs												
■ Seminars and conferences												