



Feasibility study for the creation of an EU level network of national associations representing vocational education and training (VET) providers

Final report

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creation of an EU level
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Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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Executive summary

Why this study?

This study has been commissioned by the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and inclusion, DG EMPL hereafter) at a time when increasing attention is being paid to the value of engaging with national VET provider associations at the EU level, in order to better reach out at grass root level. It was carried out by ICF between April and November 2015.

In the field of VET the European Commission (EC hereafter) has had much experience over the past decades working in partnership with national governments, employers and trade unions, in the remit of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

In December 2010, the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in VET for 2011-2020¹ formally encouraged greater cooperation with VET provider organisations, seeing them as a potential lever for supporting the implementation of VET reforms at both EU and national levels.²

During the economic crisis, the rationale for effectively engaging with the latter has been reinforced.

At EC level, the Bruges Communiqué's priority objectives have been taken forward mainly³ within the remit of these groups:

- The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT);
- The Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT);

In addition, an expert group named 'Platform of European Associations of VET Providers' ('Platform' hereafter) was created for specifically addressing VET providers.

Each of these groups (see further information in section 2), has so far and to different extents fostered exchanges between the EC and VET provider organisations. But these groups (and related actions) have not yet explicitly addressed the Bruges Communiqué's cooperation objective (i.e. 'VET provider organisations should be encouraged to cooperate at European level').

In light of the above, the EC wished to obtain insights into possible means for improving relationships with national associations representing VET providers to build on both horizontal as well as vertical relationships between VET provider organisations in the EU, candidate and EFTA countries.

This led the EC to commission the present feasibility study whose main purpose was to offer a first set of insights that would support and foster exchanges on the topic at the EU level.

¹ Council of the European Union; European Commission (2010). The Bruges Communiqué. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf

² Examples from the Bruges Communiqué: 'more and better communication is needed to involve the stakeholders: social partners, VET providers, civil society and learners' ; 'Develop structured cooperation with VET provider associations at EU level'

³ Cooperation and exchanges also take place at different levels and within different settings established at EU levels such as: ET2020 working groups, ECVET and EQAVET related bodies, VET business Forum, etc.

The following **cooperation objectives**⁴ have been considered for the purpose of this study:

- To encourage VET provider organisations and their networks to work together at European level to improve the quality and efficiency of VET, enhance its relevance for learners and employers, and build cross-border relationships for mobility and sharing practice;
- To enable VET provider organisations⁵ and their networks to be more active and involved in the EU policy making process
- To provide a potential forum for communication and dissemination about the VET policy agenda at EU and national level

The feasibility study in a nutshell

This study report presents:

- Key stakeholders' perceptions about current arrangements and on establishing a European network of National VET provider associations
- An overview of the state-of-play at national level (existence of national associations of VET providers, key features and patterns)
- Options and analysis of their feasibility
- Conclusions and recommendations for future action in the area at EU/EC level

It draws on:

- **32 country fiches** (EU 28, 2 EFTA⁶ and 2 candidate countries⁷) summarising country level information on the topic
- **An analysis** of information collated through **a limited number of phone interviews** with key stakeholders at EU/national level (ACVT and 'Platform's representatives) and through questionnaires completed by the identified associations of VET providers' representatives (34 replies received)
- The results of a validation **workshop** organised jointly with DG EMPL in October 2015.

What are the key findings?

General perceptions about current arrangements

The key findings set out below (detailed in section 2) were informed through phone exchanges with key stakeholders (i.e. 'Platform' and ACVT representatives).

⁴ Hereinafter referred to as 'cooperation objectives' as agreed with DG EMPL.

⁵ While doing so, they may act as multipliers to disseminate the VET policy agenda and good practices exchanged at the EU level. They could also be best placed for providing feedback and expertise from a grass root level on the policy proposals made by the Commission and in the framework of ACVT and DGVT.

⁶ Switzerland and Norway

⁷ Serbia and Turkey

Key findings

- The **need to engage** with VET provider associations is generally **acknowledged** and **supported**;
- The inclusion of VET provider associations at EU level raised some concerns about **their role, 'power' or interests** compared to representatives of employers and trades unions;
- The recent establishment of the 'Platform' is seen as a positive development and means to support the cooperation objective. Its (uneven) **representativeness** and to a **lesser extent** its low visibility (i.e. remit, activities, etc.) were commonly commented on.

General perceptions about establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations

Perceptions about establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations were also collated through interviews (same interviewees as above) and to some extent via the review of questionnaires completed by identified associations of VET providers' representatives.

Key findings are briefly summarised below and presented in detail in section 2.

Key findings

- The proposal to **establish a European level network of national VET provider associations** was generally considered **relevant, desirable** and **valuable** but...
- ...it is likely to be a difficult task for different reasons:
 - Possible lack of commitment and/or interest from national associations
 - Representativeness and difficulty of identifying the 'right people to participate'
 - Financial constraints on participation and dissemination
 - Linguistic barriers;
- The **possible features** of such a network (i.e. governance and scope of action) were also **difficult to comprehend** by most interviewees in the current context;
- The extent to which establishing such a network would be **feasible** was **questioned** by most respondents, especially in regard to identifying representative national associations for each country and how those could be selected.

Mapping countries' situations

The country-level mapping offered in this study is to be considered as **illustrative** (rather than exhaustive). Carried out within a limited timeframe and primarily based on desk research, its main objective was to identify whether association(s) of VET providers exist in every countries covered by the assignment (and if so to collate additional information on their key characteristics). When doing so, the primary objective was not to map those most representative associations per country but rather to compile information on various types of associations as identified in the initial desk research.

Key findings

- With the exception of two countries (LU and LV⁸), associations of VET providers were **found in all other countries** covered by the assignment;
- Where existing, the number of associations identified per country varies from **1 to 9**;
- The **number** of associations by itself does **not give a clear picture** of the degree to which VET providers are **represented** in a country;
- Most of the associations identified are **national-level associations** ⁹
- A few business sector-specific associations were also found¹⁰;
- The identified associations most commonly represent **public providers**, bringing together **IVET and/or CVET** providers;
- Lack of **representativeness** is **commonly observed** across countries (due to the variety of actors in VET provision at national/regional/local level) **though the data only allows this to be roughly estimated**.
- Though all the associations aim at influencing decision makers to some extent, the **type of activities** they support **generally greatly vary** from one association to the other (e.g. support in pedagogical issues, legal advice, support in the implementation of quality assurance procedures, etc.);
- Most of the associations are **often funded through the payment of membership fees**. However, there can also be **other funding sources** such as public funding, earnings from the sale of services or products, and donations.

Options and analysis of their feasibility

Four feasibility options ('scenarios') and a 'complementary option' were developed and assessed against the key findings of the study. These scenarios are:

- Maintaining current arrangements ('status quo' – scenario 1);
- Improving current arrangements (scenario 2);
- Establishing a new network with no more than one representative association per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 3);
- Establishing a new network with at least two representative associations per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 4).

To the above adds a further complementary/ transversal option (i.e. not a formal scenario as such) would be:

- Establishing an on-line platform (i.e. as a Forum that could bring together those associations identified in the study (or at least the most interested ones).

To the central question of this assignment (i.e. the feasibility of establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations) the general conclusion can be summarised as 'yes but'...:

- It is certainly too early to proceed

⁸ For Latvia, one organization had been identified, but no further information was found to establish any relevance.

⁹ A few examples of associations operating at regional level have been included (mainly for BE, ES, IT and UK) but information at this level has not made the object of a systematic search.

¹⁰ This kind of associations has not been the object of the search.

- The following questions/ considerations (neither exhaustive nor in specific order) ought to be addressed to further inform the ultimate action in this area:
 - How to make sure that such a setting (i.e. network or e-platform) would add value to the existing arrangements by achieving the three cooperation objectives mentioned earlier;
 - How to ensure representativeness of the VET sector across each country within a hypothetical network or e-platform, in particular:
 - a) How to identify and select the most representative national associations;
 - b) How to measure the interest and expectations of existing associations to take part in such a European setting, etc.;
 - c) How to increase the coverage and representativeness of national associations.
 - A network or an e-platform for what; to support what kind of activities? How can existing e-resources be used, such as EPALE or others?
 - How/ by whom would this be funded and coordinated?
- Further exploring possible funding arrangements at EC level (e.g. via Erasmus+) or adjustments to existing tools (e.g. EC practice dissemination web tools such as EPALE or others) so as to avoid duplication of efforts.

Overall, the assessment of the **four feasibility options** proposed above (further presented in section 4) suggests that improving current arrangements (scenario 2) would be, at least over the short term, most appropriate for furthering reflection at EU level on how to address the Bruges Communiqué's cooperation objective.

Recommendations for future developments in the area at EU level

What the EU/EC should/could do:

- Continue making efforts to **promote that EU policy and initiatives reach out at grass-root level through 'current arrangements'** (the Platform, ACVT and DGVT as a start but also via Cedefop and ETF and other relevant settings);
- Further develop the three **cooperation objectives** mentioned above with the aim of raising the interest of other stakeholders in cooperation;
- Promote better **communication and dissemination strategies** of the existing European level organisations, under the framework of the Riga conclusions;
- Promote further debate on the concrete role the Commission can play in this field. Namely, it may consider looking into the use of EU projects (for instance, under Erasmus+) as a way to create structures and supporting financially the national associations that want to participate in EU-level collaboration initiatives.

What the 'Platform', ACVT and DGVT should/could do:

- Reflect upon, individually, on how to address the Bruges cooperation objective, and better reach out at grass root level;
- Effectively engage altogether and share views on envisaged approaches/action plan and considerations about how the EC could help;
- At Platform level: explore the idea of extending the membership of the group jointly with the EC.

1 Introduction

In the field of VET and within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) more specifically, the EC has had solid experience working in partnership with national governments, employers and trade unions over the past decades. This has supported and informed VET policy making across Europe. The EC is also supported in this area by two specialist EC agencies, namely: Cedefop and the European Training Foundation (ETF)¹¹. These agencies provide a foundation for research, monitoring and policy development on VET at the European level.

In December 2010, European Ministers for VET, the European Social Partners and the European Commission adopted, as part of the Copenhagen process, the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in VET for 2011-2020.¹² Among other things, the document proposed concrete measures for Member States and the EC to modernise VET systems in order to make them attractive for young people to continue their studies and to help them get into employment, and for adults to continue learning throughout their working lives. It also stated that VET provider organisations within the EU should be encouraged to cooperate because this should assist in the implementation of VET reforms at both EU and national levels.

The rationale for improved cooperation with VET provider organisations has been reinforced during the economic crisis. Governments, education providers and other relevant stakeholders need to effectively work together to foster mutual learning, co-productive approaches so as to support the development of well-equipped individuals capable of meeting the needs of labour markets, now and in the future. VET systems (and VET providers as relevant actors at grass-roots level¹³) are believed to have an important role to play in this area at both EU and national levels because of their particular positioning between education and the world of work.

At EC level, the Bruges Communiqué's priority objectives have been mainly¹⁴ discussed in the remit of these groups:

- The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) and;
- The Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT).

In addition, an expert group named 'Platform of European Associations of VET Providers' ('Platform' hereafter) was created. Formally established in 2015, this group is both the most recent and has also focused more specifically on VET provider associations through representative European umbrella associations.

Further details on each of these groups (altogether commonly referred to as 'current arrangements' across the study report) can be found in section 2.

Each of these groups has so far and to different extents fostered exchanges between the EC and VET provider organisations. But these groups (and related actions) have not yet explicitly addressed the Bruges Communiqué's cooperation objective (i.e. "VET provider organisations should be encouraged to cooperate at European level").

In the meantime, the future VET policy priorities 2015-2020 as set out in the conclusions¹⁵ of the latest Copenhagen process Ministerial Conference (Riga, 22 June

¹¹ Focusing inter alia on accession and pre-accession countries.

¹² Council of the European Union; European Commission (2010). The Bruges Communiqué. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf

¹³ In the framework VET providers associations can be seen as crucial players as they implement VET reforms at national level and are directly relevant in the implementation of the deliverables defined in the Bruges Communiqué.

¹⁴ Cooperation and exchanges also take place at different levels and within different settings established at EU levels such as: ET2020 working groups, ECVET and EQAVET related bodies, VET business Forum, etc.

2015) reiterated the need to effectively engage with VET providers (and also with other key stakeholders including social partners, companies, chambers) for the purpose of achieving modernisation of VET-related objectives. These include among other things the promotion of work-based learning and further support for the professional development of VET teachers and trainers for instance. For the latter, the possible contribution of European and national networks of VET providers is advocated.

1.1 Aims and scope of the study

The EC wished to obtain further insights into possible means for improving relationships with national associations representing VET providers to build on both horizontal as well as vertical relationships¹⁶ between VET provider organisations in the EU, candidate and EFTA countries.

The three **objectives¹⁷ considered for the present assignment for improving cooperation** were as follows:

- To encourage VET provider organisations and their networks to work together at European level to improve the quality and efficiency of VET, enhance its relevance for learners and employers, and build cross-border relationships for mobility and sharing practice;
- To enable VET provider organisations¹⁸ and their networks to be more active and involved in the EU policy making process and a better means for:
 - effective engagement and consultation than the current arrangements through the DGVT and the ACVT; and
 - the meetings it has established with European VET provider associations since 2010 (including by recently creating an expert group in the form of the above-mentioned Platform);
- To provide a potential forum for communication and dissemination about the VET policy agenda at EU and national level; a means for the EC as well as for VET provider organisations to exchange knowledge and experience of policy implementation and best practice across EU member states and other countries.

These have underpinned the methodological approach (presented below) and were in particular taken into account when considering current arrangements and the proposal of establishing a European level of national associations of VET providers (central to this assignment) against their suitability and relevance (section 2) and more generally when assessing the feasibility options (section 4).

Against this background a first prerequisite was to having a better knowledge about the extent to which national associations of VET providers exist in countries across the EU and EFTA and their characteristics (membership, coverage of VET providers).

The study had the following purposes:

¹⁵ Riga Conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020 as a result of the review of short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

¹⁶ Horizontal relationships are those built between VET provider associations within and across countries; vertical relationships refer to those built between VET provider associations and all the VET providers they represent.

¹⁷ i.e. as agreed with DG EMPL for the purpose of the present study. These are referred to as 'cooperation objectives' across the report.

¹⁸ While doing so, they may act as multipliers to disseminate the VET policy agenda and good practices exchanged at the EU level. They could also be best placed for providing feedback and expertise from a grass root level on the policy proposals made by the Commission and in the framework of ACVT and DGVT.

- To collect ACVT and Platform representatives' views on both current arrangements and on the proposal of establishing a European network of national associations of VET providers;
- To map country situations (EU 28 Member States, 2 EFTA and 2 candidate countries) in order to improve the knowledge-base on the:
 - Extent to which national associations of VET providers exist in all countries;
 - Main features of identified associations: e.g. type(s) of VET covered, level of representativeness at national level, membership, governance, priority objectives and activities, level of engagement with other associations at national or European level, etc.;
 - Perceptions of VET provider associations' representatives on drivers/triggers for establishing an association; challenges and barriers to representativeness of national VET providers' associations and on the interest; and added value in creating a European network of national VET providers' associations;
- To set out and assess feasibility options in order to identify approach(es) which would be most relevant to help address the cooperation objectives and;
- To outline conclusions and recommendations for future developments in the area at EU/EC level.

The following considerations and **definitions** have underpinned the methodological approach presented in the next section:

What is a VET provider organisation?

It is recognised that a VET provider is "an organisation or individual that provides education or training services"¹⁹ so that they can be for profit/not for profit and include: VET, higher education (HE), school, employers, employer associations in a sector or trade, and private training companies. As a consequence it was expected that associations which exist would reflect the mix of providers in a country as well as:

- The number and scale of providers in a country (number of potential members) which will in turn affect purposes, functions, roles and responsibilities;
- The differences in the delivery of VET between countries within the EU/EFTA and candidate countries under consideration;
- Differences in how new entrants to trades and professions are trained, the extent they have licences to practise, and the extent they have progression pathways from initial VET (IVET) qualifications to higher level VET;
- The variety of EQF levels of VET qualifications for both IVET and continuing VET (CVET).

¹⁹ Cedefop (2014) Terminology of European education and training policy-a selection of 100 key terms

For the specific purpose of this study 'VET provider association' has been defined as:

- Predominantly **representing providers of VET for IVET and/or CVET** which include active labour market VET, apprenticeships, professional qualifications, and training for the existing workforce at all EQF levels (3 and above) (both formal and non-formal training). Where also embedding higher VET providers, related information has been reflected in the respective fiches. However, considering the lack of a common definition to date (and resulting heterogeneous approaches and perceptions) provider associations primarily or exclusively centred on **higher VET** have **not made the object** of a **systematic research** by the study team.
- Representing members at **national and to a lesser extent at regional, and/or sector-specific levels.**²⁰
- Provider associations focusing on **non-formal and informal adult education** which is not employment related or on adult basic skills education have **not been considered**.

How would a European network of national associations operate and relate to the existing arrangements

For the purpose of the study, the study team has (further to DG EMPL's approval) built the feasibility options referring to the establishment of a European network of national associations of VET providers (i.e. scenarios 3 and 4 – see section 4) on the following assumptions:

- The network could possibly as a basis:
 - Replace the expert group and the annual meeting of the Platform (they might be integrated in the new network).
 - Would not create any overlap with the existing governance bodies, such as ACVT or DGVT in particular.
 - Require meetings two or three times a year and a communication channel.
 - Be registered as an 'official' EC group so the attendees at meetings would be reimbursed travel expenses according to EC rules, or alternatively funded under Erasmus+.
- Its activities would be to address the three cooperation objectives

²⁰ Regional and sectoral associations have not been systematically researched. Examples of regional associations have been generally found in some countries with strong regional arrangements or by default in countries where national associations do not exist or to a very limited extent. The same goes with sectoral associations. In the same vein, chambers of commerce or social partners' organisations have not made the object of a systematic research as the main purpose of the study was to identify organisations which are not well represented yet at European level,

1.2 Methodological approach

The methodological approach followed has included:

- **Data collection** (desk-research and interviews) and;
- **Data analysis, validation and reporting tasks.**

The research and analytical work has been undertaken over three consecutive phases:

- **Phase 1 – Inception:** the objective of this phase was to develop the methodological approach and to design the data collection tools.
- **Phase 2 – Research:** this phase consisted of collecting qualitative information about:
 - existing associations of VET providers at national level (in the form of country fiches) and;
 - perceptions of current arrangements or possible developments towards a network at EU level (through phone interviews with a selected number of ACVT and Platform representatives).
- **Phase 3 – Analysis and validation of results:** in this phase the data from country fiches and interviews was processed and analysed for the purpose of the comparative analysis and in particular for informing the assessment of the different options. During this phase, a half-day 'validation workshop' was organised by the study team jointly with DG EMPL in Brussels on 30 October 2015. Its main purpose was to present and discuss the key findings of the study.

The study outputs are described in the box below.

What the study did

Between early **June and September 2015**, the research team produced:

- **32 country fiches** (all EU, 2 EFTA and 2 candidate countries) aimed at mapping country-level information on the topic.
- **a limited number of phone interviews** with ACVT and European umbrella association representatives to get insights on and analyse individual views on the topic.

Between end of **June and end September 2015**, the core team **quality assured** the country fiches as follows:

- **End June to end July: initial quality check** before circulating 'draft' country fiches to national respondents (i.e. individual national associations' representatives). The country fiches were sent to national respondents jointly with a questionnaire for completion (see template in Annex 1)
- **End August to end September:** second review/quality check for integrating feedback from respondents and DG EMPL.

End October-**November 2015**, the above was complemented by:

- A validation **workshop** aimed to present and further discuss the preliminary findings with key stakeholders, including Cedefop and ETF, so as to help the study team further develop study's conclusions and recommendations. The workshop took place in the remit of the Platform's second annual meeting in Brussels on 30 October 2015.

Further information can be found below on the methodological approach followed for the purpose of the two main research tasks undertaken to date, namely: country-level mapping and qualitative interviews.

1.2.1 Country-level mapping

The first task of the study was to map information on:

- The existence of any national associations representing various types of VET providers, and if not, what associations exist and what coverage / level / type of provider do they represent;
- Evidence of any limitations, barriers or challenges to creating and sustaining VET provider associations (e.g. evidence of lack of resource) and their capacity to cooperate with other VET provider associations and the European associations;
- Activities conducted by VET provider associations and any limitations in terms of the activities conducted and how this may influence or affect their ability to engage in an EU level network (e.g. evidence of lack of remit);
- Extent of national VET associations' involvement in EU level networks; and
- Key contact personnel to verify country fiches and supplement the information gathered.

The country-level mapping has been informed by an initial desk research which allowed the study team to gather already existing information on the topic across EU/EFTA and candidate countries, start compiling relevant information for the draft country fiches and identify gaps in information.

The task built on the examination of the following sources:

- Cedefop / Refernet country reports on the national VET situations and other relevant sources;
- Spotlights on VET Web based research on national education and ministry websites (country-based reports e.g. 'Finnish VET in a Nutshell' (2015)²¹); and
- Searches of national education or labour ministry websites, e.g. for consultees and responses to consultations and memberships of consultation bodies or standing committees;
- Web searches for VET provider associations by labour market sector; regional level; and provider sector (e.g. secondary, IVET, CVET, higher education);
- Reviews of the expert group associations' websites, etc.

A common structure/ template was put together by the core team and submitted to DG EMPL for approval during the Inception phase (see presented in the box below).

²¹ http://www.oph.fi/download/165770_finnish_vet_in_a_nutshell.pdf

Structure of the country fiches

- **Brief description of the organisation of VET and the types of providers of VET in the country Strategy / framework for action, incl. drivers**
- **Names of national association(s) responsible for VET providers**
- **Association of VET providers (1):**
 - Type of VET providers represented
 - Level of representation
 - Activities conducted and resources
 - Limitations
 - Engagement in EU-level networks
 - Key contact person for validation and questions
- **Association of VET providers (2):**
 - Same as under associations of VET providers (1) – *to replicate as many times as necessary depending on the country covered (and amount of VET provider associations identified).*

To supplement the information in the fiches, a **short questionnaire** including additional questions (see Annex 1) was sent to individual associations' representatives identified jointly with the country fiches during the verification phase.

The main purpose of the **questionnaire** was to refine information collected at national level and get representatives' perceptions of:

- Barriers and challenges to the creation and sustainability of an EU level network of provider associations and the identification of one or two national associations of VET providers per country that could participate in a European network;
- Feasibility and desirability of an EU level network of provider associations, including perceptions of its added value;
- Expectations for activities and outcomes from the network, including providing feedback on policy recommendations;
- Consideration of the governance and working arrangements, including cooperation with existing structures to reach out to all policy levels, including the EU ones, such as the ACVT and DGVT.

The verification phase²² was run between mid-July and mid-September.

1.2.2 Qualitative interviews

The study has been also informed by phone interviews with key stakeholders. Those have included:

- Representatives of each of the six EU level VET providers associations (part of the 'Platform'); and
- Representatives of the ACVT from the 3 interest groups (Governments, employers and trade unions).

The purpose of the interviews was to provide further evidence for consideration of the feasibility and added value of a network of national VET provider associations and to

²² This phase consisted of allowing representatives (where contact details found) of those national associations identified in the country fiches to verify and complement information supplied on their association. This was made on a voluntary basis and hence did not make the object of a formal validation process.

provide perspectives on its potential benefits and functionality. Questions focused on their perceptions of:

- To what extent the current systems and networks for engagement with VET provider associations is or is not 'fit for purpose' and how these could be improved;
- The barriers and challenges to engaging national associations of VET providers in an EU level network;
- The feasibility and desirability of a Commission-led EU level network of provider associations, including perceptions of its added value;
- The activities, topics and outcomes from the network, including how feedback on policy recommendations would be used;
- The governance and working arrangements (including cooperation with existing VET bodies (like DGVT and ACVT) and funding;
- Recommendations for appropriate organisations best placed to participate.

These interviews took place between end of June and mid-September depending on interviewees' availability. There were conducted over the telephone by individual ICF team members based on a topic guide (see topic guide template in Annex 2) that had been approved by DG EMPL during the inception phase.

Similarly with the approach followed with the country fiches, these interviewees helped the study team collect information that fed into the analysis supplied in the present report. The findings that emerged from these exchanges are reflected (where appropriate) in this report.

1.2.3 Assessing the options

Feasibility options were designed to assess whether a European level network (or other alternative arrangements) would help achieve the cooperation objectives mentioned earlier and enhance the existing arrangements. **Four feasibility options** have been explored:

- Maintaining current arrangements ('status quo' – scenario 1);
- Improving current arrangements (scenario 2);
- Establishing a new network with no more than one representative association per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 3);
- Establishing a new network with at least two representative associations per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 4).

A complementary option (i.e. not a formal scenario) was also considered:

- Establishing an on-line platform²³ as a Forum, with all associations identified in the study.

²³ This option was originally presented as a fifth scenario. It has been redefined as a transversal complementary option further to the exchanges that took place during the validation workshop.

For each scenario, the information has been organised in terms of benefits, dis-benefits and feasibility. To allow comparison, a scoring system has been applied to each of them consisting of:

- Benefits: score from 1 (low benefits) to 5 (high benefits);
- Dis-benefit: score from 1 (high dis-benefits) to 5 (low dis-benefits);
- Feasibility: score from 1 (not possible) to 5 (implementable at no additional cost).

To determine final score, intermediate scores have been weighted as follows: 25% allocated to benefits and dis-benefits each and 50% to feasibility. For further details, see section 5.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** presents perceptions about current arrangements and on establishing a European network of national VET provider associations
- **Chapter 3** sets out the key findings of the country mapping carried out to in 32 countries to get insights on the state of play – extent to which associations on VET providers exist everywhere and key patterns;
- **Chapter 4** presents and analyse feasibility options in the form of four main scenarios;
- **Chapter 5** sets out the conclusions and recommendations for future developments in the area.

Annexes:

- **Annex 1** sets out the questionnaire circulated to national associations of VET providers' representatives as identified in the country fiches during country fiches' verification phase
- **Annex 2** includes the topic guide for interviews
- **Annex 3** provides an overview table of country codes used in the report

2 Perceptions about current arrangements and on establishing a European network of VET provider associations

This section sets out findings about current arrangements (ACVT, DGVT and the Platform) in terms of their respective remit, priority objectives, membership and types of activities. It then outlines for the purpose of the assignment:

- Interviewees' perceptions about current arrangements, in particular their suitability for addressing the cooperation objectives with national associations of VET providers;
- Interviewees' perceptions (but also, where applicable, information supplied by national respondents in the questionnaire) about establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations (relevance, desirability, added value, feasibility and thoughts on possible governance or scope of action)

2.1 Overview of current arrangements supporting policy dialogue in VET at EU level (ACVT, DGVT and the 'Platform')

Policy dialogue in VET at EU level is being supported mainly²⁴ through these groups:

- The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT²⁵) and the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT) which are the governance bodies of European VET policy, and;
- The newly established Platform of European Associations of VET Providers which builds on informal meetings between the EC and identified European Associations of VET providers initiated in 2010.

To date, (direct) cooperation with national VET provider associations has been limited and rather informal.

The current arrangements can be briefly summarised as follows. Until now, the EC has:

- Supported a twice a year meeting of the ACVT which is made up of a representative of government, employers and trade unions for each EU Member State plus observers²⁶; Representatives of European social partners, ETF and Cedefop are also involved.
- Supported a twice a year meeting of the DGVT which is made up of Directors General for VET from the EU Member States, applicant and observer countries. Representatives of European social partners, ETF and Cedefop are also involved.
- Brought together some European VET provider associations every year since 2010 for an informal meeting which have interests in IVET, CVET, and higher level VET. In 2012 this was expanded from four to six associations to cover higher level professional VET. The associations are: EfVET, EUproVET, EVBB, EVTA, EUCEN, and EURASHE (see box below for details). One or two representatives of the associations attend.
- From these six associations lately formed an expert group of VET providers (nominated by the associations), the 'Platform', to strengthen cooperation and policy making consultation. Formally launched in 2015, this has been registered as an

²⁴ Cooperation and exchanges also take place at different levels and within different settings established at EU levels such as: ET2020 working groups, ECVET and EQAVET related bodies, VET business Forum, etc.

²⁵ i.e. an official body established by Council Decision 63/266/EEC, as last amended by Council Decision 2004/223/EC of 26 February 2004 laying down the rules of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training.

²⁶ Since 2013, one Platform member participates as an observer in ACVT meetings.

official group. It is expected to meet two or three times a year in Brussels. Its first meetings took place in spring and by late October 2015²⁷.

Table 1. Overview of existing arrangements supporting policy dialogue in VET at EU level

Date of est.	Mission	Membership	Activities	Outputs (examples)
ACVT 1963	To assist the EC (DG EMPL and interested DGs) in implementing a Community VET policy	ACVT brings together 153 members consisting of a representative of government, employers and trade unions for each EU country, European social partners, ETF and Cedefop representatives plus observers. ACVT holds meetings twice a year - ACVT is chaired by DG EMPL.	Assist the EC in the preparation of legislation or in policy definition Coordinates with Member States, exchange of views Monitors the development of national policies and the enforcement of EU legislation by national authorities Its agenda builds on Copenhagen process' priority themes.	Over past 40 years, the ACVT has provided the EC with opinions on VET issues (e.g. EC communications and other strategic documents, specific undertakings such as the establishment of Cedefop, and the preparation, evaluation and optimisation of EC action programmes in the field of VET. Activity report minutes are available online.
DGVT since the late 1990s	To provide a platform for discussion for policy makers from all EU Member States and stakeholders' representatives in the field of VET	DGVT brings together Directors General for VET from the EU Member States and other countries. Representatives of European social partners, ETF and Cedefop. DGVT holds meetings twice a year.	Offers opportunities to debate current topics on the European education agenda and share good practices DGVT agenda is based on the 18-month trio Presidency programme and consultations between the current Presidency programme team and the EC.	The DGVT meeting has taken place in each of the last ten EU presidencies at least. These tend to have a theme. The most recent was the Future of VET (Riga, June 2015).
Platform of European Associations 2015 ²⁸	To assist the EC (DG EMPL and interested DGs) in implementing a Community VET policy	The Platform is formed by 6 European Associations (EfVET, EUproVET, EVBB, EVTA, EUCEN and EURASHE) each with 2 representatives, in many cases coming from their National members. Membership at the 6 European associations is voluntary. They use their own funds for their own activities. All run for European projects Two or three meetings per year are foreseen	Platform's constituents have kept their respective responsibilities and activities, but are seeking for reaching joint objectives as far as possible in 'assuring quality in VET and parity of esteem of VET in society'.	The members of the 'Platform' presented their (common) Riga Declaration ²⁹ during the meeting of ministries responsible of VET in EU countries that took place in Riga on 22 June 2015.

Source: ICF

²⁷ i.e. on 30 October 2015. The validation workshop for the present study was held during the morning session of this meeting.

²⁸ i.e. building on/ moving forward former informal group of discussion between EfVET, EUproVET, EVBB, EVTA and the EC, established in 2010. In their 'Bruges Joint Declaration' from December 7, 2010 these European networks made clear that they are willing to support the European Commission by actively contributing to the realization of the Bruges communique and the goals of the EU2020-strategy for a 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'. In 2012, the European networks EUCEN, EfVET, EUproVET, EVTA, EURASHE and EVBB signed the Frankfurt declaration.

²⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

Further information on the respective members of the 'Platform' can be found in the box set out below.

Platform's members in a nutshell:

European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EfVET)³⁰

EFVET is a European-wide professional association which has been created by and for providers of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in most European countries. Its key role is to enrich TVET through transnational co-operation by building a pan-European network of institutions and practitioners, with the aim to :

- promote quality and innovation in TVET throughout Europe;
- develop collaboration, mutual co-operation and sharing of good practice, and;
- give colleges a platform of influence in European TVET policy.

Its policy is determined by its member colleges and schools. It collaborates with, but is independent of all government and funding bodies.

EUproVET³¹

EUproVET is a representational platform for European VET providers. EUproVET contributes to the European agenda by:

- providing the labour market with a skilled and high qualified labour force.
- contributing to social inclusion, from both the social and economic perspectives.
- contributing to lifelong learning.
- creating smooth pathways to higher stages of education.
- contributing to an open European Vocational Education and Training Area (EVETA).

Members are from England, Ireland, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Finland and cooperate via Peer Learning Activities and project implementation.

European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (*Europäische Verband Beruflicher Bildungsträger*) (EVBB)³²

The EVBB is active in the field of VET policies and educational and employment operational activities, with the objective to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, focused on a systematic link between VET, companies and society at large. It is a European umbrella association whose members are State associations, associations, coordinating institutes of education and educational providers at national, regional and local levels - public or private VET players and HE institutions, companies and public authorities. Currently EVBB has 58 educational institutions from 15 EU countries and also from Russia, Ukraine, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Switzerland, China, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. EVBB has also several national and European VET networks as members, both aimed at creating synergies in European VET policies area and improving the dialogue with national VET providers.

³⁰ <http://www.efvet.org/>

³¹ <http://www.euprovet.eu/>

³² <http://www.evbb.eu/index.php?lang=en>

The European Vocational Training Association (EVTA)³³

A network of European organisations in the field of human capital development. During its 15 years of existence, EVTA has developed into an important actor within the field of European vocational training. Through EVTA its members influence and stay updated on EU-policies and participate in European development projects. Members collaborate in projects together under 'four pillars':

- employment,
- innovation,
- entrepreneurship, and
- training.

Their work is aimed at, inter alia, bridging the mismatch on the employment market, increase competences required to create an innovative environment and provide flexible, tailored and updated training.

Members are from several countries, for example Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Hungary and France.

European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN)³⁴

EUCEN is a network of Higher Education Institutions from 22 EU countries and from countries outside the EU. Its main aims are to:

- contribute to the economic and cultural life of Europe through the promotion and advancement of lifelong learning within higher education institutions in Europe and elsewhere;
- foster universities' influence in the development of lifelong learning knowledge and policies throughout Europe.

In addition the Network has, amongst its functions, the following:

- to provide a forum for the development, interchange and dissemination of innovation and good practices on lifelong learning within European higher education institutions;
- to enhance HEIs' LLL action as VET providers, through the articulation with the social and economic fabric.

European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)³⁵

EURASHE is the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education that offer professionally-oriented programmes and is engaged in applied and profession-related research within the Bologna cycles. Members of EURASHE are national and sectorial associations of higher education institutions and individual institutions, such as universities, (university) colleges and universities of applied sciences. EURASHE's mission is to represent the views of professionally-orientated institutions and programmes in higher education systems in countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), either in binary higher education systems or in unitary 'university' system.

³³ <http://www.evta.eu/>

³⁴ <http://www.eucen.eu/>

³⁵ <http://www.eurashe.eu/>

The associations have since 2010 agreed to coordinate and combine their activities to contribute to the Bruges Communiqué (2010). They updated this most recently in the Barcelona declaration (September 2014) and badged themselves 'VET4EU2'.

In conclusion, several groups among which ACVT, DGVT and the Platform coexist at the moment for supporting policy dialogue in VET at EU level. As noted earlier, other relevant bodies, settings and tools aimed to support knowledge-base and cooperation in the area also exist at this level. However in the context of the present study, the three main groups listed above have been those considered when collecting interviewees' perceptions about 'current arrangements'.

2.2 General perceptions about current arrangements

This section outlines the key findings that emerged from exchanges with a limited number of interviewees who were asked to express their views on the following questions:

- To what extent are the current systems and networks for engagement with VET provider associations 'fit for purpose' and how could they be improved?
- What are the main barriers and challenges to engaging national associations of VET providers in an EU level network?

2.2.1 To what extent are the current systems and networks for engagement with VET provider associations 'fit for purpose' and how could they be improved?

Most respondents believed the ACVT (and to a lesser extent the DGVT³⁶), complemented the Platform and did not overlap. Several ACVT representatives reckoned it was important to engage with VET provider association representatives at EU level. Meanwhile the fact that the VET provider European associations (now part of the Platform) have been represented (via one of its representatives) in the group with observer status since 2013 was not referred to by those ACVT members interviewed. The extent to which this participation was known to everyone was somehow uncertain as a few interviewees suggested for instance that Platform members could be invited to ACVT meetings.

The risk of tensions (at national level) that could derive from giving any formal role to provider associations in policy making settings at EU level was indeed highlighted by several interviewees. Most, however, supported engaging representatives of providers in mutual learning activities, good practice exchanges, etc. Indeed, the **Platform** was generally perceived as a valuable means for potentially engaging with grass roots level practitioners' representatives though the umbrella groups were considered by some ACVT representatives to be somewhat distant from practitioners and not widely enough representative of providers in all parts of the EU.

Respondents who belong to the Platform generally believed that:

- The group already offers a **fair representativeness of the sector** by bringing together four European VET-centred umbrella associations (EVBB, EVTA, EUproVET and EfVET) with two European associations (EURASHE, EUCEN) representing cross-cutting sectors of relevance (namely higher education and adult learning/LLL);

³⁶ This group has not been directly consulted by the study team (i.e. in line with EC specifications for this assignment and agreed methodological approach). Interviewees from other groups referred to DGVT to a very limited extent during their exchanges with the study team.

- Each of them brings together different types of providers or provider associations (themselves present in different European countries) so there is not significant overlap;
- Though different in nature and remit, the six associations have identified thematic issues of common interest which have guided so far their work and notably enabled them to issue a joint declaration³⁷ supporting Riga conclusions;
- The Platform has become a valuable setting for fostering mutual learning among the six associations involved and more specifically for gaining better insights on the specific needs, difficulties, key outputs and strategic priorities of their counterparts on given thematic issues. In this regard, several praised EC's support in getting them working together as a group that has steadily formalised since 2010.

Some representatives felt that the Platform is still in its infancy and that despite its 'fair representativeness' it does not necessarily represent the whole sector (i.e. representing each EU country's VET specificities and types of providers). The extent to which this could be achieved at some point was questioned by two interviewees. One of them said that owing to the fragmented nature of the sector (e.g. different traditions, systems and governance of VET from one country to another resulting in different types of associations of VET providers (if any)) increasing their representativeness would be challenging.

A few ACVT representatives also believed that the Platform should not be confined to providers since implementation also rested with other key stakeholders such as employers and trade unions, such as those representing VET teachers. For this reason, the **current** representativeness, visibility and even 'legitimacy' of the Platform was questioned by some. Several interviewees said that they are unclear about what the group does, what its remit is (including whether it provides a separate policy influence on providers), and what national associations of VET providers are represented through the group. This might be due to lack of communication between the groups.

The key findings that emerge from the above are:

- The need to engage with VET provider associations is generally acknowledged and supported.
- The inclusion of VET provider associations at EU level raised some concerns about their role, 'power' or interests compared to representatives of employers and trades unions;
- The recent establishment of the 'Platform' is seen as a positive development and means to support the cooperation objectives. Its (uneven) **representativeness** and to a **lesser extent** its low visibility (i.e. remit, activities, etc. likely due to its recent creation) were commonly commented on.

In addition to the above, the review of the **questionnaires** received from national respondents (and of answers supplied to a question about perceptions about existing governance and working arrangements in VET policy area at EU level³⁸) revealed that **current arrangements at EU level** (as above) **often fail to be known at national level**. Most respondents indeed indicated having very little or no knowledge about these groups. Several added that they would be interested to learn more about them. Other respondents either left the questionnaire blank or did not address the question directly but rather referred to their knowledge about e.g. Cedefop reports or their own

³⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-declaration_en.pdf

³⁸ i.e. as operated through the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), the Directors General for vocational training (DGVT) and the existing EU level VET providers associations.

contribution to Refernet reporting. Lastly, only a few (around 1 out of 6) were familiar with this (i.e. with at least one of the three settings considered) and generally commented on a positive way, Unsurprisingly, these individuals take part in national associations which generally participate in European level associations.

2.2.2 What are the main barriers and challenges to engaging national associations of VET providers in an EU level network

Most interviewees considered that the main barriers are likely to be about **commitment, interest, representativeness** and **resources**. This was reiterated in the responses to the questionnaires.

Some interviewees (around one third) believed that associations of VET providers they knew of in their country might **not be interested** in participating in a European level network. They are more concerned with the national dimension of VET and consider EU level networking to be far less important. An interviewee remarked that *'the ability to influence stakeholders at an EU level is likely to provide little benefit'* for national VET association providers. Several respondents felt that the value of an EU level network in the area would have to be demonstrated to such organisations.

Many believed that **identifying the 'right people to participate'** and more specifically the 'most representative' associations would be a significant challenge in many countries. Almost all interviewees referred to the complex and fragmented nature³⁹ of VET both between and within countries – and the varying extent to which VET provider representatives are associated in policy making at a national level.

Several interviewees reckoned, that in their country, there is not a single association representing the whole sector but: at best two or more formal associations or a myriad of informal networks of VET providers at sector and/or regional level. Another interviewee also made a distinction between associations that represented publicly funded/owned training providers having higher visibility than those representing for profit/employer led providers.

Most interviewees reflected that formal associations probably varied between countries in terms of their main features (governance, remit, membership, etc.). Among these, one interviewee described a single representative association of VET providers which exists in his/her country which was 'under the auspices of the central level authorities'.

More informal associations were said to exist in many countries known to interviewees. Very often, these *'have no legal existence, are voluntary, and sometimes don't have any formal secretariat or elected presidents'*. A direct consequence of this is that this makes it difficult to know how to deal with them at national level. More generally, this situation results in a **lack of visibility** among VET providers about what they are and who does what countrywide.

One interviewee estimated that, in some countries where associations of VET providers were not identified, this may be attributed to the absence of tradition of dialogue there (i.e. where VET providers are not commonly associated in policy discussion at national level).

³⁹ A common denominator here is that countries' VET landscapes usually embed a wide range of VET providers (publicly- or privately-led representing or not State accredited programmes, etc.) which can be much different in nature and governance: fulfilling different objectives, targeting different types of learners, etc. Depending on countries, these considerations may also apply at national but also at regional levels.

Some interviewees felt that in addition to VET provider associations, there are **other settings**, such as chambers of commerce and employer or teacher associations, which also **play an important role** in VET policy in their countries. These vary from one country to another. A few of these pointed out that other bodies which are not formal representative bodies of VET providers may be better positioned to provide policy guidance.

Financial constraints were also mentioned in particular by a few interviewees. In the absence of a clear idea about how such a network would be financed, an interviewee explained that in his/her country a large proportion of VET providers do not participate in national or European associations of VET providers primarily because membership costs cannot be afforded. This was echoed by another interviewee who wondered whether many national associations invited to take part in any EU network could indeed afford to finance a person to participate. .

Linguistic barriers were considered by one interviewee to be a likely problem. Not all national VET provider associations' representatives may be equipped for effectively taking part in a European level network where the main working language would be most likely to be English.

To conclude, attempting to bring together national associations into an EU level network is according to interviewees likely to be a difficult task for different reasons:

- Possible lack of commitment and/or interest from one national association to another
- Representativeness issue and in particular difficulty to identify the 'right people to participate'
- Financial constraints
- Linguistic barriers

2.3 General perceptions about establishing a European level network of VET provider associations

This section presents the interviewees' responses to the following questions:

- To what extent would the establishment of a Commission-led EU level network of VET provider associations be a) desirable and b) feasible?
- What would be the added value of the network?
- What should be the scope of action for an EU level network of VET provider associations?
- What should be the governance and working arrangements of the network?

Where applicable, answers supplied through the questionnaires by national respondents (i.e. national associations' representatives identified in the country fiches who completed the latter) have also been reflected.

2.3.1 To what extent would the establishment of a Commission-led EU level network of VET provider associations be a) desirable and b) feasible?

In general most interviewees (i.e. comprising both ACVT and Platform's representatives) considered that establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations would be relevant and desirable. The extent to which this would be feasible (in particular over the short or even medium term) was for most of them far more problematic.

Desirability-related considerations

The Platform's representatives generally confirmed that establishing such a network would be **desirable** with a few of them anticipating that this could build on the existing group's key achievements to date including (not exhaustive):

- Participating for the first time in a ministerial conference (Riga, 22 June 2015) to represent the 'voice' of the six European umbrella associations of VET providers;
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences among its members/practitioners on various topics of mutual interest;
- Facilitating exchanges for participation in (European) projects;
- Representing, though acknowledging that the geographical coverage/membership may differ from one umbrella association to another, 'thousands of VET providers'.

To some extent, they believed that having a formal wider network would deepen the effect of the above.

According to ACVT representatives, establishing such a network was generally seen as desirable as this would enable '*a more inclusive grouping of VET providers - than is the case now*'; provide a group that would '*embed representative associations from all EU countries*' or provide a group specifically used for '*facilitating cooperation between VET institutions in different countries and help disseminate information, both policy goals/objectives and good practice*'.

Though in favour, a few ACVT interviewees were more circumspect. They felt that the level of desirability would depend on what would be expected to be the added value of such a network. '*Would VET provider associations be given a policy role which would be listened to and improve policy development?*' '*Would those identified as the most representative associations be at all interested and able to participate and do a better job than the existing umbrella associations?*'

Among associations responding to the questionnaire, most considered it desirable. Only one responded that they anticipated few positive outcomes and little added value.

Feasibility-related considerations

Regarding feasibility, perceptions were generally **less optimistic**. Several believed that the Platform already constitutes in itself a positive development. With its recent establishment, most of them considered that it would be better to build on and streamline this, such as by extending its remit, activities, and representativeness, before moving forward. As noted above, its **uneven representativeness** and relative low **visibility** was seen as a major constraint at the moment by some ACVT representatives. Meanwhile, the extent to which establishing a network could help overcome this was not necessarily perceived as high by them.

Several interviewees also believed that before discussing its feasibility, it would be useful to have a **better understanding** about what both national associations of VET providers and the EC would **expect from such a network**. In short, what would make national associations interested to participate and in turn what would be the expected added value of the network at EC level – in addition to existing groups.

*'If the network is to be about influencing EU policy, or provide a way for the EU to communicate directly to VET providers, then it is unlikely to be valuable for all parties involved in the sector and most importantly this may generate **confusion and conflicting situations**. In addition, if the network is not fully reflective of the VET landscape, influencing policy could potentially be dangerous.'*

Several interviewees referred to other VET-centred groups established at the EU level (e.g. ET 2020 Working Group on VET, VET-Business Forum, etc.) as well as to the VET agencies (Cedefop and ETF) because their needs could be part of the wider reflection about establishing a network of national VET provider associations. *'For instance, VET provider associations are often invited in VET-Business forum events - whose main purpose is to foster mutual learning and the exchange of good practices. Building on existing settings rather than setting up a new (and 'bureaucratic') network could possibly be an option to consider which might also be a less costly approach at EC level.'*

2.3.2 What would be the added value of the network?

Most interviewees (i.e. comprising both ACVT and Platform's representatives) considered that a European level network of VET provider associations would certainly be a valuable setting for:

- Improving the exchange of information on and with VET providers - and by doing so ensuring that the voice of VET providers is heard;
- Sharing good practice;
- Discussing common issues;
- Providing a different perspective and helping the EU consider a different point of view when deciding on VET-related policy/initiatives;
- Help to test some of the actions specified in EC documents or creating a *'stronger group for EU Member States to test ideas with'*;
- Getting wider buy-in to EU programmes.

The above was generally shared by national respondents who completed the questionnaires.

An interviewee noted that a potential risk for such a network would be to have associations defending their own agenda rather than fairly representing VET providers as a whole. A possible solution could be to foster cooperation between national authorities and VET provider associations (where relevant) in the form of *'mechanisms that would support regular consultations at national level'*.

Another interviewee added that *'the value of the network should also be determined by the EC who will actually pay for it'*.

2.3.3 What should be the scope of action for an EU level network of VET provider associations?⁴⁰

Most interviewees believed that the focus of the network should be on ***'testing policy and sharing good practice examples'***. For several ACVT representatives, the network should not be *'a lobbying group which is used to inform policy'*. It should on the contrary be *'less policy driven, more practical'*. Because of its potentially rich practical experience, the network could act as ***'a platform to enable the Commission to test policy proposals for their implementability'***. This was echoed by both ACVT and a few Platform representatives. One of them pointed that there is currently a *'discrepancy (i.e. knowledge-wise) between EC-led policy initiatives and practice developed at school/VET provider levels'*.

⁴⁰ No question about possible scope of action for the network was included in the questionnaire sent to national respondents.

Several believed the scope should include:

- **'Light activities'** such as peer learning, exchange of good practices, study visits, etc.) but also **'stronger' ones** (e.g. thematic/ ad hoc activities to facilitate the implementation of given policies or EU initiatives such as on the recognition of VET qualifications across countries; apprenticeship schemes; guidance to VET beneficiaries; improvement of VET/business and social partners relationships, etc.);
- **Gaining a better insight into the activities of its members** at national level especially about their agenda and priority actions/ thematic areas;
- **Stimulating synergies with other relevant VET-centred groups or forums in the EU.**

Last but not least, some interviewees suggested that the network's activities should be proposed and agreed among national associations themselves.

2.3.4 What should be the governance and working arrangements of the network?⁴¹

This question was considered difficult by most interviewees (including some who simply said they had no views on this). As a result there are few common views.

Interviewees most often referred to **basic funding arrangements for the network** as being necessary. The EC would have to support national representatives' travel and subsistence when taking part in the network's meetings/events.

Concerning the **coordination of the network**, some interviewees supported the idea that the network could be coordinated or at least chaired and facilitated by the EC (at least at the beginning). They felt that doing so would *'provide value and ensure that the work is focused'*. One interviewee noted that VET provider associations may not have time, resources or capacity for coordinating (or contributing to) the network. A few conversely anticipated that there would be a potential risk in EC leadership in that this could *'result in the group losing its independence'*. One interviewee believed that the network (if not too large) would benefit from having its own secretariat with a president or a secretary general.

Concerning the **approach anticipated for identifying and selecting** those associations which would be most relevant candidates for participating in the network, one interviewee suggested that these could be nominated by national VET administrations. Doing so would *'ensure they contain a good cross-section of organisations'*. More felt that there had to be consultation of some kind with the Platform associations, national Ministries and ACVT members.

No clear view emerged either on the **maximum number of national associations** which should be included in the network. This ranged between 2-3 and 10 associations per country. In the latter case, the interviewer pointed that this would mean creating a network of over 200 associations which would be both difficult to manage and not most cost-effective even if being more representative. One interviewee suggested a **rotating membership**. Building on the experience of peer learning activities as organised by the EC in the framework of ET2020 working groups, this could, for example, consist of having a reduced number of representative(s) per country (e.g. one or two). Those would participate depending on the thematic issues being discussed within a given event organised by the network.

⁴¹ No question about possible scope of action for the network was included in the questionnaire sent to national respondents.

All in all, interviewees generally anticipated that identifying those most relevant/representative associations of VET providers would not be an easy task from one country to another. It was suggested that selection criteria should be defined and discussed at an earlier stage.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that:

- The proposal of establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations has been generally considered **relevant, desirable** and **valuable** by interviewees and national association respondents to the questionnaire;
- The **possible features** of such a network (i.e. governance and scope of action) were **difficult to apprehend** by most interviewees in the current context as several pieces of the puzzle are missing:
 - lack of comprehensive knowledge about existing national associations of VET providers across the EU and their capacity, potential interest or expectations to take part in such a network;
 - uncertainties about the expected remit for this network (e.g. what the EC would expect to get out of it; what role would be given to national associations; how it would be funded; whether other key stakeholders than VET provider associations themselves be allowed to participate, etc.), etc.
- The extent to which establishing such a network would be **feasible** was **questioned** by most respondents. Considerations such as difficulties in assessing whether a European network could effectively bring together representative national associations from each country (and how those would be identified and selected) were drawn out by many respondents;
- For quite a few respondents the recently established Platform commonly led them to support improving and testing this further before moving to a network.

3 Mapping countries' situations

This study has involved the mapping of the existing VET provider associations in the 28 EU Member States, two EEA countries (Norway and Switzerland), and two candidate countries (Serbia and Turkey). This section describes these VET provider associations in terms of their geographical coverage, type of VET provision (IVET/CVET/higher VET), type of provider (public/private), level of representativeness (how far they represent potential members among VET providers), and level of cooperation with other national and international associations. It also briefly analyses the main features of the associations including their purpose and main activities, governance and funding, and it collects some information on the drivers in the creation of associations and the enrolment of providers as members.

3.1 Existence of VET provider associations: overview of current representation

The number of VET provider associations and their coverage varies considerably between countries. Using the information set out in the country fiches, while the most common number of associations found in a country is two, this varies from no organisations found (LU, LV⁴²) to nine (spread over the whole territory). More specifically:⁴³

- In 23 countries/sub-country level more than 2 VET provider associations were found⁴⁴;
- In 6 countries/sub-country level 2 VET provider associations were found⁴⁵;
- In 5 countries/sub-country level 1 VET provider association⁴⁶; and
- In 2 countries no VET provider association⁴⁷ was found.

The **number of associations** by itself **does not** however give a **clear picture of the degree to which VET providers are represented** in a country. While a country may have several associations, these may not cover the whole national territory, all sectors or types/levels of VET provision (IVET and CVET), and types of provider.

For **geographical coverage**, most of the associations identified are national-level associations, with some exceptions. Namely, in Belgium, most of the associations cover either the Flemish Community or the French-speaking Community owing to devolved powers in the area of education and training. Also, in Italy and Spain, where regions share competences with the state, a few regional associations have been identified. However, the previous are to be considered only as examples, since regional associations were not the object of a systematic search. It should however be mentioned that associations operating at a sub-national level have not been

⁴² For Latvia, one organisation was identified, but no further information was found to establish any relevance.

⁴³ In this analysis, the United Kingdom and Belgium are respectively counted four times and twice due to devolved powers to England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and to the Flemish Community and the French-Speaking Community of Belgium in the area of education and training.

⁴⁴ AT, BE^{nI}, BE^{fr}, HR, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, Switzerland, TR, UK-ENG.

⁴⁵ BG, CY, EE, SI, UK-SCT and UK-WLS.

⁴⁶ MT, NO, SE, UK-NI and Serbia.

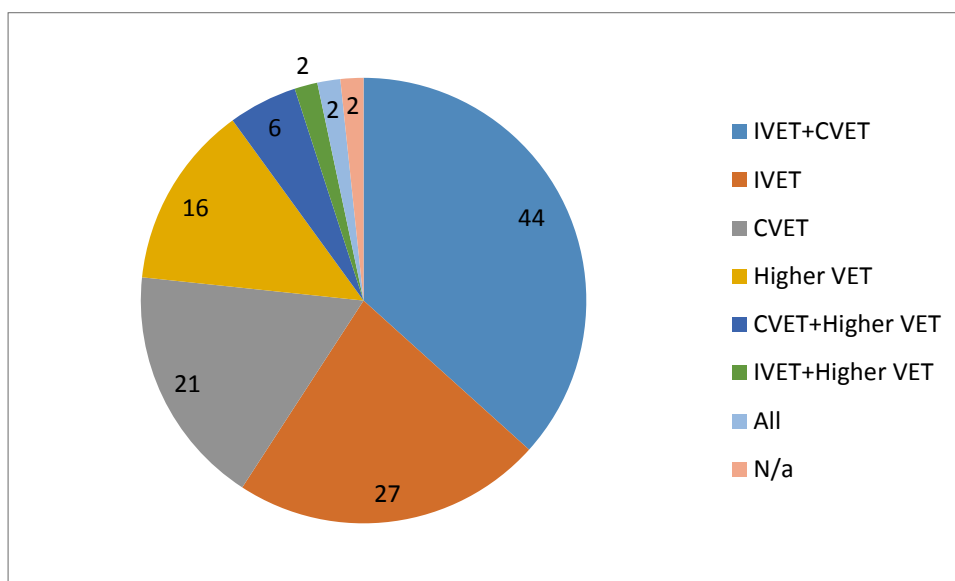
⁴⁷ LV and LU.

systematically identified **since the main purpose of the assignment was to collect information on VET providers operating at national level.**⁴⁸

Some of the associations cover **specific sectors**. There are associations in the fields of agriculture (DK, FR, HU, and PT), rural development (LT), natural resources (RO), social care and/or health (DK, CZ and SK), hospitality (BG, CZ), business (DK), administration (HR), and engineering (CZ, RO).

As for the **type of education and training provision**, associations may cover IVET (up to post-secondary non-tertiary level), higher VET, CVET, or a combination of these types of offers. Most frequently, associations include both IVET and CVET providers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Main type of education and training provision covered by associations



Source: ICF, Country fiches.

N/a: Information not available.

The lower number of higher VET associations can be explained by the fact that some may be included in associations of universities which fell outside the scope of this study⁴⁹.

Some of the associations are not exclusively made up of VET providers but cover a wider spectrum of education and training providers. For instance, several associations

⁴⁸ Moreover, the mapping exercise was conducted in a tight timeframe and was not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the most common types of bodies. Only in the countries where no associations or only a small number of them were found at national level, research was undertaken to check whether those were to be found at regional level.

⁴⁹ As there is no single, commonly agreed definition of 'higher VET' at the moment, approaches or perceptions may differ greatly from one country to another on whether a given provider delivers higher VET or not. For instance, in a few cases, some associations had been initially identified by the study team as representing higher VET providers in given countries but, during the exchange phase, individual representatives of those provider associations did not agree with this. Respondents reported that they actually represent higher education providers and not higher VET ones, even though there was some evidence that some of their members do deliver higher VET programmes. Where this is the case, these associations were removed from the analysis.

cover adult education (e.g. CZ, EE, HU), school education (e.g. BG, ES, SI), or higher education (BEfr and PT).

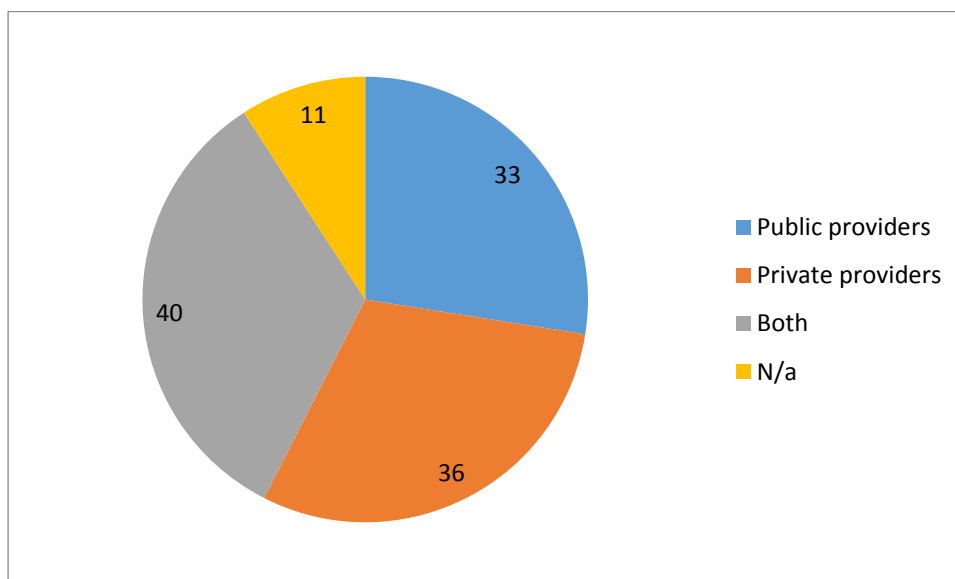
The **Association of Estonian Adult Educators Andras** brings together representatives of secondary schools, adult gymnasiums, vocational schools, NGOs, and training centres. Out of the 48 members listed on the website, 8 are VET providers. The mission of *Andras* is to provide the prerequisites for lifelong learning in Estonia, to include the decision makers and all other stakeholders in designing the educational environment, and to motivate learners in the learning process⁵⁰.

The **Bulgarian association of private schools**⁵¹ represents the entire private school sector. In fact, only a limited number of members are VET providers: 1 vocational secondary school, 1 art school and 4 vocational colleges. The association aims to support the successful development of private schools, and defending their rights and common interests before public authorities⁵².

The **Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education**⁵³ brings together private higher education institutions providing university programmes and professionally-oriented higher education programmes ('polytechnic' education). The remit of the association is to represent and integrate non-state higher education in the Portuguese education system⁵⁴.

Regarding the **type of providers**, associations more often cover public providers, but private providers are also present (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Main type of VET providers covered by associations (public/private)



Source: ICF, Country fiches.

N/a: Information not available.

⁵⁰ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.andras.ee/>

⁵¹ Българска Асоциация на Частните Училища (БАЧУ).

⁵² Information extracted from the association's website: <http://bachu-bg.com>

⁵³ Associação Portuguesa do Ensino Superior Privado (APESP).

⁵⁴ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.apesp.pt/>

The **level of coverage** of the targeted VET providers also varies⁵⁵. An association may cover all or most of the VET providers under its remit, or only a small number of them. The following countries have been found to have national-level associations representing to a high or medium extent the number of providers delivering IVET and CVET, and higher VET. These should be taken as examples since, as mentioned above, the list of associations is to be considered as illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Table 2. Examples of countries/sub-country level with national-level associations covering VET providers to a high or medium extent⁵⁶

IVET	CVET	Higher VET
BE ^{nl} , BE ^{fr} , CZ, DE, FI, IE ¹ , IT, LT ¹ , NL ¹ , PT ² , SK ¹ , UK-ENG, UK-SCT, UK-WLS, UK-NI	BE ^{nl} , BE ^{fr} , DE, EL ¹ , FI, FR, IE ¹ , IT, LT ¹ , NL ¹ , SK, UK-ENG, UK-SCT, UK-WLS, UK-NI, CH	DE, BE ^{fr} , CY ² , CZ, FI, FR ¹ , HR, IE, LT, NL, SI, RS, UK-ENG, UK-SCT, UK-WLS, UK-NI, CH

Source: Country fiches

¹ The association/s covers only or mainly public or publicly-financed providers.

² The association/s covers only or mainly private providers.

The following box provides examples of associations covering a combination of types of provision, with a high or medium level of representativeness of the relevant providers. More often, these combine IVET and CVET, mostly because the same providers often deliver both types of VET.

In **Finland** there is an overarching association covering IVET, CVET and higher VET: the **Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (AMKE)**. It represents a wide range of VET providers, from different vocational colleges to specialised institutions and providers of CVET. It includes both municipal and private providers, with a total of 84 VET providers representing over 90% of Finland’s vocational students.⁵⁷

The **Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad)** represents all publicly financed VET providers in upper secondary VET in the Netherlands, covering 69 VET schools and 514,500 students (in 2013/2014). Providers of VET programmes are multi-sectoral, large regional institutions (averaging 12,000 students at each regional training centre) and several specialist schools, including agricultural training centres. Regional training centres provide vocational education for young people and adults (IVET), in addition to general adult education; they are active in CVET with the provision of privately-funded programmes.⁵⁸

In **Italy**, the **National Association of Vocational Training Providers (FORMA)** brings together VET providers which are inspired by the Catholic social teaching (including VET schools, employer organisations, unions and companies). It focuses on

⁵⁵ It is to be stressed that the level of coverage has been assessed empirically, based on available information

⁵⁶ This classification is based on qualitative and quantitative information. The countries included have one or more associations which cover most of the providers they represent. However, they can cover only one sector from all the VET providers (e.g. only public/private sector, only one network of providers). In some cases, the number of members is not high, but they are relevant in terms of their size/enrolment of learners (see below in body text for examples).

⁵⁷ Information extracted from the association’s website (www.amke.fi) and further verifications.

⁵⁸ Information extracted from the association’s website (<http://www.mborraad.nl/>) and further verifications

both IVET and CVET. The Association's members have almost 80% of the vocational training activities taking place in Italy, with a major focus on IVET targeted at people of 14-18 years of age.⁵⁹

The **Association of Colleges (AoC)** in **England** represents all further education, tertiary, specialist and sixth form colleges. Further education would cover both IVET and CVET (including higher VET) although this classification is not used in the UK. The AoC represents 320 colleges in England, corresponding to 95% of the public organisations. However, it does not cover any of the private and not for profit providers of both IVET and CVET which receive state funding⁶⁰.

Higher VET is more often delivered by specific providers and it is therefore common to find associations specialising exclusively in this level and /or encompassing higher education. The following box provides several examples of associations focusing on higher VET, with a high or medium level of representativeness of the relevant providers.

In **France**, the **National Association for Learning in Higher Education (ANASUP)** brings together a network of 43 public apprentice training centres (CFAs) at higher education level which represent training pathways, from two-year technological university diplomas (DUT) to Masters' degrees and Engineering diplomas. They are attended each year by 40,000 apprentices out of a total of 135,000. ANASUP therefore would cover about 30% of the total number of apprentices⁶¹.

In **Ireland**, there are three overarching associations covering the (public) **Institutes of Technology** (the primary providers of higher VET), private colleges and universities. '**Institutes of Technology Ireland**' (IOTI) brings together 13 higher level public providers (out of 14 in the country); the **Higher Education Colleges Association** (HECA) represents 16 private providers of higher level education; and the Irish Universities Association (IUA) is the representative body for Ireland's seven universities⁶².

The **Swiss Chamber of Universities of Applied Science** is an association of rectors of universities of applied science. It is a chamber within the rectors' conference of higher education institutions, *swissuniversities*. It represents all universities of applied science in the country⁶³.

As for the countries not listed among those with associations covering VET providers to a high or medium extent, different situations can be observed: no associations have been found; the associations found have a low level of representativeness; there is no information on the representativeness of the associations; or the associations found do not represent VET providers but other entities.

⁵⁹ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.formafp.it/>

⁶⁰ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.aoc.co.uk/>

⁶¹ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.anasup.fr>

⁶² Information extracted from the associations' websites: <http://www.ioti.ie/>, <http://www.heca.ie/>, and <http://www.iua.ie/>

⁶³ Information extracted from the website of swissuniversities: <http://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/organisation/chambers/chamber-of-universities-of-applied-sciences/>

The lack of information on the level of **representativeness** has been a common issue in many countries. It should be taken into account that associations' websites themselves do not always mention the number of members and almost never comment on their level of representativeness. Often, this information has been extracted from the websites of ministries of education or other relevant institutions.

More specifically, in **CVET** there is usually a wide variety of providers and it may not be possible to determine their total number, or this information may not be sufficient to decide on the level of coverage of the association.

In some cases the relative significance of the members in terms of their size/enrolment of learners has been also taken into account when estimating the representativeness of an association. For instance, an association in one country brings together 70 adult education providers (public and private bodies providing CVET) as well individuals (teachers and trainers primarily). Although there is no information on the share this represents of the total number of relevant providers, it can be seen as a strong organisation since the most important providers in the field are among its members. The same is true of an association in another country. In this case, although it represents a small percentage of the providers (300 members against a total of 16,000 registered private providers in 2014), it includes most of the largest providers.

It should also be noted that **regional associations** and **associations focused on a specific field of study** have not been taken into account since it cannot be said that they are representative of IVET, CVET or higher VET providers at a national level. However, some of these associations have a high level of representativeness within their range of target providers. The box below presents two examples.

In the **Spanish region of the Basque Country** there is an association covering a large part of public IVET and higher VET providers. The Association of Public VET Schools ***Ikaslan*** brings together public schools providing VET at secondary and tertiary level in the region. The association is divided into three sections, one in each of the three provinces of the Basque Country (Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba). *Ikaslan* Bizkaia includes 24 schools; *Ikaslan* Gipuzkoa includes 23 (out of 25 public VET schools); and *Ikaslan* Araba 11⁶⁴.

The **Association of Medical Schools** of the **Czech Republic** brings together around 70 medical schools at upper secondary and tertiary professional levels. The purpose of the association is to promote the interests of medical schools and actively influence the development of secondary education in the healthcare sector. The association aims to take part in discussions and negotiations concerning the development of medical education with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health⁶⁵.

In addition to the level of coverage, the study team looked into the **level of engagement / cooperation** with other national or regional associations of VET providers and with counterparts from other countries, European associations of VET providers or with EU institutions. The questionnaire sent to national associations' representatives identified in the country fiches asked the following questions:

⁶⁴ Information extracted from the websites of the association's regional services: <http://www.ikaslanbizkaia.net/>, <http://www.ikaslangipuzkoa.eus/es>, <http://www.ikaslanaraba.net/sitio/index.html>

⁶⁵ Information extracted from the association's website (<http://www.azscr.cz/>) and further verifications.

- *To what extent do existing national association(s) of VET providers actively engage and cooperate with other national or regional associations of VET providers?*
- *To what extent do existing national association(s) of VET providers actively engage with counterparts from other countries, European associations of VET providers or with EU institutions?*

Error! Reference source not found. and **Error! Reference source not found.** reflect the information supplied by **34 associations** out of the total of around 120 associations identified through desk research.⁶⁶ While, the results are not representative of all VET provider associations they suggest that associations' representatives more often consider that there is a 'medium' level of cooperation with other associations, a bit higher at national than international level. There are however several cases where respondents mention a low or inexistent level of cooperation.

Around two thirds of the respondents report a medium or high level of cooperation with **other national or regional associations of VET providers**. Comments from associations indicate that cooperation exists when and if there are common interests. For instance, one respondent mentioned that they cooperated over certain topics (e.g. national exams, ECVET).

Table 3. Level of engagement / cooperation with other national (or sub-country level⁶⁷) or regional associations of VET providers

	Inexistent	Low	Medium	High
BEfr		√		
BEnl			√	
HR	√			
CY	√		√	
CZ			√	√
DE				√
DK				√
EL		√		
FI				√
FR			√	
IE			√	

⁶⁶ The questionnaires were not sent to the two countries where no association had been found (LV and LU), and there have been no replies from AT, BG, EE, ES, HU, SE and TR. For MT, a partially completed questionnaire was received (content not reflected in tables 3 and 4). For the remainder, information was received but to varying extent (ranging from replies received from all associations identified to only one depending on countries). Where received, the information has been shown with a tick ('√') in tables 3 and 4.

⁶⁷ i.e. for BEfr, BEnl and UK regions.

LT			√	
IT			√	
NL			√	
NO	√			
PL		√		
PT				√
RO		√		
Serbia			√	
SI	√			
SK			√	
CH			√	
UK-ENG				√
UK-SCT				√
UK-WLS		√	√	
UK-NI			√	

Source: ICF, questionnaires

Half of the respondents report a medium or high level of cooperation with **counterparts from other countries, European associations of VET providers or EU institutions.**

Table 4. *Level of engagement / cooperation with counterparts from other countries, European associations of VET providers or with EU institutions*

	Inexistent	Low	Medium	High
BEfr		√		
BEnl		√		
HR			√	
CY	√		√	
CZ		√		
DE			√	
DK		√		

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EL		√	
FI		√	
FR			√
IE			√
LT			√
IT		√	
NL	√		√
NO			√ (low to medium)
PL			√
PT			√
RO			√
Serbia			√
SI		√	
SK	√		
CH			√
UK-ENG		√	√
UK-SCT			√
UK-WLS	√		√
UK-NI			√

Source: ICF, questionnaires.

The box below presents examples of cooperation between national associations and EU-level ones.

In **France**, the **National Association for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA)** is a member of the national employment public service. It welcomes between 130,000 and 150,000 people each year, most of them for a long course (4 to 12 months). It covers both public and private providers. It is a member of the European Vocational

Training Association (EVTA) and is very active at European level: it has taken part in several European projects and initiatives (Equal, Leonardo, Interreg, and ECVET)⁶⁸.

The **National Association of VET providers** (BBB) in Germany has public and private providers of IVET at secondary level, CVET providers, sectoral representations, and training organisations of social partners. It covers the majority of training providers and associations in Germany. As IVET is mainly provided jointly by public schools and businesses, and to a lesser extent by VET providers, the bodies organised in BBB are mainly CVET providers. BBB cooperates actively with the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB). For instance, this EU-level association supports the German Training Day, an activity developed by BBB and the German Adult Education Association (DVV). In 2014, European Cooperation in Education and Training (European Education Area) was the key topic promoted through the event⁶⁹.

The **Netherlands Association of VET Colleges** (*MBO Raad*) represents all (regional/national/sectoral) publicly financed VET providers in upper secondary VET in the Netherlands. It actively contributed to create EUproVET which collaborates with other European associations in VET4EU2⁷⁰.

Table 5 below presents the European-level associations with which national associations are currently cooperating. This information has been extracted from the country fiches and the questionnaires. Due to limited information on some of the national associations' websites and to the fact that not all of the national associations replied to the questionnaire, it should be pointed out that this list is not exhaustive. It aims to illustrating the variety of EU umbrella associations facilitating cooperation between national associations of VET providers.

Table 5. Cooperation of national associations with EU-level associations⁷¹

	Country(ies)	National association(s)
European Vocational Training Association (EVTA)	BE, FI, FR	Synerjob (member) Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (AMKE) (member) French National Association for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA) (member)
European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB)	DE	National Association of VET providers (BBB)

⁶⁸ Information extracted from the association's website (<http://www.afpa.fr/>) and its annual reports, also available on the website.

⁶⁹ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.bildungsverband.info/>

⁷⁰ Information extracted from the association's website (<http://www.mboraad.nl/>) and further verifications.

⁷¹ Information extracted from the country fiches and, where available, the questionnaires. The list is not exhaustive.

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European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EFVET)	DK, ES, PT	Association for Danish Business and Technical Colleges (member) Spanish Confederation of Schools (CECE) (member) Portuguese National Association of Professional Schools (ANESPO) (member)
EUproVET	FI, IE, NL, UK-ENG	Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (AMKE) (member) Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (Mbo Raad) (member) Association of Colleges (England) (member)
European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)	BEfr, SI, HR, LT, PL, SI, RS	ARES (Academy of Research and Higher Education): Chamber of Hautes Ecoles and social advancement higher education in Belgium (member) Association of Slovenian higher vocational colleges (ASHVC) (member) Croatian Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences (member) Lithuanian Conference of Colleges' Directors (member) Polish Conference of Rectors of Public Vocational Schools (KRePSZ) (member) Conference of Academies of Applied Studies Serbia (member)
UASnet, European network of universities of applied sciences	LT, NL	Lithuanian Conference of Colleges' Directors (member) Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (member)
European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools (ECNAIS)	BG, ES	Bulgarian Association of Private Schools (BAPS) (member) Spanish Confederation of Schools (CECE)
European School Heads Association (ESHA)	ES, SI	Spanish Confederation of Schools (CECE) (member) Federation of secondary schools and dormitories of Slovenia (member)
European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE)	IE	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) (member)

European Association for the Education of Adults	CZ, DE, EE, SK	Association of Adult Education Institutions in Czech Republic (AIVD ČR) (member) German Adult Education Association (DVV) (member) Association of Estonian Adult Educators Andras (member) Association of Adult Education Institutions in the Slovak Republic (AIVD) (member)
Eurochambres	DE	Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (member)
European Union of Crafts and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME)	DE, PL	German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (member) Polish Craft Association (member)
EUROPEA International	DK, PT, RO	Association for Danish Agricultural Colleges (member) Portuguese Association of Agricultural Professional Schools (APEPA) (member) EUROPEA Romania (member)
Die Europäer	HU	Union of Hungarian Horticultural Skilled Institutes

Source: ICF, country fiches and responses to questionnaire, where available.

There are **constraints** on international cooperation⁷². Most of the questionnaire respondents signalled **limited resources**, in terms of funding and personnel, as one of the main issues restricting international work. Two respondents reflected on the fact that international cooperation is not generally a priority when set against overriding national priorities for members around reductions in funding that colleges have experienced in recent years. They need to balance the resources spent in cooperation, such as the time taken to participate in discussions, with the benefits that it will bring to members.

Some respondents criticised reductions in EU funds towards VET. Several pointed out that VET is now less of a priority in ESF and Erasmus+ with the number of VET projects funded through Erasmus+ in 2015 lower than in previous years and, in particular, less funding is available for associations.

3.2 Features of provider associations

VET provider associations generally aim to promote dialogue between providers and represent the interest of their members in national and, to a lesser extent, international forums. They chiefly represent their members in public debate and in discussion and representation with public authorities (such as funders, policy makers, politicians and inspectors).

It is mainly the case that the associations are multi-purpose, i.e. they do a range of activities for members, including (not exhaustive):

⁷² Questionnaire question 3: *What are the main limitations encountered by national association(s) of VET providers (if any) in engaging with associations in other countries or one of the European associations – e.g. lack of resources (funds , personnel, etc.), remit, lack of cooperation internally or with other provider associations at country level or beyond, other?*

- Support in pedagogical issues, innovation, joint development of instruments, methods and didactic materials (e.g. Society for Vocational Education in Croatia, Lithuanian Association of Innovative Vocational Education Institutions);
- Legal, administrative and financial advice (e.g. Bulgarian Association of Private Schools, Association for Danish Business and Technical Colleges);
- Support the implementation of quality assurance procedures (e.g. National Association of VET-providers (BBB) in Germany, Hungarian Association of Adult Education Providers);
- Training, counselling and exchange of knowledge and best practice, such as by holding meetings, seminars and conferences (e.g. Association of Adult Education Institutions in Czech Republic, Education and Training Board Ireland, Conference of Rectors of Polish Academic Schools);
- Contributing to studies, research, and other publications (e.g. National Association for Apprenticeship in Higher Education in France, National Confederation of Training and Professional Updating in Italy);
- Implementing EU-funded initiatives and supporting the development of EU-funded projects (e.g. Colleges Wales, Ikaslan – Association of Public VET Schools of the Basque Country (Spain));
- Promotion of cooperation of school-based VET providers with companies (e.g. Foundation for Education in the French speaking Community of Belgium).

Although all the associations aim at **influencing decision makers** to some extent alongside other activities, some of them specifically focus on this type of activity. These are more like consultation and participation bodies with an advisory role to governments and more actively involved in policy making. This is for instance the case of the Croatian Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences, the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the National Council for VET in Norway⁷³.

The **Croatian Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences** aims to promote common interests, along with adapting vocational studies to European standards, assuring mobility and mutual recognition of certificates and diplomas. Among other activities, it provides content for diploma supplements; sets conditions for the professional development of teachers; organises the work of sectoral councils; proposes members to the Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development; and oversees the harmonisation of plans and programmes in line with European good practice⁷⁴.

The **Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry** (DIHK) is the central organisation for 80 Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Germany. Part of the association's remit is to oversee the provision of training to apprentices in the dual system provided by its member companies. It advises the Chambers of Commerce and Industry on all questions of vocational training, coordinates and makes recommendations, prepares materials, texts and information for instructors

⁷³ Information extracted from the mandate of the Council:
<http://www.udir.no/Upload/Fagopplaring/Mandat%20for%20SRV%202012-2016.pdf?epslanguage=no>

⁷⁴ Information extracted from the association's website (<https://www.azvo.hr/hr/vvivs>) and the Rules of Procedure of the Croatian Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences, 2014 (*Poslovník o radu*, 2014).

and examiners. The DIHK is also involved in the development of training regulations and coordinates the Federal Government's training initiatives in conjunction with businesses⁷⁵.

In specific cases, associations have other roles. For example, Dutch associations act as employer organisations, so the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (*Mbo Raad*), among other activities, negotiates labour conditions for staff working in the VET sector with the trade unions and signs collective labour agreements. Some of the associations are also VET providers themselves, such as the Austrian Vocational Training Institute (BFI) and the French National Association for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA).

Associations' governance is frequently a board or assembly formed by one representative of each VET provider member or a smaller number of elected representatives. Not all the associations have a secretariat and, where this exists, it is often voluntarily led by members, elected on a periodical basis. However, some associations also have paid staff.

The **Union of Hungarian Horticultural Skilled Institutes** does not have a paid secretariat. The director of one member school is in charge of representing the organisation on a rotating presidency scheme. The main body is the board of school directors, which is in charge of electing the president (with a maximum of five members, including two vice-presidents) for three years⁷⁶.

The **National Association of Professional Schools** in Portugal represents private professional schools providing lower and upper secondary VET programmes. According to its statutes, the General Assembly is composed of representatives of all the schools. The Directorate is composed of one president and six vice-presidents, elected by the General Assembly every three years. In addition, there are three members in the board of the general assembly, three members in the fiscal council and two members in each regional secretariat (North, Centre, South and Autonomous Regions), all elected by the General Assembly⁷⁷.

The availability of paid staff resources greatly depends on the level of **funding**. Most of the associations are often funded through the payment of membership fees. This has been found in at least 65 of the around 120 associations⁷⁸. However, there can also be other funding sources such as public funding, earnings from the sale of services or products, and donations.

The **Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI)** is funded by a mix of funds from SOLAS (National Further Education and Training Authority) and annual fixed contributions from its 16 member Education and Training Boards (ETBs). All ETBI's staff is paid but it works closely in cooperation with senior staff in its member ETBs and a significant amount of ETBI's work is undertaken by ETB personnel⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ Information extracted from the association's website:

<http://www.dihk.de/en/segments/training> and <http://www.dihk.de/en/europe>.

⁷⁶ Information extracted from the association's website: <http://www.makeszisz.eu>

⁷⁷ Information extracted from the association's website (<http://www.anespo.pt/>) and further verifications.

⁷⁸ But the number is likely to be higher since sometimes this information is not available on the organisations' websites.

⁷⁹ Information extracted from the association's website (<http://www.etbi.ie/>) and further verifications.

The **Association of Employment and Learning Providers** (England) is funded by both membership fees and income from a range of other sources including charging for training and events, delivering projects and securing sponsorship for specific activities⁸⁰.

3.3 What has engaged provider associations in cooperative activities?

This study also looked into what helps engage providers in VET associations within countries and what drives national associations to participate in associations or other cooperation initiatives at EU level. This was addressed through the questionnaire that asked national associations about what triggered the creation of associations, what encourages VET providers to be members, and any recent changes in their cooperation with other national or international associations. The level of response to these questions was low. However, some findings are highlighted below.

When asked about **what triggered the creation of the association**,⁸¹ some associations' representatives referred to the fact that the associations had been created on a voluntary basis and the wish of VET providers to cooperate. The motivations for cooperation are related to the identification of common problems and the need to defend common interests before national governments and other stakeholders.

The characteristics of VET systems in each country determine the specific issues which associations need to attend to on behalf of their members. For instance, in one country, the fact that competences in employment and VET are organised at a regional level, motivated the creation of an association that brings together all public employment services (which are VET providers) in the country with the aim of ensuring mobility for citizens. In another country, one single association was created in the recent years, merging two separate associations - for CVET and IVET- because most of the IVET providers are also CVET providers (and vice versa) so the decisions affecting one system also affect the other one.

In a few cases, governments have played an important role in the creation of VET provider associations. One respondent mentioned that the creation of the association was a government initiative. Another one explained that the government stimulated the creation of a national association, as it wanted to have one spokesperson representing and channelling the voice of providers in the context of a policy of deregulation and increased institutional autonomy. A third respondent reflected that the existence of national VET associations is more frequent in countries where VET providers have a higher level of autonomy.

There are two main **drivers of active engagement by VET providers**:⁸²

- The development of projects and the promotion of the mobility of students and staff, mainly through EU programmes;
- Policy involvement of VET providers at national and/or EU level.

⁸⁰ Information extracted from the association's website (<http://www.aelp.org.uk/>) and further verifications.

⁸¹ Question 7: *What have been the triggers to the creation of the Association you represent (e.g. top down approach, voluntary basis).*

⁸² Question 5: *Where there is participation what has enabled this to happen - e.g. remits, members' interests in mobility and international students, European projects.*

Several associations referred to members' interest in participating in European projects and international mobility programmes for students and staff. VET providers' membership provides support when applying to these programmes, in particular to find relevant counterparts in other countries. A respondent explained that partnerships are either based on bilateral contacts between VET schools, or contacts within the framework of the initiatives of European VET providers. One respondent also referred to efforts to promote internationalisation among its members, encouraging partnerships at both national (between the schools in their association, the government, other umbrella organisations, school guidance services, companies, etc.) and international level in order to enhance peer learning among other things.

Also, some representatives referred to increasing participation at policy level. For example, one respondent explained that they are increasingly called by policy makers to provide information and opinions on VET-related issues. A representative from another association mentioned that while they had originally focused on the development of EU-funded and government-funded projects, they are now devoting more efforts to lobbying for the interests of their member organisations.

When asked about **improvements or developments in cooperation with national and international associations**,⁸³ respondents mainly referred to their recent involvement in European associations or in specific international activities (e.g. Erasmus+ projects).

In the light of the topic and objectives examined by the present study, the following example of cooperation among several national associations is of wider interest. The Association of Colleges (UK-ENG), MBO Raad (NL), AMKE (FI) and ETBI (IE) have been working together – within EUproVET- to build close links and understanding between their associations and members. They have further developed this through collaborative work with other EU VET associations via the VET4EU2 agreement. Information about the rationale for cooperating, key difficulties encountered and how this was overcome is set out in the box below.

Cooperation between national-level associations: AoC (UK-ENG), MBO Raad (NL), AMKE (FI) and ETBI (IE)⁸⁴

AoC, MBO Raad, AMKE and ETBI have engaged in cooperation since 2008 and have created a platform, called EUproVET (European Providers of Vocational Education and Training), as the foundation for sustainable collaboration and sharing of good practices.

This cooperation was, on the one hand, the result of a tendency towards more institutional autonomy of VET providers in some European countries. For instance, in the Netherlands, since 1996, there was an increase in institutional autonomy and large regional education and training centres (ROCs), providing a variety of programmes, were created through merges. ROCs formed an association - MBO Raad - which represents all government funded educational institutes for secondary VET and adult education in the Netherlands. National associations with a high level of representativeness, such as MBO Raad, started acting as intermediaries between VET providers and governments or other entities.

⁸³ Question 6: *To your knowledge, what changes (if any) have taken place to: Improve and developing cooperation between national associations where this did not previously exist; Increase and enable engagement by any national associations in European association activities.*

⁸⁴ Based on information received from EUproVET and desk research on the associations concerned.

On the other hand, the cooperation across countries was motivated by the growing importance of European policy in the field of VET and its impact at institutional level. Concretely, EUproVET has the aim of increasing policy involvement of VET providers in European policy making. It has provided a platform for AoC, MBO Raad, AMKE and ETBI to develop several joint projects and policy contributions.

One of the main barriers for EUproVET to extend cooperation to other European countries has been the difficulty to identify similar associations in other countries with a good coverage of VET sectors and a good level of representativeness. Also, language barriers can be an issue and, mostly, possible eligible members mainly from southern and eastern European countries find the financial commitment of a membership fee and travel expenses sometimes too high a barrier to participate.

As a way to overcome this situation, EUproVET engaged in cooperation with other European associations through VET4EU2 which provides a platform for both individual VET institutions and national or regional associations through the joint working of the 4 major EU VET representative associations (EUproVET, EfVET, EVBB, EVTA) and with two European associations representing cross-cutting sectors of relevance (EURASHE and EUCEN).

3.4 Key summary points

- The number of VET provider associations and their coverage varies considerably between countries.
- Associations can cover only public providers, only private, or both. Some of the associations cover specific sectors.
- The following countries have been found to have national-level associations (or sub-country level) representing to a high or medium extent the number of providers delivering IVET, CVET and/or higher VET: BEfr, BEnl, CY⁸⁵, CZ, DE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, NL, PT, SI, SK, UK-ENG, UK-SCT, UK-WLS, UK-NI, CH, and RS.
- National-level associations more often cover both IVET and CVET, mostly because the same providers often deliver both types of VET. Higher VET is more often delivered by specific providers and it is therefore common to find associations specialising exclusively in this level and /or encompassing higher education.
- The information collected through the survey suggests that associations' representatives more often consider that there is a 'medium' level of cooperation with other associations, a bit higher at national than international level. There are however several cases where respondents mention a low or inexistent level of cooperation.
- Respondents pointed out several constraints on international cooperation, mainly limited resources in terms of funding and personnel.
- VET provider associations generally aim to promote dialogue between providers and represent the interest of their members in national and, to a lesser extent, international forums.
- They are generally multi-purpose providing a range of activities for members (e.g. support in pedagogical issues, legal advice, support in the implementation of quality assurance procedures, etc.).

⁸⁵ Applying to higher VET.

- Associations' governance is frequently a board or assembly formed by one representative of each VET provider member or an elected number. Not all the associations have a secretariat and, where this exists, it is often voluntarily led by members.
- Most of the associations are often funded through the payment of membership fees. However, there can also be other funding sources such as public funding, earnings from the sale of services or products, and donations.
- The motivations for the creation of associations are related to the identification of common problems and the need to defend common interests before national governments and other stakeholders.
- The growing importance of European policy in the field of VET and its impact at institutional level have driven some national associations to cooperate with the aim of increasing policy involvement of VET providers in European policy making.
- Survey results suggest that the main driver for VET providers to participate in associations is their interest in participating in European projects and international mobility programmes for students and staff.
- When asked about developments in cooperation with national and international associations, associations' representatives mainly referred to their recent involvement in European associations or in specific international activities.

4 Options and analysis of their feasibility

Drawing on the information set out in sections 2 and 3, this section presents and assesses four options ('scenarios'). These are:

- Maintaining current arrangements ('status quo' – scenario 1);
- Improving current arrangements (scenario 2);
- Establishing a new network with no more than one representative association per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 3);
- Establishing a new network with at least two representative associations per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 4).

To the above a complementary approach has been considered:

- Establishing an on-line platform (i.e. as a Forum that could bring together those associations identified in the study (or at least the most interested ones)⁸⁶.

These have been primarily designed in the light of the cooperation objectives that underpinned the present study:

- To encourage VET provider organisations and their networks to work together at European level to improve the quality and efficiency of VET, enhance its relevance for learners and employers, and build cross border relationships for mobility and sharing practice;
- To enable VET provider organisations and their networks to be more active and involved in the EU policy making process and a better means for:
 - effective engagement and consultation than the current arrangements through the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT), and the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) and;
 - the meetings it has established with European VET provider associations since 2010 (including by recently creating an expert group, named the Platform of European Associations of VET Providers);
- To provide a potential platform for communication and dissemination about the VET policy agenda at EU and national level; a forum for the Commission as well as for VET provider organisations to exchange knowledge and experience of policy implementation and best practice across EU member states and other countries.

For each scenario, the information has been organised in terms of:

- **Benefits** (i.e. whether the scenario proposed would enable stakeholders involved meet EC cooperation objectives plus further considerations about other actions of benefits to the above)
- **Dis-benefits** (i.e. whether the scenario proposed would not help address the key issues listed above, in particular representativeness or visibility issues)
- **Feasibility** (i.e. extent to the scenario would be feasible in terms of: addressing all EC cooperation objectives, be implementable at reasonable costs).

The assessment of these dimensions has involved considering elements that are central to this study (i.e. whether scenario X is of benefits or not for meeting above-mentioned cooperation objectives and how far these (if any) are (un)likely to be

⁸⁶ This option was originally presented as a fifth scenario. It has been redefined as a transversal complementary option further to the exchanges that took place during the validation workshop.

achieved) and others that have emerged from the analysis presented above (e.g. primarily in line with representativeness and visibility issues denoted across earlier sections). To allow comparison, a scoring system has been applied to each of them consisting of:

- Benefits: score from 1 (low benefits) to 5 (high benefits);
- Dis-benefit: score from 1 (high dis-benefits) to 5 (low dis-benefits);
- Feasibility: score from 1 (not possible) to 5 (implementable at no additional cost).

To determine final score, intermediate scores have been weighted as follows: 25% allocated to benefits and dis-benefits each and 50% to feasibility.

Further information on the scoring system followed and more specifically on the sub-criteria considered for scoring the three dimensions above is set out in the table below.

Table 6. Scoring system for scenarios

	Benefits	Dis-benefits	Feasibility
1	<p>Low benefits</p> <p>Not addressing any cooperation objectives</p>	<p>High dis-benefits</p> <p>The option significantly impedes the degree of cooperation (with national associations of VET providers)</p> <p>Outcomes achieved through existing arrangement(s) cannot not be achieved anymore</p> <p>Representativeness and visibility issues (as denoted in the report) are not addressed</p>	<p>Low feasibility</p> <p>Expensive / no funding available</p> <p>Not manageable / detrimental organisational and/ or governance issues</p>
2	<p>Low-medium benefits</p> <p>Addressing at least one cooperation objective (or several partially) and; Not or poorly addressing any key issues denoted in the report</p>	<p>Medium-high dis-benefits</p> <p>The option worsens the degree of cooperation with national associations of VET providers to a large extent</p> <p>Given outcomes currently achieved through existing arrangement(s) cannot not be achieved</p>	<p>Low-medium feasibility</p> <p>Costly or funding source/ costs unknown and/or</p> <p>Possible high governance and/or organisational constraints</p>
3	<p>Medium benefits</p> <p>Addressing at least two cooperation objectives and; Key issues denoted in the report to a limited extent</p>	<p>Medium dis-benefits</p> <p>The option enables some cooperation with national associations of VET providers to some extent</p> <p>Given outcomes currently achieved through existing</p>	<p>Medium feasibility</p> <p>Funding source unknown but anticipated costs reasonable and/or</p> <p>Some governance and/or organisational constraints</p>

		arrangement(s) can be achieved at least partially Extra time/commitment of stakeholders involved highly anticipated	
	Medium-high benefits	Low-medium dis-benefits	Medium-high feasibility
4	Addressing all cooperation objectives and; Key issues denoted in the report to some extent (e.g. including flexible approaches for reaching out new members/ engaging with new members/ grass root level practitioners)	The option enables a high degree of cooperation with national associations of VET providers Outcomes achieved through current arrangement(s) are sustained and deepened Extra time/commitment of stakeholders involved possibly needed	A) Implementable at no additional cost but anticipated limited outcomes or B) Implementable at reasonable costs (easy to estimate) plus Limited governance and/or organisational constraints
	High benefits	Low dis-benefits	High feasibility
5	Addressing all cooperation objectives, and; Key issues denoted in the report fully	The option enables a very high degree of cooperation with national associations of VET providers Outcomes achieved through current arrangement(s) are sustained, deepened and mutually feed into each other and in new one	Implementable at no additional cost No or very limited governance and/or organisational constraints

Source: ICF

Similarly to the rest of the report, the information below is to be considered as a first set of insights and considerations to foster exchanges on the topic among key stakeholders and other interesting parties.

4.1 Maintaining current arrangements ('status quo' – scenario 1)

The assessment of scenario 1 is informed largely by the data collected from interviews which contained questions about the suitability of current arrangements (i.e. ACVT, DGVT and the 'Platform') to meet the cooperation objectives considered for this study.

4.1.1 Benefits

To a large extent, interviewees were satisfied with the organisation and types of outputs resulting from the group they belong to. For most of them, no specific overlaps were denoted between the three groups. A key benefit of the 'status quo' was that the recently established 'Platform' was considered (most interviewees) as a positive step towards engaging with national associations of VET providers. Several ACVT representatives reckoned that engaging with the latter is 'relevant', 'important' and a few acknowledged that this was a 'missing link' or even a 'gap' or 'discrepancy' so far.

Several Platform representatives emphasised that despite its recent establishment, the group works well, has carried out different activities including drafting a joint declaration supporting Riga conclusions to represent, for the first time, the voice of VET providers in a ministerial conference. A few of them considered that the group, as it is already, offers a good representativeness of the VET sector across the EU and should be allowed to develop, before considering alternatives.

4.1.2 Dis-benefits

Most interviewees considered that the Platform fails to offer a sufficient level of representativeness (i.e. capable to represent the whole VET sector across the EU). Several interviewees observed that the membership of its constituents is quite heterogeneous (i.e. with some umbrella associations only covering a small number of EU countries or bringing together a mix of stakeholders ranging from individual VET providers and trades unions to employer representatives while others embed national associations of VET providers, etc.). This low level of representativeness was generally seen as a main constraint in current arrangements. This is borne out by some analysis in this report.

The Platform was commonly reported not to be very visible as yet (likely due to its recent establishment). Several ACVT representatives admitted not being fully aware about what it does, has achieved or plans to do in the future. Some mentioned that there was not much communication between the different groups (ACVT and the Platform).

One interviewee concluded that despite the establishment of the Platform, the 'involvement of national VET provider associations is not connected yet in a concrete way to ACVT and DGVT'.

In short, this scenario would neither sufficiently help to achieve the cooperation objectives set out above nor foster effective cooperation with national associations of VET providers.

4.1.3 Feasibility

Based on the different considerations set out above, it can be fairly assumed that the feasibility of maintaining current arrangements would be high. Since this scenario would build on existing arrangements (generally rated positively), no specific implementation problem would be anticipated. In the same vein, the status quo option would be implementable at no additional cost.

4.1.4 Scoring

Table 7. Scenario 1 - scoring table

	Benefits	Dis-benefits	Feasibility	Total
'Status quo' – scenario 1	2	2	4 (A)	3

Source: ICF

4.2 Improving current arrangements by informing the development of the 'Platform' (scenario 2)

The assessment of scenario 2 draws on information from the interviews and the country-level mapping analysis. In this scenario, improvements like the possibility of enlarging the membership of the Platform, improving its visibility, etc. have been considered in line with views notably expressed by interviewees.

Benefits

Many interviewees indicated that while establishing a European network would be relevant and desirable, a first step to consider would be to improve current arrangements. A first key benefit would be that this would develop the Platform. Launching the discussion about establishing (i.e. if considered relevant, desirable, valuable and feasible) a European network of national VET provider associations would be part of the overall process.

Among other things improving current arrangements would be beneficial for:

- Further assessing and discussing the main assets and gaps in the current Platform in terms of its: membership, remit, activities, communications, collaboration with ACVT and DGVT (and how to improve this to achieve the cooperation objectives);
- Reflecting upon the potential value of extending the membership of current arrangements, and this of the Platform in particular (e.g. to open it up to other relevant EU associations or other relevant stakeholders). Further testing the needs for and potential added value of a European network of national VET provider associations for the EC and provider associations themselves. This could be an opportunity for testing the interest in having such a network on national VET provider associations;
- Further exploring the form(s) a potential network may take: e.g. agreeing upon ways to jointly identify those national associations best placed to take part from each country (i.e. most representative or interested ones depending on the scope and remit of the network once determined by interested parties at EU level);
- Improving communication among the different parties involved (i.e. the Platform's members including the EC, ACVT and DGVT representatives). This would gain further ownership of the process ultimately.

As a consequence, this scenario could be a valuable opportunity for national authorities and social partner representatives (via ACVT and/or DGVT governmental representatives) jointly with European umbrella associations and additional members of the Platform to reflect on how the Platform could be better integrated in this context (i.e. what kind of valuable insights it could bring to ACVT/DGVT and vice-versa), etc.

It could enable issues around representation of the current members of the Platform to be addressed by these European associations.

4.2.1 Dis-benefits

No clear dis-benefits derive from the information collected although this would require time and commitment from the current members of the Platform and the ACVT. This could also require more meetings than they currently have. Involving the two groups (or three with DGVT if considered necessary) on the topic, in a wider exchange (possibly in plenary session(s) at some point). This said, the essence and specificities of the respective groups (ACVT, DGVT and the Platform) would be preserved through this scenario.

4.2.2 Feasibility

Improving current arrangements appears to be a desired option for many interviewees. Based on the preliminary findings it was anticipated that there would be some difficulties in making progress towards the cooperation objectives by improving the current arrangements. This was not necessarily supported by workshop participants though. Most Platform's representatives indeed considered that the associations they represent already address these objectives (for further considerations, see 5.2 below) and that the Platform (so as other key groups such as ACVT) would be well placed for

moving this forward. This option might require extra resources at EC level for organising extra meeting(s), facilitating discussion (which may not be straightforward considering the varied profile/ interests of the different stakeholders likely to be involved), reimbursing extra participants' travel fees and subsistence, etc. Lastly, membership of the existing European umbrella organisations is not in the gift of the EC; any extension to widen the geographical coverage would have to be initiated by them.

4.2.3 Scoring

Table 8. Scenario 2 - scoring table

	Benefits	Dis-benefits	Feasibility	Total
Improving current arrangements – scenario 2	4	3	4 (B)	3.75

Source: ICF

4.3 Establishing a new network with no more than one representative association per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 3)

The assessment of scenario 3 draws on the country-level analysis (fiches and questionnaires) and interviews.

4.3.1 Benefits

Having such a network which would either replace/ build on the existing 'Platform' would offer various benefits including:

- The possibility for all interested parties including the EC to engage more directly with national associations of VET providers where applicable;
- A formal 'setting' at the European level for national associations of VET providers: this would allow them to know and exchange among each other, learn about good practice examples in other countries, identify similarities with other associations (e.g. terms of their governance, activities, themes of interest, etc.) so as possible axes for cooperation, etc.;
- Each association would represent one country within the European network and would then act as contact point of the network (i.e. for national authorities, other associations, key stakeholders, etc.) in their country;
- The network could also be open to other key stakeholders' representatives;
- Having a manageable network in size and cost for the EC.

4.3.2 Dis-benefits

A few interviewees claimed that if such a network were put in place, it should not be used for policy making and it would question the EC's engagement of organisations representing social partners. The role(s) of the network and its capacity to effectively interact, benefit from and add value to existing arrangements should be clearly defined at an early stage.

For many establishing a membership of VET provider associations (one per country) would be difficult and would not be ideal given the existing provider organisations in many though not all countries. Some emphasised in particular that having one association per country might not secure a fair level of representativeness of the VET

sector from one country to another. Equally, **no association** of VET providers were found in two countries (LU and LV) so they would not be represented.

4.3.3 Feasibility

Strictly considering the study findings, the feasibility of establishing a restricted network would be limited ranging from 'not possible' (i.e. in the case of a network strictly building on one representative association per country) to 'low' (i.e. for a restricted network which would foresee a rotating participation) for different reasons as further presented below.

Though theoretically manageable in size and cost (i.e. as opposed to a wider network), scenario 3 would nevertheless require the EC to allocate specific funding for this.

Overall, this suggests that the costs for establishing and sustaining such a network remain to be determined so as the exact source of funding.

Besides, more than one association of VET providers were identified in several countries (ranging from two to nine associations depending on countries). Based on these findings (to be again considered as illustrative rather than exhaustive), the study team has made a first estimate for pre-identifying those associations which would be most relevant to consider for the purpose of the network (and if not alone, which ones could be considered to provide a fair coverage of the VET sector in the different countries considered).

The results of this first estimate suggests that the number of countries where **one association** of VET providers has been identified (i.e. not only as such but also in terms of its capacity to offer a good to very good representativeness of the sector) is **scarce**.

In part this problem could be overcome by having **rotating participation** of those national associations pre-identified. While a clear benefit to this approach would help ensure a greater level of representativeness of the sector among the different countries, a possible side effect could result in governance issues, in the form of a heavier and less manageable network. There could also be difficulties faced in considering:

- What would happen if more than one association in given countries would be interested to take part while having equally strong arguments for doing so?
- How to make sure that such an approach would lead associations to representing the whole sector?
- How to make sure that identified rotating members would effectively communicate and collaborate with the other organisations where they do not have arrangements in place to do so at present?

In the case of a restricted network with a rotating participation, the number of associations which should be possibly considered per country for offering altogether a medium to high level of representativeness of the VET sector would vary from one country to another (i.e. from two to six per country based on data collected). Meanwhile, this would not consider those countries (see section 3) where associations identified, even though brought together, would only offer a rather poor level of representativeness of the sector. In addition, a few countries would not be represented (i.e. as they might not have any formal or suitable association).

The problems to be addressed in arriving at a single member scenario suggest that many organisational and governance-related questions are much likely to arise. These should be thus further discussed among the different parties concerned beforehand which would give rise to costs and time delays.

In addition, there would need to be agreement upon who should coordinate the network. A few respondents suggested that the network could be coordinated (at least at the beginning) by the EC while a few others were not sure whether this would be most appropriate.

4.3.4 Scoring

Table 9. Scenario 3 - scoring table

	Benefits	Dis-benefits	Feasibility	Total
Establishing a restricted network – scenario 3	4	3	2	2.75

Source: ICF

4.4 Establishing a new network with at least two representative associations per country and a limited number of other standing members (scenario 4)

4.4.1 Benefits

The benefits of establishing a new network with at least two representative associations per country would be close to those outlined under scenario 3. Both scenarios would indeed help address the cooperation objectives outlined above.

Compared with scenario 3, the benefits of the present scenario would be somehow stronger as the wideness of the network would help address the representativeness issue noted earlier. Each representative association part of the network could e.g. express his/her views, take part in network's activities of his/her choice, etc. In turn, similarly to scenario 3, the members of the network could still be contact points for other interested parties (EC, European umbrella associations part of the 'Platform', ACVT and DGVT representatives).

4.4.2 Dis-benefits

The dis-benefits of this scenario would be similarly to the above quite close to those of the previous scenario (i.e. applying to the option foreseeing a rotating participation). However, as opposed to the latter, the dis-benefits of scenario 4 would be higher primarily in terms of governance arrangements and costs (see further consideration below under feasibility).

4.4.3 Feasibility

In line with the above and similarly with the considerations set out for scenario 3 (i.e. option with rotating participation), the feasibility of establishing a network with at least two representative associations of VET providers per country would be low.

As noted earlier, establishing a network which would bring together those national associations of VET providers considered among the most representative ones would mean encompassing between 1 to 6 associations (i.e. based on a first estimate undertaken by the study team) per country. This would represent at least 60 national associations of VET providers.

Similarly to the previous scenario, an alternative approach should be thought to enable the few countries which have no association of VET providers at the moment to be represented. The extent to which the network should be open to other key stakeholders (e.g. Cedefop, ETF, social partners' representatives but also sectoral or decentralised associations of VET providers, chambers of commerce, etc.) should be

considered too. In order to foster tighter interaction and mutual learning between education and employment-related stakeholders, an interviewee also supported such a network could be similarly open to other EU level bodies or settings such as the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) or the 'PES to PES Dialogue'⁸⁷ for instance. It can be fairly assumed that the wider network that would result from this scenario would be difficult to coordinate (e.g. facilitating discussions or decision making processes may not be always straightforward). The costs for establishing and sustaining such a network would be also much higher than those anticipated for scenario 3⁸⁸.

Table 10. Scenario 4 - scoring table

	Benefits	Dis-benefits	Feasibility	Total
Establishing a wider network – scenario 4	4	3	2	2.75

Source: ICF

4.5 Establishing an on-line platform as a complementary option to above scenarios

As mentioned above, each of the scenarios (scenarios 2 to 4 in particular) outlined above could be potentially complemented, to different extents, by a virtual network in the form of a large on-line platform, as a forum, which would be open to all associations identified in the study (and beyond).

Though not considered as a formal scenario, general considerations about the anticipated benefits, dis-benefits and feasibility for this further option have been assembled and are set out below. Considering its complementary nature and possible specificities per scenario considered, this option has nevertheless not made the object of a specific scoring.

4.5.1 Benefits

The tool would in particular address the third sub-cooperation objective outlined above: 'to provide a platform for communication and dissemination about the VET policy agenda at EU and national level; a forum for the Commission as well as for VET provider organisations to exchange knowledge and experience of policy implementation and best practice across EU member states and other countries'.

Overall, the platform would offer a useful and comprehensive repository for national associations themselves but also for the wider VET community (EC, the 'Platform', ACVT, DGVT and other VET-related working groups/ fora), hence complementing either existing arrangements or any communication/dissemination actions launched by a European level network of national associations of VET providers.

⁸⁷ 'PES to PES Dialogue' is the European Commission's mutual learning support programme for public employment services (PESs) in the European Union. It aims to contribute to the implementation of the priorities of the [Europe 2020 strategy](#) and the [Employment Guidelines](#) by helping to increase the capacity and effectiveness of PESs. Further details available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=964&langId=en>

⁸⁸ This assumption builds on the consideration that the EC would cover participants' travels fees and subsistence for attending network's events/meetings. The purpose of the present assignment was not to carry out cost-effectiveness analysis.

Other possible benefits would include (not exhaustive):

- Offering a fair level of representativeness of the VET sector across EU, EFTA and candidate countries;
- The 'virtual network' would build on a voluntary basis - i.e. each association could contribute or not whenever considered convenient, necessary or useful, etc.

4.5.2 Dis-benefits

Potential dis-benefits may include a certain disinterest or even reluctance about launching 'another EU online platform'. A few interviewees noticed that several groups, forums and web tools already exist to support knowledge-base and exchange of experience in the field of VET at EU level. According to these interviewees, launching a new tool of this kind may not be that appealing or loose in visibility and face the risk of being (somehow) redundant with existing ones.

4.5.3 Feasibility

The feasibility would depend on the form this tool would ultimately take (i.e. against the scenario(s) considered) and related budget needed /available at EC level. It would be certainly worthwhile testing relevant parties (i.e. national associations of VET providers the 'Platform', ACVT, DGVT) on their interest, expectations and perceived added value of such a tool beforehand for further informing its feasibility. Analysing on whether the tool could build on existing EU level web tools (e.g. EPALe, Circabc or Yammer) would be appropriate too.

In the same vein, costs and time needed for maintaining and keeping such a platform regularly updated should be also further considered.

4.6 Assessment of the four scenarios

To conclude, the assessment of the four feasibility scenarios presented above suggests that scenario 2 ('improving current arrangements') would be, at this stage, the one emerging (combined or not with the online platform mentioned above) as the most suitable for further reflection among key stakeholders at EU level in order to address the cooperation objectives. Actions and specific steps to follow for improving current arrangements should be further discussed among key stakeholders at the EU level.

However, based on the exchanges with Platform's representatives, Cedefop and ETF staff members present in the validation workshop, this scenario should not necessarily be seen in isolation (nor as 'the solution') but possibly in the light of flexible approaches (e.g. including drawing future developments on more specific cooperation (sub-) objectives that remain to be defined) which remain to be considered and further explored.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This section starts summarising the key conclusions of the study report based on the findings outlined in earlier sections. It ends with a 'recommendations' section which builds on the key findings of the exchanges with Platform's key stakeholders during the validation workshop that took place in Brussels on 30 October 2015.

5.1.1 Establishing a European network of national VET provider associations: lessons learnt from the study

In order to inform whether establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations would be a possible solution for addressing the Bruges Communiqué's cooperation objective mentioned above, gaining further insights on the current state of play at national level was a first prerequisite. This was complemented with the analysis of data collected through interviews about key stakeholders' views on current arrangements and the proposal of establishing a European level network.

One of the first key conclusions that emerges from both data collection processes regards the heterogeneity, complexity and fragmented nature of VET systems from one country to another. Echoing an interviewee, VET is 'son of several fathers and mothers in each country (i.e. schools, VET centres, universities, companies, trade unions or social partners, governmental authorities – ministries in charge of education and/or labour, etc.)' therefore when considering furthering cooperation in the sector, this should be thought against this broad(er) scope.

In line with this, the analysis of data collected at **national level** reveals that:

- With the exception of two countries (LU and LV), associations of VET providers were **found** in **all other countries** covered by the assignment;
- Where existing, the number of associations identified varies from **1 to 9**;
- The **number** of associations by itself does **not give a clear picture** of the degree to which VET providers are **represented** in a country;
- Most of the associations identified are national-level associations, with only a few exceptions;
- A few sector-specific associations were also found⁸⁹;
- Identified associations most commonly represent **public providers**, bringing together **IVET and/or CVET** providers;
- Lack of **representativeness** (so as lack on information on the topic) is **commonly observed** across countries. The highest level of representativeness (though varying from one type of VET – IVET, CVET or higher VET) is found in around 10 countries. This is generally ensured by more than one association. In other countries (particularly those with lowest level of representativeness), a mix of associations of varied scope, size and membership is often found.
- Though all the associations aim at influencing decision makers to some extent, the **type of activities** they supported **may generally greatly vary** from one association to the other;
- The functioning of identified associations is often funded through the payment of membership fees (64 out of around 120 associations identified);

⁸⁹ This kind of the associations has not made the object of a systematic research though for this study.

- Information on the extent to which existing associations **cooperate** with counterparts at national level or from other countries (including European associations of VET providers or EU institutions) was scarcely captured;
- Information was also scarce on **drivers and triggers** for either setting-up or engaging with a national association of VET providers.
- Most commonly reported **challenges or obstacles** included:
 - Funding constraints
 - Lack of representativeness
 - Different national legal frameworks and VET systems
 - Low level of interest of policy makers
 - A low development of VET in the country
 - Linguistic barriers, etc.

The above was supplemented (and usually concurred) through the analysis of key stakeholders' perceptions. The latter helped identify that:

- The need to **engage with VET provider associations** is generally **acknowledged** and supported at EU/national level (i.e. as perceived by those individual ACVT or 'Platform's interviewees);
- The evocation of formally engaging with national VET provider associations at EU level however generate **fears or questions** about the 'role' or 'power' they would be given at this level, in several cases. The **risk of possible tensions**, in the context of the OMC, with national representatives was commonly emphasised;
- The recent establishment of the '**Platform**' is seen as a positive development and means to support above cooperation objective. Its (uneven) **representativeness** and to some **extent** its low visibility (i.e. remit, activities, etc.) were however seen as a possible constraint at the time being.
- Lack of transparency/ communication among the different EU settings (Platform, ACVT, DGVT) was also often reported (not clear who does what in this remit)
- The proposal of **establishing a European level network of national VET provider associations** is generally considered **relevant, desirable** and **valuable**. Meanwhile, attempting to bring together national associations into such a network is likely to be challenging for the different reasons evocated above;
- The **possible features** of such a network (i.e. governance and scope of action) were also **difficult to apprehend** by most interviewees in the current context;
- The extent to which establishing such a network would be **feasible** was **questioned** by the vast majority of respondents (i.e. in regard to existing uncertainties so as in the light of difficulties to judge whether a European network could effectively bring together representative national associations for each country and how those could be identified and selected.

Quoting one interviewee, '*It is very important that national VET stakeholders are represented at EC level, but it is similarly important to ensure that we have there "the right voices, the right representatives", not only 1 or 2'. VET systems, related needs and priorities and VET stakeholders may greatly vary from one country to another, hence 'number should not be a main or exclusive selection criterion'.*

The assessment of the **four feasibility options** proposed above (section 4) suggests that improving current arrangements (scenario 2) would be, at least over the short term, most appropriate for further reflection at EU level on how to address the Bruges Communiqué's cooperation objective.

The proposal for establishing a European network or platform of national VET provider associations was indeed usually perceived as 'certainly a good idea' but:

- It was considered too early to proceed with this: most interviewees recommended that existing arrangements should be firstly deepened. The different groups (ACVT, DGVT and the 'Platform') could be possibly more practically involved into the reflection.
- A knowledge gap currently exists on the topic. Questions/ considerations such as:
 - How to ensure representativeness of the VET sector across each country represented in a network or platform;
 - How to identify and select most representative associations;
 - How to measure the interest and expectations of existing associations to take part in such a European setting;
 - How to make sure that such a setting would bring value to existing arrangements;
 - How this would be funded and effectively coordinated. In this area, the need to have a better understanding of EC's expectations/ vision on the topic was emphasised by several interviewees (around 1 out of 3), and more generally;
 - Getting more comprehensive information on the current state of play at national level with over half interviewees reckoning this important knowledge gap.

To some extent, the key messages that emerged from the validation workshop concurred with the above. The scenarios proposed in the present report are thus to be considered as a first entry point for discussion on the topic and are thus likely to further evolve based on future discussion between the EC and relevant parties.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations derive from the above and have been clustered into the following categories: what the EU/EC should and could do and what EU stakeholders considered across this report (Platform and ACVT members primarily) should/could do themselves, among them and/or with EC.

The key messages that emerge from the above are as follows:

- Further reflection/exchanges are needed at EU level to define / take action for effectively engaging with grass root level practitioners (i.e. national associations of VET providers plus possibly other key stakeholders). The present report which offers an illustrative mapping and a first set of observations on the topic is to be considered as a first output aimed to support/ inform further discussion in the area at EU level; the Commission should continue to acquire a better knowledge of national governance of VET providers, in cooperation also with VET stakeholders, ETF and Cedefop.
- To move forward, the following issues should be further considered:
 - **Representativeness issue:** ways to identify and reach out most representative associations (or most interested ones depending on the approach/mechanism considered) have to be further thought and discussed among key players at EU level. Any flexible approaches for mitigating this should be similarly reflected upon.
 - **Communication/dissemination issues:** study findings reveal that current arrangements (the Platform, ACVT and DGVT) and in particular their respective activities (and resulting outputs) suffer from a lack of visibility. Several interviewees reported not having a clear view of what the other settings do. No

specific communication channels among these settings exist to date whilst their respective outputs may be disseminated to varying extent. At national level these settings also suffer from a lack of visibility (i.e. as replies obtained by national respondents often suggest).

In line with the above, the following areas where the EU/EC and key stakeholders part of 'current arrangements' should or could intervene are set out below:

What the EU/EC should/could do:

- Continue making efforts to **promote that EU policy and initiatives reach out at grass-root level through 'current arrangements'** (the Platform, ACVT and DGVT as a start but also via Cedefop and ETF and other relevant settings). In this area, the EC should:
 - share/discuss the results of the present study (and where considered useful more detailed information) with relevant key stakeholders at EU level;
 - take stock of what European associations have already done and gain further insights on why there are difficulties in engaging with national-level associations;
 - bear in mind the preference of the group for above-mentioned scenario 2, which may involve extending the expert group to incorporate other stakeholders and bodies;
 - consider adopting a pragmatic approach, focused on enlarging participation by better engaging those who are already interested in participating in EU-level cooperation initiatives.
- Further develop above-mentioned **cooperation objectives**, toward more concrete goals linked to implementation of VET policies (for example on transnational mobility or European transparency tools to support mobility) with the aim of raising the interest of other stakeholders in this cooperation. This should also be considered more widely for enabling EU policy and initiatives to reach out more effectively grass-root level practitioners.
- Promote better **communication and dissemination strategies** of the existing European level organisations, under the framework of the Riga conclusions (e.g. through the organisation of a VET week). Dissemination should reach out different stakeholders including not only VET providers and associations but also social partners and governments.
- Promote further debate on the concrete role the Commission can play in this field. Namely, it may consider looking into the use of EU projects (for instance, under Erasmus+) as a way to create structures and supporting financially the national associations that want to participate in EU-level collaboration initiatives.

What the 'Platform', ACVT and DGVT should/could do:

- Reflect upon, as a group, on how to address the Bruges cooperation objective;
- Effectively engage altogether (or the Platform with ACVT as a minimum) and share views on envisaged approaches/action plan (to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure consistency for e.g. improving communication and visibility and defining ways to reach out grass root level practitioners) and considerations about how the EC could help;
- At Platform level: explore the idea of extending the membership of the group jointly with the EC.

Annexes

Annex 1 Questionnaire template

Dear respondent,

Thank you for having accepted to verify the information assembled by our study team in the draft country fiche enclosed. In addition to this, we would be grateful if you could answer the questions set out below. These additional responses will help supplement our initial findings and further inform the study.

This document once completed should be sent with the reviewed country fiche to Stephanie Oberheidt (stephanie.oberheidt@icfi.com) by 4 August 2015.

We thank you very much in advance for your consideration and cooperation.

Best regards,

ICF study core team.

ICF question	Your answer
In your country...	
<p>1) To what extent do existing national association(s) of VET providers actively engage and cooperate with other national or regional associations of VET providers</p> <p><i>Note: if no national associations of VET providers exist in your country, please move to question 4.</i></p>	<p>Please select one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'inexistent' - 'low' - 'medium' - 'high' <p>Briefly justify your choice</p>
<p>2) To what extent do existing national association(s) of VET providers actively engage with counterparts from other countries, European associations of VET providers or with EU institutions</p> <p><i>Note: if no national associations of VET providers exist in your country, please move to question 4.</i></p>	<p>Please select one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'inexistent' - 'low' - 'medium' - 'high' <p>Briefly justify your choice</p>
<p>3) What are the main limitations encountered by national association(s) of VET providers (if any) in engaging with associations in other countries or one of the European associations – e.g. lack of resources (funds , personnel, etc.), remit, lack of cooperation internally or with other provider associations at country level or beyond, other?</p> <p><i>Note: if no national associations of VET providers exist in your country, please briefly indicate whether there are any plans or debate to establish one or if not, do specify why.</i></p>	<p>Please specify here:</p>
<p>4) If not explicitly addressed in the Country fiche could you please specify whether the</p>	

ICF question	Your answer
association you represent is is funded by membership fees and has a paid or voluntary staff	
<p>5) Where there is participation with what has enabled this to happen - e.g. remits, members interests in mobility and international students, European projects</p> <p><i>Note: if no national associations of VET providers exist in your country, please briefly indicate whether there are any plans or debate to establish one or if not, do specify why.</i></p>	Please specify here:
<p>6) To your knowledge, what changes (if any) have taken place to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve and developing cooperation between national associations where this did not previously exist - Increase and enable engagement by any national associations in European association activities 	<p>Please briefly state what has happened whilst specifying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the name of the practice/leading association, key features and Internet links/contact details of project leader (if available)
7) What have been the triggers to the creation of the Association you represent (e.g. top down approach, voluntary basis)	
Do you know other relevant VET Associations representing VET providers in your country which are not members of one of the already mentioned groups	Please indicate name, internet site, contact details etc.
At EU level, according to you...	
8) Would it be desirable to establish an EU level network of VET provider associations ?	Please answer by 'Yes' or 'No' and further specify why
9) What would be the added value of an EU level network at your own level/organisation's level or at national level?	<p>Please specify:</p> <p>A) Your thoughts on the added value (if any) such a network may have at your/your organisation level e.g. enabling you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gain a better knowledge on developments (policies/programmes) in VET area at EU and national level; - share experience/good practice; - develop relationships with other

ICF question	Your answer
	<p>VET provider associations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gain visibility; - other <p>Note: if you estimate that no specific added value would derive from such a network, please make this explicit.</p> <p>B) What you would expect from such a network in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities: e.g. good practice exchange/ information sharing on latest policy/practice developments through formal meetings and/or complementary virtual communication, etc., and; - topics and outcomes : e.g. fostering knowledge and actual interaction and synergies among VET policy makers and practitioners at EU and national level, etc.) that the network could support/monitor.
<p>A) Would an EU level network of VET provider associations bringing together either one or two national associations be appropriate?</p>	<p>Please answer by 'Yes' or 'No' and further specify why</p>
<p>B) What would be the main barriers and challenges to the creation and sustainability of an EU level network of provider associations representing each country?</p>	<p>Please specify your views here (e.g. fragmentation of the VET sector/different VET systems across the EU, lack of resources, no interest, linguistic issues, other)</p>
<p>C) What do you think about existing governance and working arrangements in VET policy area at EU level (i.e. as operated through the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), the Directors General for vocational training (DGVT) and the existing EU level VET providers associations – to be listed)?</p>	<p>Please indicate whether you know these structures/bodies and if this is suitable for yourself/your organisation to be kept informed of latest policy developments at EU, to share learning with other Member State associations and to contribute to policy development at EU level.</p>

Annex 2 Topic guide for interviews

Current state of play

1. To what extent are the current systems and networks for engagement with VET provider associations 'fit for purpose' and how could they be improved?
Prompt: interviewee's perceptions on suitability of existing structures/bodies (ACVT, DGVET, annual meetings between the 6 European umbrella associations and newly established expert group of VET providers) in terms of: effectiveness/appropriateness for a wider dialogue with grass root level representatives (e.g. communication, activities, etc.), complementarity of actions or overlaps, etc. and potential room for improvement (if any).
2. What are the main barriers and challenges to engaging national associations of VET providers in an EU level network?
Prompt: general interviewee's perceptions.
3. To what extent would the establishment of a Commission-led EU level network of VET provider associations be a) desirable and b) feasible?
Prompt: interviewee's perceptions on the added value of such a network and on the extent which establishing it would be easily achievable or not (and why). Explore some of the barriers and enablers

Scope and organisation of a potential EU level network

4. What should be the scope of action for an EU level network of VET provider associations?
Prompt: interviewee's perceptions on the activities (e.g. good practice exchange/ information sharing on latest policy/practice developments through formal meetings and/or complementary virtual communication, etc.), topics and outcomes (e.g. fostering knowledge and actual interaction and synergies among VET policy makers and practitioners at EU and national level, etc.) that the network could support/monitor; how feedback on policy recommendations would be used in this framework and potential limitations (if any).
5. What should be the governance and working arrangements of the network?
Prompt: interviewee's perceptions on the above including funding and possible membership (e.g. including one or two national VET provider associations per Member State, recommendations for appropriate organisations best placed to participate, etc.).
6. What would be added value of the network?
Prompt: interviewee's perceptions on whether the benefits expected could be achieved and the requirements which would have to be met to achieve them.

Other thoughts/recommendations

7. Do you have any other thoughts/recommendations (incl. good practice examples) you would like to share for the purpose of the feasibility study?

Annex 3 Country codes

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BE fr	Belgium – French Community
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
MT	Malta
NL	The Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom
UK-ENG	United Kingdom - England
UK-NI	United Kingdom – Northern Ireland
UK-SCT	United Kingdom – Scotland
UK-WLS	United Kingdom - Wales

CH	Switzerland
NO	Norway
RS	Serbia
TR	Turkey

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