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Closing Remarks at the 15th IVETA International Conference, Moscow, Russian Federation, 21-23 August 2006



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» I was asked to give a presentation on the lessons that were learned at this conference. I have tried to sum them up, but I must admit that my comments reflect mostly my own views and reactions, for of course it was impossible for me to attend every session. Once finished with my remarks, I will put forward the Conference Resolution that was developed by the organizers and the IVETA executive team.

After a period of marginalisation (from around 1980 to 1996), the importance of VET has once again become apparent in the world, especially since both globalisation and technology have become significant drivers of education reform. At this conference, the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation told us that VET was even discussed at the recent G8 meeting. At the same time, VET institutions and systems have undergone tremendous reform in the past ten years. There is no doubt that this is transforming the field. The important reforms involve issues such as:

- » Financing and governance of VET, including diversifying financing sources and including stakeholders in decision making;
- » Diversification of VET providers, including more VET delivery by private institutions;
- » Improved relevance and linkages to employers and other stakeholders;
- » Adopting (and adapting) standards-driven, competency-based approaches;
- » A stronger focus on the effectiveness and efficiency of training;
- » A wide recognition of the importance of quality in VET.

Some reforms, as well as new and innovative approaches, are ahead of both formal education systems and "traditional" employers. Here, I am particularly referring to:

- » The concept of lifelong learning;
- » National and regional qualifications frameworks;
- » Occupational standards;
- » New quality assurance mechanisms, and
- » A focus on outcomes and demand rather than inputs and supply.

However, many challenges remain. Some of the most significant include:

- » In most countries involved in IVETA, there is still a stigma attached to VET. It is seen as inferior to tertiary and university education. We find this attitude particularly among parents, but sometimes even among educators;
- » Most countries continue to struggle with high unemployment (especially for youth and women) on the one hand and a shortage of highly skilled workers on the other;
- » VET systems need to focus more on upgrading the skills of workers and involving workers in lifelong learning activities;

- » There is an over-reliance on institution-based training. While we all believe that enterprise-based training is the most relevant and efficient, official recognition and credit is only one of the many difficulties encountered;
- » In many developing countries, training programmes are too short to produce highly skilled workers;
- » There is a need to provide compensatory education for school drop-outs who have not acquired sufficient basic competencies;

Other areas of concern or weakness include:

- » Inadequate career guidance and counselling;
- » Inadequate labour market information;
- » Loss of skills due to the migration of workers;
- » A lack of research on the return on investment in VET on the one hand and an increasing demand for accountability on the other;
- » Despite the fact that VET reforms address issues that are important in the tertiary sector, such as occupational standards, a weak connection between VET and tertiary education still exists.

The Way Forward

I would like to suggest a few essential improvements that can enhance the quality and status of VET:

- » The reforms that have been undertaken must now be consolidated and extended. Also, the education and training systems must be better integrated;
- » Trainees must be able to improve their skills after basic training. This calls for promoting the importance of further training as well as ensuring the financing of further training;
- » There should be more outreach and promotion of transferability;
- » An even stronger emphasis should be put on "soft" skills, including matters such as communication, working in a diverse environment, teamwork and project-oriented learning;
- » Assessment processes must be continually strengthened, and the quality of these processes must be assured;
- » We must demonstrate – through the use of empirical data – that VET provides a good return on investment, and that national qualification frameworks and systems integrate marginalized groups into the

economy and improve standards of living;

- » Entrepreneurship training and services for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to be improved, especially since in the future an increasing number of people will be self-employed within the formal economy;
- » Stakeholders should have even more influence on VET, and consequently, VET should focus more on partnerships. This includes increasing cooperation and voluntary participation based on perceived benefits and value;
- » There should be a greater recognition of skills gained through other means of education, including distance learning;
- » We should further explore the role of VET in the provision of national social security, and
- » VET should influence secondary and tertiary education reforms to improve the relevance of these segments for the world of work.

Great things are possible if we have an inspiring vision, a challenging, socially and economically relevant mission and the leadership and management skills to actualise our common goal of enhancing skills to facilitate investment and the creation of jobs. Ultimately, this generates

wealth and meets the aspirations of the people. Social cohesion, which is the basis for improved international relations and peace, will be boosted.



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Conference resolution

15th Conference of the International Vocational Education and Training Association on "Vocational Education and Training, an Integral Part of Lifelong Learning", Moscow, 21-23 August, 2006

The Conference, representing about 30 countries from 5 continents, both IVETA members and non-members, has been instrumental in promoting a mutual understanding of contemporary global issues relating to education, training and lifelong learning.

The Conference notes the progress that has been made in taking forward the process of developing and promoting lifelong learning and vocational education and training as its integral part, across continents. The Conference urges that countries represented at the conference continue to undertake actions required to ensure enhanced access to education and training of all categories of the population and specifically of the disadvantaged groups to promote social inclusion and well-being of the people

irrespective of their age, gender, race, social and financial standing.

The Conference recognizes that much important work remains to be done. On the one hand, governments should be urged to adopt policies that in real terms address the goals of lifelong learning and incorporate them in their social and economic strategies. On the other hand, the business communities world over should be motivated to take a more constructive stand on interacting with systems of vocational education and training.

In particular, recognizing the importance of the issue, the Conference agrees that international cooperation to promote lifelong learning and improve the existing systems of vocational education and training should be enhanced both on the formal level and informally, and links built during the conference should be strengthened between IVETA members and non-members. This will provide an opportunity to strengthen international discourse in education and training and enhance the role of the latter in building a better understanding of the problems posed by the transition to the global

knowledge-based economy with its ensuing benefits and threats. This will also ensure a continuing mutual learning that would empower countries to pursue more effective and humanistic education and training policies.

Conference participants also recognize that the reforms in VET in the context of lifelong learning require sound theoretical and research support and international contacts between researchers and experts should continue and strengthen.

Having in mind the need for further development, the Conference urges the IVETA Executive to continue, as a priority, its role as coordinator and leader in consolidating the exchange of expertise and knowledge among countries and continents, relating to lifelong learning and VET development.

The Conference participants agree that the concerted effort of governmental and non-governmental bodies could ensure adoption on the national level of legislation conducive to implementing lifelong learning strategies and to strengthening links between the state, education and training and the business community.