

Policy paper with recommendations on regional skills development groups

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1. Introduction

In the Erasmus+ KA3 Project Bridge+ regional communication, cooperation and coordination groups on the topic of competence and skills-based guidance will be the heart of the regional initiatives.

The groups will usually be established as sub-groups of existing networks. Members of these groups will be different kinds of actors like a) employers and their Chambers/associations, b) education and training institutions, c) educational and career guidance organisations and d) political decision makers.

The BRIDGE+ project provides a collection of basic principles and recommendations on how to establish such groups, on how to run groups, on possible issues of coordination etc. A pilot group in Baden-Württemberg serves as a role model.

On the basis of this concept, the other 4 regional partners from the Basque Country, Bretagne, Jämtland and Styria will establish own regional groups of coordination and start their regional initiatives to develop skills-based guidance.

- Establishment of a pilot group in Baden-Württemberg
- Survey among partners on regional background for the groups
- Gathering of recommendations and issue of policy paper
- Support for regional partners when establishing such regional groups

Policy paper with recommendations on regional skills development groups

The paper will summarise main recommendations on how to start regional skills development initiatives with regional communication, cooperation and coordination groups at the centre.

II. Rationale

This policy paper provides advice on possible roles and functions “regional skills development groups” can play in supporting individuals, companies, and entire regions prepare for the challenges of the future in a timely manner today.

Having the right skills and competencies in the right place at the right time will be the key to mastering personal development pathways in the world of work and employment as well as for the competitiveness of companies and regions.

This policy paper provides insights into scenarios of future developments, highlights the importance of different levels of skills and competences, and encourages regional cooperation to prepare for future developments in a cooperative way.

In addition, hints are formulated how this can work under different regional circumstances.

The main part of the policy paper is a section with a definition and description of those actors and stakeholders that should in any case be included in a regional group, with the respective questions that concern these groups.

Furthermore, detailed instructions are formulated, which should be taken into account when setting up such a group, which functions and roles they can take, including which obstacles and resistances one should take into account.

A list of useful links and references completes the policy paper.

We wish intensive use of these policy paper and recommendations by all concerned regions, groups and responsible persons!

III. Past jobs, jobs nowadays and jobs for the future?

It is obvious that the world of work is undergoing a deep and far-reaching change.

That is not really something new.

Over the past 200 years, there have been many developments that have changed the world of business and society and have revolutionized the world of work and careers.

Steam engines, railway, electricity, automobiles, computers have not only changed economic activities, they have left behind for hundreds of years traditional trades and created new ones.

Occupations such as weavers, typesetters, stoker have disappeared, professions such as locomotive drivers, electricians, car mechanics and programmers have emerged, and this development continues.

What is new and different today is the speed in which change is going on and that all areas of life, economics and occupation are covered by it.

Affected are almost all professions. Carpenters, automotive technicians, toolmakers still exist, but they have completely different ways of working, topics, materials and techniques that they deal with than a few years ago.

In addition, new occupations and fields of activity emerge in ever faster succession, such as Big Data Engineer, Cloud Architect, Social Media Manager, Mobile App Developers, e-commerce trader; these are occupations that did not exist in this form ten years ago.

In addition, there are increasingly areas of activities for which there is no common job title or targeted occupational training, in the IT industry, in the media sector, event management and much more.

Many persons earn their income already as Youtuber, Blogger, Gaming engineer, etc., without this being seen as a "profession".

And what is possible tomorrow or needed, we do not know. Are it Industry 4.0 professions, Smart Industries, smart city jobs, 3-D organic life printer, Artificial

Intelligence Engineers, Hybrid robotic cyborgs or similar? Anyway, a lot of new things will come faster than we imagine.

How we handle these changes, how we approach new situations and demands, decide how individuals can shape their lives, how companies will survive on local, regional, national and global markets, and how regions will develop economically, societally and socially.

This is not only a challenge for every individual in the first choice of vocational training after completing initial school education, this is a task that will take place throughout life.

These are challenges that an individual alone cannot cope with, and this requires support that can only be provided in cooperation of all persons, groups, institutions and organizations involved and concerned.

Occupations that do not yet exist cannot be chosen – but we have to prepare for it.

At European level forecasts for future needs and demands on skills and jobs in labour market exist, like the Cedefop Skills Panorama

<https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en> with key skills trends until 2030 and occupation prospects.

At national level Public employment services provide forecasts and insights into recent and future needs and demands on labour market, skills and qualifications.

All these and additional services and provisions are necessary and helpful for individual orientation, for career guidance, for policy makers and governmental authorities.

But, the most effective way to identify the concrete needed skills and qualifications today and tomorrow is to bring together all competences and insights at regional level.

IV. Relevant Features on VET and Adult Education in Partner Regions - Flashlights

The following presents some relevant features of education systems in partner countries and partner regions, where they are of particular importance for VET and adult education.

Baden-Württemberg

In Baden-Württemberg there are a number of agreements and networks that enable a structure for interactive exchange.

These include: Alliance for Lifelong Learning, Training Pact 2015 – 20120, The Digital Further Education Campus, National Network Further Education, Literacy strategy. 31 regional vocational training networks composed of 1350 regional institutions provide information and advice on local further education. In the Alliance future topics of education such as digitization and Industry 4.0 have been coordinated and implemented.

At national level, the "German Qualifications Framework" is in place, which assigns the qualifications to eight levels and should offer transparency and comparability, including European ones. Until now only formally acquired qualifications are assigned.

Federal State "Bundesland" of the Federal Republic of Germany

Education is responsibility of the Federal State Baden-Württemberg
Inhabitants: about 11,000,000
Area: approx. 36,000 sq. km

Basque

For Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning an elaborated Training Plan 2019 – 2021 exists, which has 6 principles – e.g. "Learning about the future", "Challenges of the 4th Industrial Revolution" and "boosting collaborative learning" - and 9 strategic guidelines which covers the essential questions about skills and qualifications of the future.

Autonomous Community, part of parliamentary-democratic state of Spain

Autonomous responsible for education
Inhabitants: about 2,200,000
Area: approx. 7,200 sq. km

This training plan is based on the future areas of technology developed by the World Economic Forum. The plan is also budgeted in detail for 2019, 2020, 2021.

The Spanish Qualifications Framework is designed to provide transparency, orientation and comparability of formal, non-formal or informal qualifications at eight levels of qualification. A Royal decree for implementation is in preparation.

Jämtland

In Sweden, education is governed by national law, and adult education takes place predominantly at the level of Municipalities in so-called Lärcenters.

The regions have a high level of autonomy, for example for the validation and accreditation of qualifications and competences.

At the level of the Jämtland region an Innovation Strategy 2025 exists, which combines future-oriented social and business development for a changing world. Networks and cooperation are central elements of this strategy.

In Sweden, the National Qualifications Framework has been in force since October 2015, consisting of eight levels, also including qualifications acquired outside of formal education, at work and in daily life.

Province of the decentralized unitary state Sweden

High independence for education based on national laws

Inhabitants: approx. 113,000

Area: approx. 38,000 sq. km

Styria

Austria, like Germany, is a federal republic, but the laws on education are predominantly national law, including those for formal vocational training.

There are shared responsibilities for lifelong learning of adults, where there are national laws as well as initiatives at provincial level "Länder", regional and local.

Federal Province "Bundesland" of the Federal Republic of Austria

Education basically national law, partly competences at the province level

Inhabitants: approx. 1,250,000

Area: approx. 16,500 sq. km

In Styria, Strategies for lifelong learning, lifelong guidance, employment and innovation exist at provincial level. The economic prospects for the future are based primarily on areas of strength called "clusters", in particular mobility, green tech, wood and paper, human technology and the so-called "Silicon alps"

V. Low skilled - how skilled – high skilled - right skilled?

Education, knowledge, skills, competences, qualifications - basically it can never be enough, the more the better ...

But: Who can obtain which education under which conditions? Is it about to achieve the highest possible number of graduations from as many people as possible? Is it about to acquire the needed knowledge and skills for companies and working world in the region? It is about opening up opportunities for people through education, for their personal lives and for profession, regardless of the region, also in Europe and in the world?

There is not one single, no simple answer to these questions. Basically, the aim here is to provide each person in the region with educational and developmental pathways that meet the personal interests, facilities, talents and potentials of a person, and provide employment opportunities in the region and beyond, but also prerequisites for living together in society and in the region. This is easier said than done. The base for this must be laid in initial school education. This is not the main topic here, here the main focus is on VET and adult education.

However, it could also be a task for regional "skills development groups" to send signals and messages to the schools in the region, what is needed in companies and in the workplace today and tomorrow, and how young people can be prepared for it. This task also includes contributions by the regional economy to provide insights into the real world of work in order to give young people early orientation on suitable training and career paths.

Orientation for education and work is a complex topic. The different theories of educational and career choices cannot be discussed in detail here. However, it should be noted that the different personalities, interests, motivations, abilities and talents of young people must be considered. Developing skills and competences is not a simple technocratic process that work by order. This is a very personal development process that should be supported in a sensitive and common understanding.

Not for every person every pathway in education and occupation is possible. But every person has facilities, potentials, talents, wishes and interests too. Finding

these out is an important task for the initial choice of a vocational education or a profession. In many cases, talents and interests only become apparent when people are just in the work process. Continuing education in the workplace or alongside the profession is therefore at least as important as initial vocational training.

That should happen on various levels of education. For top quality and competitiveness in a region, of course, top qualifications are crucial. These are needed for research and development as well as for the implementation of high-tech production processes, business foundations and start-ups. But just as important are qualifications that are needed at the executive level. Specialists and skilled workers in the production, for activities in service occupations, in health and care, in the tourism, in logistic and delivery, trade, in cleaning occupations, etc. etc.

The simple distinction "low skilled - high skilled", as measured by the degree of completion, the duration of education and training, at the levels of ISCED or similar measurements is not sufficient, often even misleading.

It is not only about "what" is learned, but "how" is learned, the degree of quality and performance achieved with a course of education. And it depends on whether what you have learned matches what you want to apply. So it is about "right skills," both in terms of a person's abilities, and in terms of what's going on in business and in personal life needed in the workplace in the region.

The diversity of skills and qualifications in a region, in a company can be seen as a "chain" or a "network". The different kinds of competences and qualifications at different levels depend on each other. If essential parts are missing, independent of the level, the overall performance decreases, so all levels of competences and qualifications have to be promoted qualitatively.

This should not be seen as a static issue, but as a dynamic, continuous process. Lifelong learning should not be understood as pressure, but as a beneficial development process. Receiving and promoting curiosity, enjoyment of results and personal performance in the region will increase the number of people working with high quality in the region.

The development in economy, technology and society will show: We need all! No competence, no potential in the region should be lost. This includes the social component, which also plays an important role for social cohesion in the region

VI. Regional skills development group

The proposal is to establish Regional Skills Development Groups, as an instrument and an interactive platform to bring together and evaluate all existing information and insights on requirements and needs for knowledge, skills, competences for the world of work, for business, today and tomorrow.

The group should also support to transfer findings and insights concerning future needs into action, develop those skills, and use for added value in the region.

Some preliminary questions have to be clarified:

- How do we define the "region" for which the group should work?
- What does the term "skills" include?
- How should the contribution to "development" be made?
- How should the group be set up, put together, take effect?

These are seemingly "simple" questions, but they contain complex issues.

Essential elements of the partner regions in the Bridge+ project are described in the "Regions-Flashlights" chapter, they show how different regions can be defined and look out.

The aim is to provide recommendations for regions with very different characteristics.

But, all of these regions have the same challenge in principle: to prepare individuals, employees, employers, organizations in education, social partners, administration etc. for an uncertain future, that certainly will come.

To involve concerned stakeholder in a common process of interaction, to collect information, opinions, recognitions concerning skills needed in upcoming future out from different points of view will improve the common picture what is necessary to do for a target-orientated preparation in skills development in the region.

In particular, the following preliminary questions should be clarified regarding the establishment of regional skills development groups:

To: Definition "Region"

- Which area includes the region for which the group should be established?
- Which political and administrative structures, including regarding skills development, the region has
- Which autonomous and responsible areas of action for education exist in the region?

To: Term "skills"

- What kinds of skills do we mean?
- Basic, general, occupational-professional, social, personal?
- Is formal as well as non-formal and informal learning covered?

To: "Development"

- What opportunities for self-development of skills exist in the region?
- Who can influence and how?
- What support and support do you need from higher-level bodies at national level?

To: Establishment of the group

- Who defines the overall goal, aims and objectives, takes the initiative, invites for membership?
- Which persons, institutions, partners should participate in the group?
- In what way can the group be effective through Communication, Cooperation, Coordination?

The following sections are intended to give some advice on how to address these issues. The sequence is based on the possible timing of the preparation and the establishment of a regional skills development group.

First considerations:

Which goal for the group should you suggest

e.g. like this:

Bring together and evaluate all existing - and maybe not yet existing - information and insights on requirements and needs for knowledge, skills, competences for the world of work, for business, today and tomorrow

Create an innovative approach to prepare for future challenges in the region and involve as many people and institutions as possible

Create a common understanding of challenges and pathways in the region to develop the skills and competencies individuals, employees and employers in the region need to master the future

Important: To bring in these proposals as an inspiration, to discuss, to adapt and to search for partners who want to support these ideas

Before engaging people in the region to get involved, it's important to get an overview of what initiatives and approaches in skills development already happen in the region

Which strategies, programs, projects exist in the region?

Which groups and networks in education, economy and society are there on this topic?

Which organizations, companies and individuals are particularly active here?

Important: It can be assumed that there are approaches for that topic in most of the regions. The chapter "Regions - Flashlights" gives examples from the partner regions. These approaches can be important levers for further development. If they are not taken into consideration, resistance is usually to be expected.

Which persons and institutions should be addressed in the region?

Anyhow, the following should be considered:

Political actors

- Who is responsible for education and economic development in the region?
- Who is particularly active and interested in this topic or could it be?
- Who has special influence in crucial fields of education and business?
- Who is personally recognized, regardless of party affiliation?
- Who is looking for an attractive topic for his development in the region?

Social partner organizations

- Who is responsible for education in employers and employee organizations?
- How deal social partner organizations with the topic's skills for tomorrow
- Which offers provide social partner organizations in VET, in guidance etc.?

Companies

- Who is on the board or in human resources of regional companies responsible for personnel, recruiting, training and particularly active?
- Are there any workgroups, cross-company networks, business associations or clusters that are particularly concerned with education requirements of the future?
- Which industries or economic sectors are particularly challenged in the region to find qualified staff?

Labour market services

Public Employment Services PES have good background on data and statistics concerning the needs and demands of the current labour market in the region, they should have also an overview about trends and perspectives in the closer future. That implicates that PES must be integrated into such a regional group, also by the reason that PES will be an important actor for implementing results and outcomes of the group work into the regional development

Education and Training providers

Who are the key player in the region concerning innovative activities in the sector of education and training E&T, including Higher Education, Research and Development?

Who have the most possible acceptance in different areas of E&T – all relevant sectors of Lifelong Learning, of course especially stakeholder in VET, but, not only...

Who could have influence in change management processes in E&T in the region?

Important: you should also consider, who should not be “forgotten”, that could be a reason for heavy obstacles

Guidance services

A principle of guidance should always be to look in the future and support individuals to find sustainable perspectives for life, profession, including necessary pathways in E&T.

Who in the region has innovative and far reaching approaches in guidance and counselling?

Who has the most powerful resource to support implementation processes for future-orientated skills development?

Individuals

All activities on skills development can only become successful if persons, individuals are willing and able for personal processes of learning, training. Personal development.

To involve “The Voice of Users” into the process of regional skills development from the very beginning will be a success factor in the process.

How to do that should be a topic for common discussion within the upcoming group – face to face interviews, online surveys, focus groups etc.

Important: There should be created a climate of common development with an approach of positive future perspectives, support human beings for meaningful personal pathways into the individual,

societal and economic future – avoid an atmosphere of pressure or fear because such moods will always contribute to negative trends.

Additional remark:

Although the target is to create a “Regional skills development group”, try to involve persons and institutions with a broad European and International view – this must be an element of added value to look beyond the borders, to find interesting practice of future orientated skills developments in other European regions or in the world.

Establishment and working principles of the group

Crucial questions:

Who should take the initiative for invitation to participate in such a group?

Possible options:

Top down

Bottom up

“mixed strategy”

The choice of procedure depends on the “culture of cooperation” in the region, but it is essential to be considered what? How? Who?

It could be done by an accepted “Leader” or a composed “steering group”, also depending on regional circumstances

VII. Communication, Cooperation, Coordination

In most regions, there will already be working groups, platforms, committees, bodies, organizations, companies or business associations and several individuals dealing with the topic of skills for the future. Which areas and which stakeholders that can be and which questions they move is described in detail in chapter “Regional skills development group”.

The extent of cooperation and co-ordination can be very different in regions. It depends on many factors, on historical, traditional, cultural, social conditions as well as on political frameworks and actors.

Before setting up a new group, it is useful to analyze the existing structure and explore possibilities, to address functioning existing groups, to be interested in the topic, to network with each other and to address regional skills development in a new, innovative way.

In any case, it should be considered in advance what form and intensity the mode of action of a further developed or new group should have.

There are basically three central levels of intensity of operation:

Principles of CoCoCo



Source: ELGPN

It may make sense to start with a more communicatively oriented way of working to build mutual trust, to make the meaningfulness of the structured exchange of experiences tangible and visible (**Communication**).

From this, first joint actions can be deduced, and effects can be achieved (**Cooperation**).

If there is common acceptance, there is an overall understanding of regional development concerning future skills, and an institution or person is willing and able to take leadership, then this can give rise to **Coordination**.

VIII. Possible roles of regional skills development groups

(Source: ELGPN, added and adapted)

What could be the roles of regional skills development groups?

Five roles can be distinguished in principle; these need to be clarified, as they are not exclusive, and a group could undertake more than only one role.

The five are:

Dialogue: a platform where actors and stakeholders meet to discuss and exchange information and viewpoints, and whose main outcome is creation of a common understanding and voluntary initiative of activities.

Consultation: a body set up primarily to act as a reactive kind of “sounding board” for government initiatives and policies

Research and exploration: Collect data from regional, national, international sources, explore and analyze future prognoses concerning working life, needed skills and qualifications

Policy development: a proactive group to promote lifelong guidance through concrete policy proposals and initiatives.

Systems development: a place for developing the full range of activities with Communication, Cooperation, Coordination and implementing concrete, practically-oriented issues for skills development for the region and for the near and far future.

IX. Remarks to Future Skills and Competences

In order to gain an overview of the framework in which a group could work on the subject of "skills", it is helpful to study both concerned European and international sources as well as to search for sources at national and regional level, which could be indications for the search to offer new.

An innovative "regional skills development group" moves in a challenging balance between requirements today and in the near and far future.

Creating skills and competencies always requires time. So you have to look far into the future to set the right actions for tomorrow today, for a future; we do not know yet.

On the other hand, individuals and businesses legitimately expect to acquire skills and competencies that offer opportunities and opportunities to find work today, to be competitive, and to lay the foundations for good further development in economic, social and societal development.

The faster changes take place and the more uncertain future developments are, the more important it is to orientate oneself on what will remain in any case.

In addition to the basic educational skills, these are undoubtedly the ability to navigate complex and rapidly changing environments, to know about one's own abilities, strengths, potentials and interests, as well as the ability to make decisions about one's own learning, life and career paths and to implement them.

These skills are summarized under the term "career management skills" and provide a foundation for all other, content, professional, technical, occupational skills and competencies.

X. Excursus: Career Management Skills CMS

(Source: Erasmus+ Pass2Work, 2018)

A range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals (and groups) to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions. Career management skills are the life, learning, training and employment skills which people need to develop and manage their careers effectively.

CMS consist of a bundle of competences, composed of:

Ability for self-reflection

thinking about your own feelings and behaviour, and reflect about the reasons that could be behind them, and to make personal conclusions for further personal activities and decisions

Recognition of own skills and competences and interests;

awareness and ability for looking into your own personal potentials, to discover, develop and to use personal strengths and to consider limits and needs in relation to individual plans for education, profession and life

Ability for decision making; dealing and valuing of data and information;

Consider prerequisites for making good decisions, collecting and assessing relevant data and information, valuing, thinking in alternatives, excluding, conscious decision

Ability to define personal objectives and follow them

Set ambitious and realistic personal goals, find ways to pursue them, knowledge of support systems and the ability to use them, ability to stand up to obstacles, and be happy *about progress and motivation*

XI. Sources and Links to “Skills” at European, worldwide – and at regional level

European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8299-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

Cedefop Skills Panorama

<https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en>

OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030

<http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/>

World Economic Forum

<https://www.humanresourcesonline.net/world-economic-forum-on-the-top-10-skills-and-workforce-strategies-in-2020/>

Example from **Baden-Württemberg**

<https://nextskills.org/future-skills-report-2019/>

Example of **Basque**

<https://basquetalentobservatory.bizkaiatalent.eus/visual/public/open#/skill>

Example of **Jämtland**

https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1544782780.pdf

Example from **Styria**

<https://www.dieindustrie.at/bildungsanforderungen/>

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