

6.2 NEARVET Policy Guidance Recommendations

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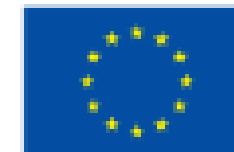
Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

This recommendations have been authored by Elena Grilli, MetropolisNet EEIG, and validated by the partnership. they are based on the processes, outcomes and input coming from the Consortium members, the transnational and National Communities of Practice, the NEARVET conceptual and methodological outcomes.

Further information about the project is available at: <https://nearvet.projectlibrary.eu/>



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Index

Introduction and context

Process and goals

Recommendations for European Policy-Level engagement on Applied research in VET

Recommendations for Practitioners (VET Educators & Trainers)

Recommendations for Employers and Company Representatives

Conclusions and next steps for policy and practice

Introduction and context of the NEARVET recommendations

NEARVET places itself within the Erasmus +, Forward looking Cooperation Projects (FLCP) Call for Proposals 2022 the Call for Proposals from the EACEA¹ which, among the others, states that "a feature of VET applied research is the close link between research and efforts to improve VET pedagogy. These endeavours can lead to innovative thinking, new teaching practices and training products, and ultimately more creative graduates". It adds "By being actively engaged in applied research with local companies, VET providers become co-creators of local innovation eco-systems. They do so by contributing to the generation of new and improved products, services and processes, but also through the supply of skilled, innovative and entrepreneurial VET graduates."

The NEARVET concept was developed through seeking to address a question that is often left unaddressed: **'if applied research in VET is critical - who are the applied researchers?'**. Starting from its Methodological approach, NEARVET has been seeking to uncover and address the needs of practitioners and company representatives through an inquiry and research program, and through building a capacity building concept and offer which could be relevant, flexible, entailing their direct action, involvement and recognition as primary actors for applied research to happen in VET.

To do so, NEARVET has deliberately and purposely used a **Communities of Practice (CoPs) approach**, on the transnational and National level, which have been designed and implemented has the inner machinery and engine for stimulating co-development, involvement, share of knowledge and, ultimately, undertaking of applied research and innovation among VET and other organisations, and in particular SMEs.

¹ ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PI-FORWARD-LOT2 (25th November 2021)

Process and goals

Process

During the implementation process, the country-base partnerships and respective Communities of Practice (CoPs) faced similar challenges, whereas specific needs, gaps and concerns could be further specified in each contexts. The European approach is key for fostering change.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of these recommendations is to foster long-term sustainable practices, capacity-building, and innovation. Therefore, NEARVET recommendations seek to identify concrete policy and practice actions and plans which can concretely be used, in the short and the medium term, to progress Applied Research concepts and initiatives as started through NEARVET.

Context and topics addressed

The NEARVET recommendations drafted by the partnership are based on the outcomes and results of the project, and are aligned with the methodological approach, goals, and specific target groups identified in the project.

The recommendations touch important themes around applied research in Europe from the peculiar perspective of VET (Vocational Education and Training).

Recommendations for European Policy-Level Engagement on Applied Research in VET



Invest in developing and specifying a peculiar methodological approach for Applied research in VET

Fostering Applied research in VET calls for researching upon peculiar approaches, conditions and shared understanding among the European VET community



Raise awareness and develop a "VET-owned" voice on Applied Research

Avoid automatically adopting the same view and approach of the university and/or big industry systems, detecting and valuing the competences and knowledge already present in the systems, the emerging needs and building answers for the "VET applied researchers"



Provide relevant opportunities for systemic exchange and cooperation

Through co-design and co-development of capacity building opportunities to effectively respond to the needs and challenges faced in VET

To Whom: Policy makers, VET organisations and business representatives, programme designers, fund managers

Rationale: NEARVET was conceived and carried out through a peculiar methodological approach, which has been further developed and adopted as basis within this project. This fosters sustainable cooperation among the different actors and stakeholders relevant in VET through Communities of Practice. The NEARVET methodological concept evidenced and the project development shows that Applied research takes place in a variety of contexts, initiated by a number of actors and answers to the interests of different groups/stakeholders. The European VET communities need to build awareness of their specific needs and to pave an own way – distinct from Higher education and universities – which is relevant to their excellences, needs and future horizons.





The Digital Hub

The Digital Hub offers a framework for practitioners involved in progressing applied research in VET to access opportunities, to exchange and cooperate on applied research project ideas, partners search, knowledge exchange and innovation transfer.

It includes Digital and interactive learning material and resources (MOOC), a Digital CoP Space and an Open Applied Research Resources Space.

[Go to the NEARVET Digital Hub](#)



Network foundation

NEARVET promoted various actions to progress and stimulate a network approach to Applied Research, among which the transnational and National Communities of Practice; Applied Research Seminars; Applied Research contests open to business, VET organisations and individual teachers and students. A Memorandum of Understanding has been undersigned by partners and stakeholders to progress the NEARVET concept further.

[Check in the Open AR Resources Space](#)



Methodological Concept

The NEARVET Methodological Concept was designed and developed through andragogical philosophies and user-led and user-validated methods and techniques.

It provides insights, guidance, reflection and shared understanding for the wider European VET community of applied research in VET.

[Check on the NEARVET Concept](#)

Shift Focus to Empower Applied Researchers in VET

Prioritize Empowerment

Policymakers and VET organisations should prioritize empowering applied researchers (VET educators, trainers, and industry professionals) to become active agents of change.

1

2

Build Capacity

Build capacity-building structures for educators and trainers to take on research roles, providing both professional recognition and resources to sustain their involvement in research that directly improves pedagogy and training outcomes.

3

Redefine Applied Research

Move beyond traditional definitions of "what is applied research" to fostering an environment where who conducts applied research and how they are supported becomes the primary focus.

To Whom: VET centres, policy makers, funding bodies, company representatives

Rationale: Empowering practitioners and company representatives as applied researchers strengthens the link between VET and real-world industry needs. By supporting those closest to the challenges, we can ensure that research outputs are grounded in practical application.





Competence framework

Developed through the Blooms taxonomy and validated within the NEARVET community, the Competence framework set the specific range of competences and respective learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) recognized as key to plan and incorporate applied research across VET, starting from a perspective of individual and organisational empowerment.

[Check the NEARVET Competence framework](#)



Understanding the needs

An in depth action research was used to determine the prerequisites to implement Applied Research in VET, with the goal to obtain a comprehensive understanding from the perspectives of those who are involved in VET, either from a researcher and a practitioner's viewpoint. One specific focus was to identify the high-level skills required by VET professionals to conduct and supervise applied research projects.

[Check the Report on Attention Areas](#)



Blueprint

The Blueprint takes into account the NEARVET focus on the development of a newly-defined and emerging 'community of applied researchers in VET', and outlines essential components to contextualise the evolution of these 'change agents' who have the potential to be an innovative force in the 'step up' of vocational education and training (VET) within a European context.

[Check the NEARVET Blueprint](#)

Adapt Applied Research to a Fast-Changing Labour Market

1

Continuous Adaptation

Adapt applied research to evolving labour market needs

2

Technological Advancements

Address shifts driven by new technologies

3

Changing Job Roles

Respond to evolving industry trends and job requirements

4

Sector-Specific Approaches

Promote flexibility in research methods and result integration

To Whom: VET institutions, policy makers, sector organisations, companies, SMEs

Rationale: Applied research must stay relevant to the demands of the industry. Ensuring that VET research is adaptable will enable institutions to support the development of skilled practitioners, staff and graduates who are prepared for emerging challenges in the workplace.



Sustain and Scale Communities of Practice for Innovation in VET

Foster Sustainable CoPs

Establish CoP as central to continuous professional development and innovation within VET

Formalize Structures

Ensure long-term support by formalizing and structuring CoPs

Targeted Funding

Provide targeted funding and advocacy efforts to institutionalize CoPs as part of mainstream VET activities

To Whom: VET centres, policy makers, funding bodies, company representatives

Rationale: CoPs bridge the gap between education and industry, creating spaces where practitioners can share knowledge, collaborate on research, and solve real-world problems in an integrated manner. This can enhance both the relevance and the impact of applied research in VET.





Communities of Practice

Transnational and National Communities of Practice have been the engine to develop a capacity building concept, co-develop, test and validate the learning resources needed for fostering Applied Research in VET.

[Check the NEARVET CoPs](#)

Ensuring that teaching resources remain relevant in a context of rapid technological change and professional development needs

Create Dynamic Learning Resources

Institutions should focus on creating dynamic learning resources that are adaptable to the continuous changes in both the labour market and educational technology. This includes integrating digital platforms and innovative pedagogical approaches into the development of VET curricula.

Encourage

Collaboration

Encourage collaboration between VET centres, SMEs, and tech companies to ensure learning resources are future-proofed, relevant, and responsive to the shifting landscape of skills and employment demands.

To Whom: VET providers, policymakers, businesses, education professionals

Rationale: As industries evolve, so must the tools and resources used to train the workforce. By fostering innovation in learning materials and teaching methods, VET systems can better align with the needs of the labour market and equip learners with the skills to succeed.



Recommendations for Practitioners (VET Educators & Trainers)

1

Active Participation in Research and Co-Development

Practitioners should take an active role in co-developing research projects with industry partners and policymakers, focusing on the practical implementation of findings to improve teaching and training practices.

2

Integrate Research into Professional Development

Encourage VET educators to integrate applied research projects into their professional development and teaching methods to foster a research-driven learning environment.

3

Integration of Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) and Project-Based Approaches

VET educators should incorporate challenge-based learning and project-based learning into their curricula, emphasizing real-world problems that require collaborative problem-solving and innovation.

4

Facilitate Critical Thinking and Entrepreneurial Skills

By involving learners in real-world challenges, educators will facilitate the development of critical thinking and entrepreneurial skills that are essential for the modern workforce.



Recommendations for Employers and Company Representatives

Invest in Collaborative Research with VET Institutions

- Collaborate with VET providers on applied research projects
- Identify skill gaps and areas for innovation in the workforce
- Establish partnerships to co-create aligned training programs

Promote CoPs as Platforms for Knowledge Exchange

- Actively engage in Communities of Practice (CoPs) alongside VET organisations
- Support continuous professional development and innovation
- Share best practices, discuss challenges, and explore new solutions



Conclusion and Next Steps for Policy and Practice

The recommendations for policy and practice derived from the NEARVET project should be seen as a starting point for future initiatives to strengthen applied research in VET across Europe. Through targeted efforts in empowering applied researchers, adapting to fast-changing labour market needs, and fostering Communities of Practice, NEARVET aims to contribute to fostering strong and resilient European VET communities, able to drive innovation within themselves.

By focusing on co-development, sustainability, and capacity-building, these recommendations provide a comprehensive framework for further enhancing the role of VET in driving applied research, innovation, and continuous professional development. Implementing these measures can help bridge the gap between education and industry, ensuring that VET is both responsive and forward-thinking.

1

Empower Researchers

Support VET educators as active agents of change

2

Adapt to Market

Ensure VET research aligns with industry needs

3

Foster CoPs

Sustain Communities of Practice for innovation



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