European Trade Union Committee for Education

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ETUCE Position Paper

ETUCE's views on the upcoming Vocational Education and Training (VET) Strategy of the European Commission

After consultation with ETUCE Committee and member organisations, adopted by ETUCE Committee on 25-26 November 2025

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), representing 121 teacher trade unions across Europe and more than 4.9 million teachers and education personnel in all education sectors, welcomes the "*Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030*" presented by the Danish Presidency and co-drafted with the European Commission and European social partners. While it places VET in a key role for answering to green and digital transitions, demographic changes, skills shortages, and regional inequalities, it places also social dialogue with trade unions and VET teachers in an essential position.

The Union of Skills announced a new VET Strategy of the European Commission as an addition to the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (2020), Osnabruck Declaration (2020) and Herning Declaration (2025).

Following strategic discussion with ETUCE members on 22 September 2025, ETUCE and its member organisations reaffirm that high-quality, inclusive, publicly funded initial VET systems, supported by a valued and well-resourced VET teaching profession, are the foundation for delivering the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Education Area, and a socially just green and digital transition. We stand ready to work with European institutions, CEDEFOP, European Training Foundation, Member States, other social partners, to strengthen VET systems across Europe.

ETUCE welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop a renewed EU Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and it asks that such strategy shall focus on the following issues:

European Trade Union Committee for Education | John MacGabhann, President | Jelmer Evers, European Director
Blvd Bischoffsheim 15 – B-1000 Brussels | secretariat@etuce.org | www.etuce.org

1. Initial vocational education and training (VET) plays a critical role in Europe's social, economic, democratic, and environmental future. VET is not only about skills for labour-market needs and it is not only about competitiveness as the Union of Skills see it: VET empowers learners to acquire broad and future-proof knowledge, competences and skills, supports fair and sustainable transitions to life and high-quality employment, and contributes to the development of active, informed citizens. Therefore, the VET Strategy must balance economic needs with the broader societal mission of education, and ensure that initial VET is governed as a public good and a shared responsibility, not merely as an instrument for labour-market pressure or short-term skills gaps.

2. The EU VET Strategy must place education quality, professional standards, public investment, and democratic social dialogue at its core. The new EU VET Strategy must ensure that its recommendations to Member States mean continuation of the implementation of recently adopted EU VET strategies with **stronger involvement of education sector trade unions**. Reforms need time and effective collaboration with the social partners, including the trade unions of teachers in the VET sector. ETUCE affiliates report that involvement in VET policy varies greatly across Europe. In many countries, consultation is ad-hoc, late, or symbolic, and union input does not meaningfully shape reforms. Lack of involvement of teachers' trade unions in VET policy development and implementation risks the creation of technocratic reforms detached from school realities, overburdening teachers without necessary resources, weakened professional autonomy, and lower quality and inclusion. Meaningful social dialogue should also be guaranteed at institutional level, ensuring that VET teachers are involved in curriculum development, evaluation and local implementation processes. Where unions are included early and systematically, policies are more aligned with real needs and more effective to implement. Therefore, social dialogue mechanisms in designing and implementing the new VET Strategy must be embedded and enforceable at EU and national level. The European Commission should demand the Member States to update their National Implementation Plans based on meaningful cooperation with the trade unions, especially with the trade unions of teachers.

3. Education trade unions stress that VET reforms must remain grounded in pedagogical principles and research-based practice, not temporary market trends or purely technological fixes. The new VET Strategy should support that initial VET serves as

public good and the **right to quality education for all** by preparing the students for life and for quality jobs. Initial VET needs to strengthen democracy, equality, and social cohesion, beyond answering to labour-market needs. IVET curriculum should be based on broad capabilities, not just narrow occupational skills. We demand strong general education component in all IVET programmes to support knowledge and skills for the green and digital transitions, and nurture critical thinking, civic responsibility, cultural understanding, democratic values. It is important to reduce underachievement of VET students in basic skills, and to improve their key competences, especially language learning and soft skills which are essential also for life and jobs.

4. According to CEDEFOP, only 18% of VET teachers believe that their profession is valued. For one third of VET teachers their profession was not the first choice. On average VET teachers receive 11% less salary than other tertiary educated professionals, while only 40% of VET teachers are satisfied with their jobs. Therefore, initial VET is not only about attractiveness of the learners but about making each VET institute a high-quality learning and working environment for the students and teachers. VET sector should be made equally attractive for the teachers. The new VET Strategy needs to strengthen the commitments of the Herning Declaration of EU ministers on VET teachers, namely : "*Address shortages of teachers and trainers in VET by making the profession more attractive by ensuring their professional autonomy, and by continuing to invest in their initial pedagogical qualifications and professional development and in supportive working conditions and environments, including school leadership*". The European Commission should further support these essential commitments of the Member States by reminding them to ensure their implementation with effective social dialogue with the teachers' trade unions.

5. The attractiveness of the VET teaching profession is central to VET quality. To make the VET teaching profession attractive and sustainable, ETUCE insists on competitive and equitable pay, commensurate with general education and relevant industry sectors; stable employment with limitation of precarious contracts; manageable workloads; meaningful time for quality and free CPD during working hours; smaller class / group sizes in practical/workshop learning; and infrastructures and conditions that support safe, healthy and well-resourced teaching. Given the rising complexity in VET (dual systems, apprenticeship supervision, work-based learning), working conditions must reflect this. As the Union of Skills emphasises digital and green

transitions, ETUCE demands that VET teachers receive time, training and support to embed these transitions in their pedagogy. The VET Strategy should also promote strong pathways into vocational teacher education, ensuring high-quality initial and continuing training and closer cooperation between schools, teacher education institutions, and workplace. ETUCE demands structured induction and mentoring for new VET teachers, clear career paths, and recognition of dual-expertise (pedagogical and industry). Teachers must be recognised as professionals contributing to the development of educational quality and inclusion. VET policy and practice should be grounded in research-based teacher education and support for practice-oriented research involving VET teachers.

6. ETUCE demands that VET teaching be accorded the same status, recognition and professional rights as general education teaching. This includes protecting pedagogical autonomy, ensuring high-quality initial teacher education and continuous professional development, and safeguarding qualification standards so that VET teachers cannot be replaced by technology or unqualified personnel. Teacher shortage can only be reduced with attractive salaries and decent working conditions for all VET teachers. Recent European Commission report also underlined that even though several professionals would like to be teachers, after the necessary pedagogical training they drop-out quickly from the teaching profession. Reducing shortages of the teaching profession in VET this way is not a solution until competitive pay of VET teachers at parity with relevant industry professions is guranteed.

7. ETUCE also cannot accept lowering qualification requirements and teaching standards as a solution to reduce teacher shortage in the VET sector. Instead, effective support to novice teachers concerning access to housing, career development possibilities within the education sector, and effective mentoring system need to be further discussed with the education trade unions. We also ask the European Commission to develop a separate strategy to VET teachers of initial VET institutes and to company-based VET trainers as their status and qualification requirements are different.

8. ETUCE reiterates the need for sustained public funding as the foundation for excellence in VET. This means strong investment in modern, well-equipped VET institutions and workshops, dedicated funding for staff, infrastructure, and continuous quality improvement. It is essential to ensure public investment to allow

VET teachers to participate in mobility programmes and continuous professional development, especially in companies, where they can the best update their professional knowledge. EU countries should also ensure that all VET students have quality apprenticeships with quality learning outcomes, fair pay and recent working conditions ensured by the employers, and that the apprenticeships are quality assured and monitored with the involvement of VET teachers.

In conclusions, ETUCE calls for the EU VET Strategy to:

- Treat VET as a public good serving both society and individuals, not only companies.
- Guarantee meaningful social dialogue with education trade unions at all levels.
- Ensure sustained public investment in VET institutions, staff, and equipment.
- Prioritise VET teachers' attractiveness, pay, conditions, autonomy, and professional development.
- Maintain a strong general education foundation in VET curricula.