**Paper 8.**

**Abstract:**

While vocational education and training (VET) per se cannot solve the economic and social challenges currently facing Europe, it helps create the necessary conditions for growth, employment and welfare in a longer term perspective. Its excellence and inclusivity are important building blocks in the EU’s effort to realise the current European Commission agenda and advance towards the Europe 2020 goals. Unemployment is still high but there are also countries and sectors that face skills shortages. Employers report a lack of technical and soft skills as well as job readiness of applicants. In these respects, the potential of VET, particularly apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning, is now commonly acknowledged. Learning outcomes-based qualifications frameworks could be used more actively to visualize opportunities and pathways. The European tools that focus on outcomes of learning can play a key role. By making people’s knowledge, skills competences and qualifications more easily understood, compared, and recognised, they can enable individual and flexible lifelong learning pathways and become engines of employability promoting mobility across sectors and borders. Ensuring that qualifications people acquire through labour market measures or youth guarantees are included in the national qualifications framework or can be validated and certified will make these measures sustainable. To help ensure that the commonly developed European tools and principles meet users’ needs in the best possible way, Cedefop supports the efforts to realize consistent use of the learning outcomes approach and help link them better. Making the tools easier to use and more interactive should do more than support progression and career opportunities within own and other EU countries; accompanied by welltargeted information and guidance, it can also help integrate people from countries outside the EU. In a landscape of unprecedented global competition, fast-changing technology, global regulatory standards, increasingly mobile populations, and the constant generation of new jobs and skills sets, the entry of new elements into VET – new forms of VET provision and qualification – comes as no surprise as it is no longer the exclusive territory of national systems. New players have come into the field – international sectoral bodies, multilateral agencies, multinational companies – changing the way skills are delivered, acquired and assessed. The importance of promoting responsive VET systems able to strengthen the international competitiveness of the labour force, as highlighted in the Riga conclusions, requires an increased focus on quality.