

Giving VETNET a shape – Giving VET research a profile in EERA.

September 20, 2007, VETNET Forum at ECER in Gent

Martin Mulder, Speaking notes

Distinguished colleagues and friends.

Thanks Pekka for the preparation of this Forum, and for standing in for David.

Ten years of VETNET. I am starting to feel old.

Dear friends. Let me go back to the years before 1997, the pre-pre-history of VETNET, if you still can remember.

I am in the business of VET research from the middle of the 80s. And when I started I missed a community of HRD and VET researchers in Europe. It hardly existed.

When I concluded a major study on corporate training in the Netherlands with colleagues in 1988, an international conference was organized at the University of Twente. It was followed up by an international conference some years later. And then colleagues began to speak about a new association, which became Irnetd, which had its third conference in Milan. It was work at the grassroots level: organizing 3 international conferences was a lot of work. However, it appeared that a separate association was not really sustainable. With the creation of EERA which adopted a network strategy, I saw an opportunity to have a sustainable framework.

I started to ask friends from previous conferences to form a board and I submitted the proposal to create VETNET to the EERA executive council. It was exciting, since we were not sure of its success. However, the proposal was well received and because of our size, we had a large part in the ECER program, we were regarded as an active network,

In fact VETNET was the 2nd approved network within EERA. Being a strong network, I see that as an acknowledgement of our position in educational research, and colleagues and I have had frequent positive remarks about the network, also from renown scholars in educational

research. I want to be modest here: all this was made possible because of the very many contributions of many of you.

What is VETNET? I see it as a platform for junior and senior researchers who do local, national, European, and global research; practical, policy oriented and academic research; career driven and curiosity driven research. It is a steady meeting place for partners in EU projects.

VETNET also established various more or less intensive relationships with key organisations like UNESCO, IVERA, and others. We have to acknowledge the work of those which went into that as well.

Let me then give some reflections on the future of VETNET.

It is my strong belief that network convenors should have a stronger voice and a better position in EERA: after all, they maintain the core of the work of the conference program.

I also experience the problem of parity of esteem in educational research. Our field of research is relatively young. We are an integral part of EERA, but ... There are concerns about the quality of VET research. This is measured by publications in ISI journals, and their impact. In Science and Nature, the impact can be 30. In social sciences the average impact of ISI journals is around 2. The maximum impact of journals in education and educational research is also around 2, and the minimum around 0.01.

There is a lot of pressure in Universities regarding research quality and output, and it still increases. It also has negative side effects, for example the research assessment in the UK which leads to postponing contributions from non-UK authors. The need for A-publications (the best journals within the discipline), and citations. Some even speak about ISI-terror. But it is the reality, we are living with it.

No VET research journal is in the ISI list. This needs to change. But will a VET research journal achieve this? Maybe. It takes a long time. The main difficulty is that the VET journal needs citations in ISI journals. How to achieve that in a couple of years? I appreciate the idea of an own VETNET journal. There is plenty of space for all of us.

With the European Journal of Vocational Training I am working on ISI listing, but I cannot guarantee success. I have presented the journal policy to raise its academic status in the plenary Governing Board of Cedefop (consisting of representatives of governmental, employer's and employee organizations of all member states of the EU, representatives of the commission and observers) twice now, and it was well received. Also the Directorate of Cedefop supports the policy to further develop the EJVT into an academically independent journal listed in ISI.

The I would like to share a couple of ideas for the coming years. Let me start with a question. Can VETNET contribute to answer the question of what is World Class Vocational Education? What are the fundamental principles? The commonplaces if you will. Can the VETNET community contribute to theory - policy debate - development strategies - and persuasive research results? Can it produce a recommendations on evidence-based quality vocational education research? The challenges are enormous from what is saw in recent years in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the problems much the same.

Would it also be interesting to create a network of PhD students in VET Research? Could VETNET top researchers provide VET research training at ECER conferences? I think we should think more about the young researchers, because they are the future.

Can VETNET also further develop the lateral links with other networks within EERA? Maybe there are more opportunities than used at the moment.

Finally - I would like to stress the importance of maintaining this platform for cooperative learning about VET research based on a mixture of contributions, be it academic research, policy-driven applied research, practice oriented case studies, or theoretical contributions. They all deserve a place in VETNET.

To conclude, thank you all again for your collective efforts (colleague conveners, board members, programs chairs, presenters, sessions chairs, discussants and participants) and the energy that you have put in making VETNET a sustained success - thank you. I am very happy with it.