Centres of Vocational Excellence

Implementing vocational excellence approaches features prominently in the overall EU policy agenda for skills and for Vocational Education and Training (VET). The European Skills Agenda, the European Education Area, the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET, as well as the Osnabrück Declaration, all include very clear references to Vocational Excellence as a driving force for reforms in the VET sector.

The initiative on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) aims to respond to this policy priority supporting reforms in the VET sector, ensuring high quality skills and competences that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities, meeting the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy. The CoVE initiative also supports the implementation of the European Green Deal, the new Digital Strategy, the Communication on attracting Skills and Talent, and the new Industrial and SME Strategies, as skills are key to their success.

CoVEs operate in a given local context, creating skills ecosystems for innovation, regional development, and social inclusion, while working with CoVEs in other countries through international collaborative networks. They establish a bottom-up approach to vocational excellence involving a wide range of local stakeholders enabling VET institutions to rapidly adapt skills provision to evolving economic and social needs.

They provide opportunities for initial training of young people as well as the continuing up-skilling and re-skilling of adults, through flexible and timely offer of training that meets the needs of a dynamic labour market, in the context of the green and digital transitions. They act as catalysts for local business development and innovation, by working closely with companies (in particular SMEs) on applied research projects, creating knowledge and innovation hubs, as well as supporting entrepreneurial initiatives of their learners.

The networks aim for "upward convergence" of VET excellence. They will be open for the involvement of countries with well-developed vocational excellence systems, as well as those in the process of developing similar approaches, aimed at exploring the full potential of VET institutions to play a proactive role in support of growth and innovation.

This initiative introduces a "European dimension" to Vocational Excellence by supporting the implementation of EU VET policy and actions agreed with member states, social partners and VET providers.

The concept of Vocational Excellence proposed here is characterised by a holistic learner centred approach in which VET:

- Is an integrated part of skills ecosystems, contributing to regional development, innovation, smart specialisation and clusters strategies, as well as to specific value chains and industrial ecosystems;
- Is part of knowledge triangles, working closely with other education and training sectors, the scientific community, and business;
- Enables learners to acquire both vocational (job specific) as well as key competences through high-quality provision that is underpinned by quality assurance;
builds innovative forms of partnerships with the world of work, and is supported by the continuous professional development of teaching and training staff, innovative pedagogies, learner and staff mobility and VET internationalisation strategies.

**Objectives of the Action**

This action supports the gradual establishment and development of international collaborative networks of **Centres of Vocational Excellence**.

Centres of Vocational Excellence will operate at two levels:

1. **At national level** involving a wide range of local stakeholders creating skills ecosystems for local innovation, regional development, and social inclusion, while working with CoVEs in other countries through international collaborative networks.
2. **At international level** bringing together CoVEs that share a common interest in:
   - a common interest in specific sectors,
   - innovative approaches to tackle economic and societal challenges (e.g. climate change, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development goals, integration of migrants and disadvantaged groups, upskilling people with low qualification levels, etc.), or
   - innovative approaches to increase the outreach, quality and effectiveness of existing CoVEs.

The networks will bring together existing CoVEs, or develop the Vocational Excellence model by linking partners from various countries, that intend to develop Vocational Excellence in their local context through international cooperation. They could contribute e.g. to the delivery phase of the **New European Bauhaus initiative** by collaborating with the communities involved in the local transformations fostered by the initiative.

CoVEs can be existing vocational schools/providers that strive to achieve excellence by engaging in the set of activities proposed by this European initiative. They can also be newly set-up centres established with the purpose of providing excellent training offers and services that are responsive to labour market needs.

CoVEs achieve their objectives by bringing together and working closely with a set of local/regional partners such initial and continuing VET providers, higher education institutions including universities of applied sciences and polytechnics, research institutions, science parks, innovation agencies, companies, other employers, chambers and their associations, social partners, social enterprises, sectoral skills councils, professional/sector associations, national and regional authorities and development agencies, employment services, qualifications authorities, social inclusion and reintegration organisations, etc.

This call will thus support projects bringing together local or regional partners from various countries developing a set of activities under three clusters; 1) Teaching and learning, 2) Cooperation and partnerships, and 3) Governance and Funding.

CoVEs are required to apply **EU-wide instruments and tools** whenever relevant.

They must include the design of a **long-term action plan** for the progressive roll-out of project deliverables after the project has finished. This plan shall be based on sustainable partnerships between education and training providers and key labour market actors at the appropriate level. It should include the identification of appropriate governance structures, as well as plans for scalability and financial sustainability.
It should also ensure the appropriate **visibility and wide dissemination** of the work of the COVE networks, including at EU and national political level and include details on how the roll-out will be implemented at European, national and/or regional levels with relevant partners. The action plan shall also indicate how other EU funding opportunities, and national and regional funding, as well as private funding can support the roll-out of the project.

To see the list of CoVEs already funded, please check the Funding & Tenders opportunities Portal (FTOP). Factsheets for the funded projects are also available on the website of DG Employment, Social Affairs and inclusion. 

**Eligibility criteria**

In order to be eligible for an Erasmus grant, project proposals for Centres of Vocational Education must comply with the following criteria:

**Eligible participating organisations (Who can apply?)**

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities, if applicable) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies);
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme;
- be active in the field of vocational education and training or in the world of work;
- Organisations active in the field of vocational education and training or in the world of work from third countries not associated to the Programme may also participate - as beneficiary, affiliated entity or associated partner - but not as coordinator.

**Exception:** organisations from Belarus (Region 2) and the Russian Federation (Region 4) are not eligible to participate in this action.

Participating organisations can be, for example (non-exhaustive list):

- VET providers
- VET provider representative organisations
- Companies, industry, other employers or sector representative organisations
- National/regional qualification authorities
- Research institutes
- Innovation agencies
- Regional development authorities
- International organisations active in the VET field

**Consortium composition (Number and profile of participating organisations)**

The partnership must include at least 8 applicants (beneficiaries) from a minimum of 4 EU Member States or third countries associated to the Programme.

Each EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme must include:

1. at least 1 enterprise, industry, other employers or sector representative organisation, and
2. at least 1 vocational education and training provider (at secondary and/or tertiary level)

Affiliated entities and associated partners do not count in this minimum configuration of the consortium. They can not be the coordinating organisation.
The coordinating organisation must be from an EU Member State or a third country associated to the Programme.

Organisations from third countries not associated to the Programme can also participate as beneficiaries or affiliated entities, to the extent it is demonstrated that their participation brings an essential added value to the project. They can also participate as associated partners.

**Eligible activities**

The applicant must address 3 clusters of activities (providing details on the concrete actions and deliverables). For each cluster, a minimum number of activities must be selected from the list below:

- at least 4 activities under Cluster 1 – Teaching and learning,
- at least 3 activities under Cluster 2 – Cooperation and partnership, and
- at least 2 activities under Cluster 3 – Governance and funding.

The Clusters are described below in the section “Setting up a project”.

Vocational education and training activities, at any EQF levels from 3 to 8, including the upper-secondary level, the post-secondary non-tertiary level as well as the tertiary level (e.g. Universities of applied sciences, Polytechnic institutes, etc.) are eligible. However, applications cannot include only activities that target learners at tertiary level; if they focus on VET at post secondary level (EQF levels 6 to 8), they must include at least one other VET qualification level between EQF levels 3 to 5, as well as a strong work-based learning component.

**Geographic location (Venue of the activities)**

Activities must take place in any eligible country (see Part A of this Guide).

**Duration of the project**

Projects should normally last 48 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment of the grant agreement).

**Where to apply?**

To the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) via the Funding & Tender Opportunities Portal (FTOP).

Call ID: ERASMUS-EDU-2024-PEX-COVE.

Before applying, please see the relevant FAQs in FTOP.

**When to apply?**

Applicants have to submit their grant application by 7 May at 17:00:00 (Brussels time).

Applicant organisations will be assessed against the relevant exclusion and selection criteria. For more information please consult Part C of this Guide.
Setting up a project

CoVEs are characterised by adopting a systemic approach through which VET institutions actively contribute to co-create "skills ecosystems", together with a wide range of other local/regional partners. CoVEs are expected to go far beyond the simple provision of a quality vocational qualification.

Below, we present a list of typical activities provided by CoVEs. Projects will reach their objectives by building on a combination of these activities (bullet points are indicative examples of possible actions under each activity).

Description of the Clusters

Cluster 1 - Teaching and learning

Activity 1 - Providing people with labour market relevant skills

- by anticipating future skill needs using effective means to rapidly identify changing labour market needs, and matching skill provision with job opportunities also taking into account work undertaken by Sectoral Blueprint, where relevant and available;
- by focusing on both technical skills and key competencies by including the skills necessary for the green and digital transitions,

Activity 2 - Pursuing a lifelong learning and inclusive approach in VET

- by ensuring learning opportunities to people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds by combining offers of initial VET qualifications and of continuing training for upskilling and reskilling, that are informed by skills intelligence.
- providing higher-level VET programmes, developing flexible pathways, and cooperation mechanisms between VET and higher education institutions.

Activity 3 - Developing VET curricula and qualifications, allowing flexibility and individualisation of delivery

- by developing individual learning plans or pathways for each learner, including for adults
- Integrating international learner mobility in the curricula, ensuring the validation and recognition of the learning outcomes acquired abroad
- Designing qualifications that integrate both school-based as well as work-based learning components
- Developing European Vocational Core profiles, that contributes to the mobility of learners and workers, while ensuring its recognition, as well as the transparency, understanding and portability of learning outcomes.
- Developing and/or using micro-credentials to recognise the outcome of short learning opportunities adapted to a fast-changing society and labour market
- Making use of the European Digital Credentials for Learning, allowing to easily authenticate, validate and recognise credentials of any size, shape or form

Activity 4 - Developing innovative learner-centred teaching and learning materials and methodologies

- including interdisciplinary, project-based, competence-based learning, “Learning factories”, makerspaces and positive education.
- making use of European competence frameworks and derivative tools such as DigComp, EntreComp, FreenComp, LifeComp, GreenComp, SELFIE WBL, Test your digital
skills, and the European Digital Skill Certificate.

- exploiting innovative teaching equipment and digital technologies such as MOOC’s, simulators, virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, for both school-based as well as work-based learning

- fostering learner excellence through actions that incentive VET learners to explore their innovation and creative potential, leading to a virtuous cycle of benefits for the learners, teachers/trainers and the VET institution that can integrate best practices into regular programmes.

Activity 5 - Investing in the initial and continuing professional development of teachers and trainers

- for pedagogical, technical, green, and digital skills including those needed for online and distance learning

- embedding teachers’ and trainers’ mobility in learning, development and internationalisation strategies

- supporting the implementation of a quality culture based on defined management systems.

Activity 6 - Establishing strong quality assurance mechanisms

- based on European tools and instruments such as EQAVET

- working towards the certification of education and training providers based on standards developed by relevant national and/or international standards organisations - e.g. ISO 21001 or EFQM (see also EVTA label for VET Excellence)

Activity 7 - Establishing effective feedback loops and graduate tracking systems

- setting-up procedures, mechanisms and instruments for effective feedback and review as part of a strategic learning process in the VET organisation, to support the development of high quality provision and improve opportunities for learners

- enabling the timely adaptation of learning provision based on effective graduate tracking systems.

Activity 8 - Providing guidance services

- ensuring quality guidance for both young people and adults to support their career and education and training choices, as well as and their participation in lifelong learning

- providing tailor made support to people with vulnerabilities

- enabling adults to make use of their entitlements to training

Activity 9 - Providing validation of prior learning

- Providing validation of skills, no matter how they were acquired, including outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities, as a basis for personalised training provision

Cluster 2 - Cooperation and partnerships

Activity 10 - Establishing business-education partnerships

- Cultivating mutually beneficial relationships with the business sector by forming long-term business-education partnerships, including for innovation and skills anticipation

- Working together to continuously review and update curricula to ensure its relevance to
learner and labour market needs, in particular for work based learning and apprentices
• Supporting companies, other employers and in particular SMEs with tailor made training for up-skilling and re-skilling
• Co-operation with Public Employment Services and civil society to up-skill and re-skill unemployed and inactive
• Supporting sector-based and regional co-operation, including joining the Pact for Skills, and creating synergies with Sectoral Blueprint, as relevant and available
• Providing SMEs with technical support, skill needs assessment, tools and methodologies
• Organising work-based learning, apprenticeships, and internships opportunities for learners, sharing of equipment, as well as exchanges of teachers and trainers between companies and VET centres

Activity 11 - Applied research and Innovation

• Working together with companies, in particular SMEs on applied research projects involving VET learners and staff
• Making use or co-creating innovation hubs and technology diffusion centres to support SME innovation process with the involvement of VET learners and staff
• Contributing to creation and dissemination of new knowledge

Activity 12 - VET internationalisation and mobility abroad

• Developing strategic planning for international activities, closely linked to the development of the VET institution, and the quality of teaching and learning practices
• Creating support structures and measures to foster and ensure the quality of VET mobility experiences (including virtual mobility) among the partners in the CoVE network in compliance with the Erasmus Quality Standards
• Launching initiatives to mobilise learners, teachers and trainers (including in-company trainers), as well as experts, to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme (KA1) to engage in mobility abroad

Activity 13 - Fostering entrepreneurial skills and initiatives

• Developing an entrepreneurial culture within VET organisations including leaders, staff, teachers and trainers as well as learners
• Working with local partners to develop learners’ entrepreneurial skills and attitudes that respond to real world challenges
• Providing or linking with local business incubators for VET learners to develop their entrepreneurship initiatives

Activity 14 - Raising VET attractiveness

• By launching and actively participating in communication campaigns and activities, aimed at raising the attractiveness of VET
• Informing of job opportunities through VET and attracting young people and adults (including learners in primary and secondary schools) to VET learning pathways
• Setting-up International VET campus or summer camps aimed at learners, teachers and trainers, leaders in VET institutions, Trade unions, as well as for people considering future vocational study options. These could focus on specific occupational fields, products or services, as well as on complex challenges of societal and economic importance
Activity 15 - Skills competitions

- Fostering the participation of learners in sectorial, national and international skills competitions, aimed at raising the attractiveness and excellence in VET (e.g. World Skills and/or EuroSkills competitions). Please note that prizes are not an eligible cost in the budget.

Cluster 3 - Governance and funding

Activity 16 - Autonomy and effective VET governance

- Developing the capacity of VET providers to take decisions, independently and with accountability, on educational, organisational, financial, staff-related and other matters, in pursuit of activity carried out within the scope defined by national rules and regulations.
- Involving relevant stakeholders, particularly companies, chambers, professional and sector associations, trade unions, national and regional authorities and social partners, including representatives of learners, in the governance of VET systems

Activity 17 - Strategic approach to skills development and governance

- Actively engaging in the national and regional skills governance systems
- Contributing with a skills perspective to employment and social policy making at local, regional, national and European level

Activity 18 - Co-creating skills ecosystems

- Mobilising relevant economic and social partners as well as other educational and training institutions to engage or create local skills ecosystems aimed at supporting innovation, smart specialisation strategies, clusters, and sectors and value chains (industrial ecosystems)
- Enabling local skills ecosystems contribute to attract foreign investment, by ensuring timely provision of skills for companies investing locally

Activity 19 - Developing sustainable financial models

- Combining public and private funding, as well as income generating activities, and taking full advantage of performance-based funding schemes (if relevant)

Activity 20 - Making full use of national and EU financial instruments

- These can include the support of education and training actions, mobility of learners and staff, applied research activities, infrastructure investments to modernise VET centres with advanced equipment, implementation of management systems to assure excellence and sustainability of VET organisations and the services they provide

The project must clearly identify and explain the choice of each of the selected activities in the application form, and describe how the work to be carried out through those activities will concretely contribute to the relevant work packages, and with the overall objectives of the project.

Expected impact

The gradual establishment and development of European networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence is expected to increase VET responsiveness to adapt skills provision to evolving economic and social needs, ensuring that VET is at the forefront of providing solutions to the challenges posed by rapidly changing skills needs.
By forming an essential part of the “knowledge triangle” – the close collaboration between businesses, education and research – and playing a fundamental role in providing skills to support innovation and smart specialisation, the Centres of Vocational Excellence are expected to ensure high quality skills and competences that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities, which meet the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy.

By being firmly anchored within regional/local contexts while at the same time operating at transnational level, the Centres of Vocational Excellence will form strong and enduring partnerships between the VET community and the world of work at national level and across borders. It will also contribute to the internationalization of VET by bringing together partners from all over the world. They will aim for “upward convergence” of excellence in VET, which would be difficult to establish in the absence of EU incentives, technical support, and opportunities for mutual learning.

Through the wide dissemination of project outcomes at transnational, national and/or regional levels and the development of a long-term action plan for the progressive roll out of project deliverables, taking national and regional development and smart specialisation strategies into account, individual projects are expected to engage relevant stakeholders within and outside the participating organisations and ensure a lasting impact after the project lifetime.

Award criteria

The following award criteria apply:

**Relevance of the project (maximum score 35 points)**

- **Link to policy**: the proposal demonstrates how a transnational cooperation network of Centres of Vocational Excellence will contribute to achieve the goals of the policy priorities covered by the [Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/recommendations/2019/10/16/council-recommendation-on-vet-for-sustainable-competitiveness-social-fairness-and-resilience/), as well as the [Osnabrück Declaration](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/recommendations/2018/12/13/osnabruck-declaration/);
- **EU values**: the proposal is relevant for the respect and promotion of shared EU values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as fighting any sort of discrimination;
- **Consistency**: the extent to which the proposal addresses the objectives of the call; the goals are clearly defined, realistic and address issues relevant to the participating organisations; the extent to which the proposal delivers an adequate needs analysis;
- **Activities**: The extent to which the activities selected from the three clusters are clearly identified, described and linked to the overall objectives of the project;
- **Innovation**: the proposal considers state-of-the-art methods and techniques, and leads to innovative results and solutions for its field in general, or for the geographical context in which the project is implemented (e.g. content; outputs produced, working methods applied, organisations and persons involved or targeted);
- **Regional dimension**: the proposal demonstrates its contribution to regional development and smart specialisation strategies, based on the identification of local/regional needs and challenges in each of the participating countries;
- **Cooperation and partnerships**: the extent to which the proposal adequately identifies and involves the most relevant partners, that are necessary to realise the objectives of the project, and explains how it will establish strong and enduring relationships at both local and transnational levels, between the VET community and businesses (can be represented by chambers or associations), in which interactions are reciprocal and mutually beneficial;
- **European added value**: the proposal clearly demonstrates the added value at the individual (learner and/or staff), institutional and systemic levels, generated through results that would be difficult to attain by the partners acting without European cooperation;
• **Internationalisation**: the proposal demonstrates its contribution to the international dimension of VET excellence, including the development of strategies to foster VET transnational mobility of learners and staff, as well as sustainable partnerships;

• **Digital skills**: the extent to which the proposal foresees activities related to digital skills development (e.g. skills anticipation, innovative curricula and teaching methodologies, guidance, etc.) related to the development of digital skills;

• **Green skills**: the extent to which the proposal foresees activities (e.g. skills anticipation, innovative curricula and teaching methodologies, guidance, etc.) linked to the transition to a circular and green economy;

• **Social dimension**: the proposal includes a horizontal concern throughout the various actions to address diversity and promote shared values, equality, including gender equality, and non-discrimination and social inclusion, including for people with special needs/fewer opportunities.

**Quality of the project design and implementation (maximum score 25 points)**

• **Coherence**: the overall project design ensures consistency between project objectives and activities. The proposal presents a coherent and comprehensive set of appropriate activities and services to meet the identified needs and lead to the expected results;

• **Activities**: The work to be carried out under each of the activities selected from the three clusters are clearly described in terms of their expected outcomes/deliverables, their concrete contribution to the relevant work packages and to the overall objectives of the project;

• **Methodology**: the quality and feasibility of the methodology proposed and its appropriateness for producing the expected results;

• **Management**: the coordinator shows high quality management, the ability to coordinate transnational networks and leadership in complex environment, and establishes solid management arrangements. Timelines, organisation, tasks and responsibilities are well defined and realistic. The proposal allocates appropriate resources to each activity. A clear set of Key Performance Indicators, and a timeline for their assessment and achievement are defined;

• **Budget**: the budget provides for appropriate resources necessary for success, it is neither overestimated nor underestimated; the proposal is cost-effective and allocates appropriate resources to each activity;

• **Work plan**: quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including the extent to which the resources assigned to work packages are in line with their objectives and deliverables;

• **Quality control**: control measures (continuous quality evaluation, peer reviews, benchmarking activities, etc.) and quality indicators ensure that the project implementation is of high quality. Challenges/risks of the project are clearly identified and mitigating actions properly addressed. Expert review processes are planned as an integral part of the project. These processes include an independent external assessment at mid-term and at the end of the project;

• **If the project includes mobility activities** (for learners and/or staff):
  • The quality of practical arrangements, management and support modalities;
  • The extent to which these activities are appropriate to the project's aims and involve the appropriate number of participants;
  • The quality of arrangements for the recognition and validation of participants' learning outcomes, in line with European transparency and recognition tools and principles.

**Quality of the partnership and the cooperation arrangements (maximum score 20 points)**

• **Configuration**: the project involves an appropriate mix of complementary participating
organisations with the necessary profile, competences, experience and expertise to successfully deliver all aspects of the project; the role of each partner must be clearly identified, and its added-value explained;  

- **Upward convergence**: the extent to which the partnership brings together organisations active in the field of vocational education and training, or in the world of work, that are at different stages of development of vocational excellence approaches, and allows for a smooth and effective exchange of expertise and knowledge among those partners;  

- **Geographical dimension**: the extent to which the partnership includes relevant partners from different geographical regions, as well as the extent to which the applicant has motivated the geographical composition of the partnership and demonstrated its relevance to the achievement of the objectives of the CoVEs; as well as the extent to which the partnership includes a wide and appropriate range of relevant actors at local and regional level;  

- **Involvement of third countries not associated to the Programme**: if applicable, clearly explain how the involvement of participating organisations from third countries not associated to the Programme brings an essential added value to the project;  

- **Collaboration**: decision-making and communication between the participating organisations, participants and any other relevant stakeholder are clearly and reasonably described in detail (such as: number and timing of meetings, configuration of groups, description of aims and achievements expected, etc.) and illustrated in the project’s Gantt chart/timeline;  

**Impact (maximum score 20 points)**  

- **Exploitation**: the proposal demonstrates how the outcomes of the project will be used by the partners and other stakeholders. It provides means to measure exploitation within project lifetime and after;  

- **Dissemination**: the proposal provides a clear plan for the dissemination of results, and includes appropriate targets, activities, relevant timing, tools and channels to ensure that the results and benefits will be spread effectively to stakeholders, policy makers, guidance professionals, enterprises, young learners, etc. within and after the project’s lifetime; the proposal also indicates which partners will be responsible for dissemination;  

- **Impact**: the proposal demonstrates the potential impact of the project:  
  - On participants and participating organisations, during and after the project lifetime;  
  - Outside the organisations and individuals directly participating in the project, as well as its potential for mainstreaming into regional, national and/or European VET skills development.  

- The proposal includes measures as well as clearly defined targets and indicators to monitor progress and assess the expected impact (short- and long-term);  

- **Sustainability**: the proposal explains how the CoVE will be further developed; the proposal includes a long-term action plan for the progressive roll-out of project deliverables and sustained partnerships between education and training providers and key industry stakeholders at the appropriate level; the established plan includes the identification of appropriate governance structures, as well as plans for scalability and financial sustainability, including the identification of financial resources (European, national and private) to ensure that the results and benefits achieved will have a long-term sustainability.  

To be considered for funding, applications must score at least **70 points** (out of 100 points in total), also taking into account the necessary minimum pass score for each of the four award criteria: minimum 18 points for the “Relevance of the project” category; minimum 13 points for “Quality of the project design and implementation” and 11 points for the categories of “Quality of the
partnership and the cooperation arrangements” and “impact”.

Ex-aequo proposals will be established according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion “Relevance”. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion “Quality of the project design and implementation”. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion “Impact”.

If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

As a general rule, and within the limits of existing national and European legal frameworks, results should be made available as open educational resources (OER) as well as on relevant professional, sectorial or competent authorities’ platforms. The proposal will describe how data, materials, documents and audio-visual and social media activity produced will be made freely available and promoted through open licences, and does not contain disproportionate limitations.

**Seal of Excellence**

The project proposals evaluated above the quality thresholds, with a total score equal to or higher than 75%, but that cannot be funded under Erasmus+ due to lack of available budget under this call for proposals, may be awarded with a Seal of Excellence certificate to attest the quality of the proposal and to facilitate its alternative funding at national or regional level.

The Seal of Excellence is a quality label certificate awarded to quality project proposals that cannot be funded under Erasmus+ due to insufficient funds. The label recognises the quality of the proposal and facilitates the search for alternative funding. Funding bodies at national or regional level may decide to directly fund the Seal holder project proposal on the basis of the high quality evaluation process performed by the Commission’s independent experts, without performing a new full evaluation process. The award of the Seal of Excellence may also facilitate the alternative funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), in accordance with Article 73(4) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).

Applicants should be made aware that the award of a Seal of Excellence certificate does not provide guarantee for automatic alternative funding, since the decision to potentially fund Seal holder project proposals is entirely discretionary to the Cohesion policy funds Managing Authorities, under ERDF or ESF+, or other funding bodies at national and regional level.

If prior authorisation is provided by the applicant in the application form, the data of the Seal holders project proposal may be shared with Cohesion policy funds Managing Authorities and other potentially interested funding bodies at national or regional level through the National Agencies, in full respect of the rules governing the confidentiality of the proposal and the protection of personal data.

**What are the funding rules?**

This action follows a lump sum funding model. The amount of the single lump sum contribution will be determined for each grant based on the estimated budget of the action proposed by the applicant. The amount will be fixed by the granting authority on the basis of the estimated project budget, evaluation result and a funding rate of 80%.

The maximum EU grant per project is 4 million euros.
Financial support to third parties in the form of grants or prizes is not allowed.

Volunteer costs are allowed. They shall take the form of unit costs as defined in the to the Commission Decision on unit costs for volunteers.

SME unit costs for SME owners are allowed. They should take the form of unit costs as defined in the Commission Decision on unit costs for SME owners.

The relevant work package should include costs for at least one annual meeting (1 representative from each full partner of the project) organised by or at the initiative of the European Commission/European Education and Culture Executive Agency for the exchange of good practices and mutual learning between Centres of Vocational Excellence.

**How is the project lump sum determined?**

Applicants must fill in a detailed budget table according to the application form, taking into account the following points:

1. The budget should be detailed as necessary by beneficiary/-ies and organised in coherent work packages (for example divided into ‘project management’, ‘training’, ‘organisation of events’, ‘mobility preparation and implementation’, ‘communication and dissemination’, ‘quality assurance’, etc.);
2. The proposal must describe the activities covered by each work package;
3. Applicants must provide in their proposal a breakdown of the lump sum showing the share per work package (and, within each work package, the share assigned to each beneficiary and affiliated entity);
4. Costs described can cover staff costs, travel and subsistence costs, equipment costs and subcontracting as well as other costs (such as dissemination of information, publishing or translation).

Proposals will be evaluated according to the standard evaluation procedures with the help of internal and/or external experts. The experts will assess the quality of the proposals against the requirements defined in the call and the expected impact, quality and efficiency of the action.

Following the proposal evaluation, the authorising officer will establish the amount of the lump sum, taking into account the findings of the assessment carried out.

The grant parameters (maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc.) will be fixed in the Grant Agreement. Please refer to Part C of this Programme Guide, section 'Eligible direct costs'.

The project achievements will be evaluated on the outcomes completed. This funding scheme will allow putting focus on the outputs rather than the inputs, thereby placing emphasis on the quality and level of achievement of measurable objectives.

The proposal must include costs for at least one annual meeting (1 representative from each full partner of the project) organised by or at the initiative of the European Commission/European Education and Culture Executive Agency for the exchange of good practices and mutual learning between Centres of Vocational Excellence.

More details are described in the model Grant Agreement available in the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal (FTOP).
Footnote

1 See brochure on VET skills for today and for the future→ back
2 Skill ecosystems are defined as regional or sectoral social formations in which human capability is developed and deployed for productive purposes (Finegold 1999). Their basic elements are business settings and associated business models, institutional/policy frameworks, modes of engaging labour, the structure of jobs, as well as the level of skills and systems for their formation (Buchanan et al. 2001). See A guide to the skill ecosystem approach to workforce development→ back
3 Regional Development Policy - Regional development is a broad term but can be seen as a general effort to reduce regional disparities by supporting (employment and wealth-generating) economic activities in regions. ← back
4 An innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations. ← back
5 Smart Specialisation is a place-based approach characterised by the identification of strategic areas for intervention based both on the analysis of the strengths and potential of the economy and on an Entrepreneurial Discovery Process with wide stakeholder involvement. It is outward-looking and embraces a broad view of innovation. ← back
6 Industrial clusters are groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors in a location that cooperate closely. There are around 3000 specialised clusters in Europe. The renewed EU industrial policy recognises clusters as a powerful tool to support industrial innovation. See the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP). ← back
7 See 14 industrial ecosystems as described in the Commission Communication on Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy, as well as the SWD(2021) 351, Annual Single Market Report 2021→ back
8 See Education in the knowledge triangle→ back
9 As defined in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. ← back
10 See ETF work on Public-Private Partnerships for inclusive skills development→ back
11 See for example the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) works to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry or industrial ecosystemsSee 14 industrial ecosystems as described in the Commission Communication on Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy, as well as the SWD(2021) 351, Annual Single Market Report 2021→ back
12 See Berlin Declaration on Education for SDG→ back
13 Such as the EQF, EQAVET, Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, Council Recommendation on key competences, etc. ← back
15 Can also be complemented with other activities agreed among the partners← back
16 See Cedefop work on Skills for the labour market, and Matching skills→ back
17 As defined in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning← back
18 See Cedefop publication on “Digital, greener and more resilient” and on “The green employment and skills transformation” as well as the ESCO taxonomy of skills for the green transition← back
19 ILO Guide on making TVET and skills development inclusive for all← back
20 Also building on existing Skills Intelligence tools such as that provided by Cedefop OVATE tool, and other Skills initiatives aimed at delivering training relevant for the labour market (e.g. Pact for Skills Sectoral Blueprints)← back
21 See Process model for the cooperation between VET and HE institutions and the upcoming OECD study on “Pathways to Professions: Understanding higher vocational and professional tertiary education systems”. ← back
22 See Michele Schweisfurth in Learner-Centred Education in International Perspective← back
23 See Finland’s example← back
24 Including “internationalisation at home”, defined as “purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments”. See Beelen & Jones, 2015← back
25 See ETF publication “A handbook for policy makers and social partners” on Work based learning← back
26 European Vocational Core profiles describe sets of key learning outcomes corresponding to occupational profiles that are common and relevant for national VET programmes across EU countries in specific occupational/vocational fields← back
27 See Cedefop study on Comparing Vocational Education and Training Qualifications← back
28 Makerspaces are collaborative workspaces for making, learning, exploring and sharing (see IRC report)← back
29 See The state of positive education and IPEN International positive education network← back
30 See Marherita Bacigalupo paper on Competence frameworks as orienteering tools← back
31 The European Digital Competence Framework← back
32 EntreComp the entrepreneurship competence framework← back