



Vocational Education and Training Means to approach the Shortage of Professional Drivers in Europe (summary)

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Last update: 27/12/11

Starting point for this paper is the question with what means and measures vocational education and training (VET) can contribute to decreasing the shortage of professional drivers in Europe. Different studies from Europe and abroad have been reviewed in order to identify causes of the driver shortage and proposed strategies to overcome them. Furthermore stakeholders such as drivers, trainers, employers and representatives from social partners coming from different European countries have been interviewed about their view on the driver shortage and possible measures against it. As a result the following VET measures have been identified as possible contributions to overcoming the professional driver shortage:

- The strong and continuous orientation of initial and continuous VET for professional drivers on labour market/ industry needs in terms of training content as well as of its organisational and methodological approach.
- The opening up and facilitation of career/education pathways for professional drivers potentially supported by instruments such as qualifications frameworks or credit point systems as a way to make professional driving more attractive to youth and to keep experienced drivers and their expertise in the branch.
- The offering of training and guidance to employers on human resource development aspects such as recruitment and retention of professional drivers and management of labour turnover being especially challenging for the branch because it has to correspond to the needs of its high proportion of small and medium size enterprises.
- The need to further integrate health and safety topics especially in terms of a healthy lifestyle into professional drivers VET in order to support drivers to carry out this very demanding job also until retirement.

The most recent European effort to address the shortage of qualified drivers is directive 2003/59/EC. At this point in time it is still too early to conclude what effects the directive will have on the driver shortage and if the directives implementation succeeds to increase employability of professional drivers or has the desired effect to raise the occupations profile and image. But, the results of the conducted interviews indicate strong reservations towards the directives' efficiency especially from employers and drivers. They primarily perceive it as an additional burden they have to comply with rather than an opportunity to raise the occupations profile and to increase drivers' employability. These reservations are increased by the strongly varying national application approaches that seem not to lead to a homogeneous basic qualification level of professional drivers in Europe as originally intended.

But also other European instruments should be considered in this context such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). Although they do so far only play an inferior role within professional driver VET, they might be able to make a valuable contribution to overcome the driver shortage. Examples from New Zealand and Australia show that qualifications frameworks can open up and display possible career and education pathways for professional drivers because they put qualifications in relation to each other. Credit point approaches can support the recognition of in- and non-formal learning. Both aspects can strongly contribute to career prospects and their potential influence on the attractiveness of the driver occupation. At the same time the EQF introduces the learning outcomes approach Europe wide. While the majority of professional driver qualifications such as directive 2003/59/EC is still strongly input oriented and leads to hardly comparable qualifications in Europe, the EQFs learning outcomes approach opens up a chance to make also the implementation of directive 2003/59/EC comparable and transparent across borders.

Regardless of all these opportunities, the research results also show a large deficit with regard to differentiated reliable data about the driver shortage in Europe. It is therefore – as examples from Australia and Canada show - essential to do further research on the characteristics and causes of the professional driver shortage all over Europe that also considers regional and national differences in order to better understand and, therefore, to develop effective and sustainable measures to overcome the driver shortage that need to go far beyond vocational education and training.

The whole research paper can be downloaded at www.project-profdrv.eu.