

**Special Virtual Conference**  
**REVISING THE 2001 REVISED RECOMMENDATION**  
**CONCERNING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

**Background Note by Simon McGrath**

The focus of this Special Virtual Conference is the forthcoming revision of UNESCO's 2001 Revised Recommendation concerning technical and vocational education. This document is a short background note to help participants understand better the nature of UNESCO Recommendations and the contexts in which this revision is taking place, both in terms of the history of UNESCO standard-setting in this field and the wider development policy context.

In May 2012, in Shanghai, the Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) called for a transformation of the conceptualisation, governance, funding and organisation of TVET. Congress participants concluded that the 2001 Revised Recommendation would benefit from revision and updating, to ensure a stronger focus on lifelong learning and to respond to challenges, such as rapid demographic and technological change, youth unemployment, social inequalities and sustainable development. Since this Congress, TVET's importance for individual and national development also has been noted in a range of national policy reforms and is given high prominence in international debates about a post-2015 development vision.

A pattern of revising TVET standard-setting instruments after World Congresses can be observed. The First International Congress took place in Berlin in 1987 and has inspired the 1989 Convention; whilst the Second International Congress (Seoul 1999) was succeeded by the adoption of the current 2001 Revised Recommendation. See Annex A for more about UNESCO's standard-setting role.

In November 2013, the 37th Session of UNESCO's General Conference decided to revise the 2001 Revised Recommendation concerning technical and vocational education and also to revise the 1976 Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education. The consultation and drafting process for both of the revision processes has now begun.

The 2001 Revised Recommendation states that whilst TVE should be seen as an integral part of general education, it takes place across the levels and forms of formal, non-formal education, in workplaces and in the community. As well as being preparation for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work, TVE is also stressed as preparation for responsible citizenship; an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development; and a method of facilitating poverty alleviation.

The 2001 Revised Recommendation has the following sections:

1. Scope- an outlining of what TVE covers and its broad purposes
2. Objectives- the more specific aims and objectives of TVE
3. Policy, planning and administration- how TVE should be organised
4. Technical and vocational aspects of general education- how TVE should be delivered in schooling
5. Technical and vocational education as preparation for an occupational field- key recommendations on TVE as work preparation
6. Technical and vocational education as continuing education- important considerations in continuing TVE

7. Guidance- suggested principles and processes for guidance across all forms and levels of TVE
8. The learning process- appropriate approaches to TVE learning and its assessment
9. Staff- recommended principles for improving staff qualifications, capabilities and conditions of service
10. International cooperation- principles and procedures for strengthening TVE through better international cooperation.

The objective of this Special Virtual Conference is to re-examine the conceptualisation of TVET and its various contributions towards fulfilling UNESCO's mandate for promoting lasting peace and sustainable development. The focus of the discussion will be on the changes needed to be made to the 2001 Revised Recommendation so that it remains current in a rapidly changing world.

In order to inform the drafting process, a set of questions need to be discussed during this conference and in the larger revision process:

- *How should TVET be conceptualised? How has TVET been changing in recent years? Is the focus on target groups, on levels of education, on occupations, on types of skills shifting? What new trends are emerging? What are the main purposes of the various TVET systems participants know, and are they meeting the needs of society and the economy?*
- *What should be the scope of a successful international standard setting instrument in the field of TVET? What new elements need to be included in the Revised Recommendation? Which elements of the current Revised Recommendation must be retained, and which can be removed?*
- *What should be the guiding principles upon which to base the Revised Recommendation? Are the current objectives (section 2) still appropriate for the next period? What needs inclusion, revision or exclusion?*
- *How should the text of the Revised Recommendation be made applicable to a diversity of country contexts and remain current in a constantly changing world? What themes are common to all Member States? What issues, though not common to all, are of sufficient importance to be included? What are the key emergent developments that should be anticipated?*

The structure of the Conference will be flexible to respond to the discussion generated by the participants. However, it is planned that the discussion will take place as follows:

*Days 1-2*

Participants' reflections on recent changes and emerging challenges and opportunities for TVET- what do these tell us about the scope of TVET that should be captured in the Revised Recommendation?

The particular themes that need to be stressed in the Revised Recommendation (e.g., gender equality, youth, inclusion, sustainability, lifelong learning systems). (Together, these discussions cover Section 1 of the 2001 Revised Recommendation).

*Days 3-4*

*The central messages that need to be communicated in the Revised Recommendation regarding TVET's guiding principles. (Section 2).*

*Days 5-9*

Each of the themes of the 2001 Revised Recommendation (Sections 3-10) will be explored in parallel, alongside a discussion of other important themes that require introduction.

*Days 10-14*

A final summary discussion of proposed key considerations and relevant themes, and specific elements that participants would like to be conveyed to the Expert Group responsible for drafting the text.

The expected outcomes of the Special Virtual Conference are:

- The mobilisation of Member States and other interested stakeholders, and their engagement in the consultation and drafting process.
- The generation of ideas regarding the scope, structure and content relevant to the drafting process for the revisions to the 2001 Revised Recommendation.
- A synthesis report of the conference discussions, which will be presented to the Expert Group charged with the responsibility of preparing the draft text.

## **ANNEX A**

### **Locating the revision process in the broader international development agenda**

UNESCO Recommendations also reflect the broader contemporary debates on international development, as reflected in major UN processes. The current process of revising the Recommendation must be seen within the ongoing post-2015 development agenda debate. At present, this is best represented by two processes: the work of the High Level Panel and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

In May 2013, the HLP presented a strong vision of five “transformative shifts” that it sees as essential for successful development:

1. Leave no one behind
2. Put sustainable development at the core
3. Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth
4. Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all.
5. Forge a new global partnership.

Contained within its 10 recommended goals are Goal 3: “provide quality education and lifelong learning” and Goal 8: “create jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth”.

The Open Working Group Process is ongoing but the latest draft of its focus areas (March 19, 2014) includes the following sub-themes:

- 4b. ensuring equitable access to education at all levels with focus on the most marginalised, including indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, persons living in rural areas, and migrants
- 4e. ensuring effective learning outcomes at all levels and imparting knowledge and skills that match the demands of the labour market, including through vocational training and skills development for youth
- 4f. universal adult literacy and lifelong learning opportunities for all
- 8f. creating productive, well-paid jobs
- 9h. enhancing science and math, engineering and technical skills.

In response to the post-2015 discussions, a paper was submitted to the 2013 General Conference (and reiterated in UNESCO’s post-2015 position paper of February 2014). This states that:

UNESCO reaffirms a humanistic and holistic vision of education as fundamental to personal and socio-economic development. The objective of such education must be envisaged in a broad perspective that aims at enabling and empowering people to meet their basic individual needs, fulfil their personal expectations and contribute to the achievement of their communities and countries’ socio-economic development objectives. In addition to the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills, the content of learning must promote understanding and respect for human rights; inclusion and equity; cultural diversity; and foster a desire and capacity for lifelong learning and learning to

live together, all of which are essential to the realisation of peace, responsible citizenship, and sustainable development.

This has led to UNESCO's own recommendation for a post-2015 priority for "skills for work and life", which ensures that

all young people and adults have equitable opportunities to access and complete formal and non-formal technical and vocational education and training relevant to the world of work, as well as lifelong learning opportunities that enable learners to acquire diverse and relevant knowledge and skills that foster their professional and personal development.

Across more than fifty years of work on standard-setting concerning TVET, UNESCO has sought to emphasise the importance of skills for the world of work whilst insisting that this is only part of the story. Rather, the emphasis has been on the integration of thinking about education, work and life; and orienting TVET towards lifelong learning and sustainable development.

### **UNESCO's standard-setting role**

Recommendations are one of several normative or 'standard-setting' instruments used by UNESCO, and it would be useful to quickly describe UNESCO's standard-setting role.

As a central forum for the coordination of the contemporary ethical, normative and intellectual issues, UNESCO fosters multidisciplinary exchange and mutual understanding, working – where possible and desirable - towards universal agreements on these issues, defining benchmarks and mobilising international opinion. When agreeing to common rules, States can draw up various forms of instruments (such as agreements, conventions, recommendations, declarations, etc.). The two main forms of instruments used by UNESCO are:

*Conventions*– a two-third majority is required for their adoption and they are legally binding. They are therefore subject to ratification, acceptance or accession by States, which are then obliged to comply with the obligations prescribed by the instrument.

*Recommendations*– a simple majority is required for their adoption by the UNESCO's General Conference. Recommendations are not legally binding, but Member States are invited to apply the principles and norms they contain by taking whatever legislative and other steps that may be required. Emanating from the Organisation's supreme governing body, recommendations, though not binding, possess great moral authority and reflect States' political commitment.

### **UNESCO's normative instruments concerning TVET**

In the field of TVET there are currently two UNESCO normative instruments, the 1989 Convention and the 2001 Revised Recommendation. Member States are required to submit, by the dates specified by the General Conference, reports on the measures that they have adopted in relation to each convention in force and each recommendation adopted.<sup>1</sup>

There is a longer history of UNESCO normative instruments on TVET, stretching back to 1962 when the first UNESCO Recommendation on TVE was adopted. It recommended that technical and vocational education should do more than train an individual for a given occupation by providing the persons concerned with the necessary skills and theoretical knowledge, it should also, in conjunction with general education, provide for the development of personality and character and foster the capacity for understanding, judgment, self-expression and adaptation to varying environments. (para 7)

The text of the Recommendation discouraged early specialisation and narrow employability. It stressed the importance of gender equality, inclusion and the dignity of work. Crucially, it declared that TVE is a right and that access should not be dependent on financial ability to pay. Many of today's concerns about the organisation of TVE (such as governance, pedagogical staff's qualifications, pedagogies, guidance, etc.) were already present in this first Recommendation.

The Recommendation was revised in 1974, a process strongly influenced by the Faure Report, which insisted on education for broad human development and which also emphasised the lifelong dimension. The 1974 Revised Recommendation also highlighted how the gender equality dimension was all too often merely rhetorical, and reemphasised the commitment to a transformed notion of equitable gender access to TVE and work. It acknowledged rising issues of school drop-out and youth unemployment, but insisted that the educational response should avoid being narrow and initial: skills for employability needed to be pursued as part of lifelong education for human flourishing.

Following the 1987 Berlin World Congress, the 1989 Convention on Technical and Vocational Education was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference. This set down a set of core responsibilities of Member States regarding aspects of TVE such as broad objectives; curriculum and pedagogy; guidance; staffing; and international cooperation. It reiterated the view that TVE should promote skills for both work and life, and should be governed by concerns about equity and inclusion.

The Recommendation was again revised in 2001, to take into account the outcomes of the 1999 Seoul Conference on Technical and Vocational Education. The text reiterated the breadth of development vision but couched this in the contemporary language of citizenship, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. This was followed by the 2004 Bonn Declaration by a group of UNESCO-convened experts. This insisted on the importance of seeing TVE as being about work, life and sustainable development.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Article 17.1 of the Rules of Procedure concerning Recommendations to Member States and International Conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution

Other UNESCO normative instruments are relevant to the current revision process. Most notable amongst these are the 1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education; the 1966 Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers; the 1976 Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education- currently being revised; the regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education, currently under review; and the recent decision of the General Conference at its 37<sup>th</sup> Session to invite UNESCO's Director-General to initiate, in accordance with the applicable rules, the process of elaborating a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

### ILO's normative instruments concerning TVET

UNESCO Recommendations exist within the larger framework of the standard-setting activities of the UN system. Given the shared responsibility for TVET and skills development between UNESCO and ILO, the latter's standards-setting work in this field is also relevant here. The ILO's first Vocational Training Recommendation was adopted in 1939, accompanied by a separate Apprenticeship Recommendation.

In 1962, simultaneously with the adoption by the UNESCO General Conference of the TVE Recommendation, ILO adopted a Revised Vocational Training Recommendation. It too argued that developing "occupational capacities" was not the sole aim of technical and vocational education. Rather, this needed to be seen as part of building broader individual and societal capacities. The Recommendation also insisted on a lifelong dimension to training, as well as inclusion.

In 1975, ILO adopted Convention No. 142 and Recommendation No. 150 concerning Human Resource Development, which state that "guidance and training are directed to identifying and developing human capabilities for a productive and satisfying working life and, in conjunction with the different forms of education, to improve the ability of the individual to understand and, individually or collectively, to influence working conditions and the social environment" (para 2). As with the UNESCO 1974 Revised Recommendation, considerable attention was paid to youth unemployment issues, particularly in rural areas.

The 2004 ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation (No. 195) is more focused on a language of employability, qualifications and competencies. But even there, acknowledgment is made of the need to keep economic and social development in balance. A list of relevant documents is available on the website of the Special Virtual Conference.

A full list of references can be found on the UNESCO-UNEVOC website.