



Shaping the Future of VET: from the Osnabrück to the Herning Declaration and a Policy Perspective on the Twin Transition

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The Roadmap for Today

- The Legacy of **Osnabrück Declaration** – Evaluating the vital foundations of resilience and recovery
- Dissecting the **Herning Declaration** – Analysing the new 2026-2030 objectives and how they evolve beyond previous frameworks
- The **Union of Skills** in Practice – Closing the gap between the classroom and the smart-factory floor

The Evolution – a Brief Timeline

2020: The Osnabrück Declaration

- Signed during the global pandemic to prevent the collapse of skill systems
- Focus – resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 shock
- Goal – defensive crisis management and planting the ‘initial seeds’ of Green and Digital transitions
- The transition – moving beyond survival
- Realisation that ‘resilience’ alone was insufficient for European goals
- Shifted from wanting **to survive** global changes to wanting **to lead** them

2025: The Herning Declaration

- Signed in Denmark to mark a new era of VET leadership
- Focus – a proactive and competitive vision for the year 2030
- Goal – moving from reactive support to an engine of industrial and economic growth

The Twin Transition and the Union of Skills

The Intersecting Forces of Change

- The Twin Transition defined by the simultaneous re-engineering of the economy toward carbon-neutrality and technological advancement
- The human element: machines do not transition, but people do
- Building the 'Union of Skills'
- A single market for talent – evolving from a single market for goods and services to a unified market for European talent
- Universal recognition – working toward a future where a micro-credential is equally recognized and valuable everywhere

System Characteristics:

- Modular – learning is broken into flexible units
- Portable – skills and credentials move easily across borders
- Inclusive – designed to ensure no one is left behind

Osnabrück – the Architecture of Resilience

- **A Different World (2020)** – the Declaration was signed amidst a global pandemic, fracturing supply chains, and the onset of the ‘Great Resignation’
- **An emergency response system** – Osnabrück was designed as a survival mechanism to ensure VET could withstand the COVID-19 shock
- **A tool for recovery** – VET as the primary engine for economic and social repair



The 1st Win of Osnabrück – Resilience and Agility

- **Overcoming the speed gap** – before 2021, VET systems were criticized for taking years to update curricula while industry evolved in months
- **The shift to agility** – Osnabrück forced the development of short-cycle courses and rapid retraining modules
- **Continuous learning** – developed the capability to keep education alive even when physical workshops were closed
- **Beyond the virus** – resilience was not just about pandemic survival; it was about building a system to absorb any future shock
- **Adaptability** – ensuring the system remains robust against both economic and technological disruptions



The 2nd Win of Osnabrück – the Green Link

- **Explicit alignment** – Osnabrück was the first major policy document to tie vocational excellence directly to the European Green Deal
- **Practical sustainability** – moved ‘sustainability’ from corporate reports into the hands of the apprentice
- **Integrated skillsets** – ensured that ‘Green Skills’ were no longer an ‘add-on’ but the new standard of industry

The 3rd Win Osnabrück – The Digital Push

- **A decade of progress** – Osnabrück accelerated the digitalization of VET by a decade in just a four-year span
- **Beyond remote learning** – moved past basic 2021-era remote tools to establish frameworks for digital pedagogy
- **Immersive environments** – accelerated the use of advanced digital tools in the classroom, replacing the traditional methods

From Recovery to Leadership

The Osnabrück Era (2021)

Vocabulary – *support, protect, mitigate, and restore*

Objective – stopping the ‘bleeding’ in the labor market and surviving the transition

Status – a system focused on recovery and catching up with industry

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The Herning Era (2026)

Vocabulary – *innovation, excellence, attractiveness, and sovereignty*

Objective – moving from stability to *proactive leadership*

Status – VET systems have proven their worth; employment rates are stable

VET as the Driver of Change: from Osnabrück to Herning

- **Driving industry** – transitioning from ‘reacting’ to the industrial world to becoming the force that drives it
- **Leading the Twin Transition** – we are no longer just reacting to Green and Digital shifts, we are the ones making them happen
- **The platform** – Osnabrück provided the stable ground, but Herning provides the platform to leap forward

Herning 2026-2030 – a New Impulse

- **Beyond ‘functional’** – we are moving past a system that is merely functional to one that is explicitly attractive
- **The Primary choice** – VET is no longer a ‘safety net’ for those who cannot attend university
- **Building the future** – it is now positioned as the first choice for those who want to actively build the future
- **Competitiveness** – high-quality VET is now recognized as the key to European economic strength
- **Quality jobs** – the focus is on preparing learners for high-value roles in a modern economy

The National Objectives – From Rhetoric to Results

Measurable Accountability:

- **Beyond vague cooperation** – Herning introduces 13 specific National Objectives to ensure measurable progress across member states
- **Mandatory reporting** – each member state is now required to report on concrete progress rather than abstract improvements
- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):**
 - Graduate employment rates – tracking the direct impact of training on the labour market
 - Adult Reskilling – aiming for an ambitious 60% participation target by 2030
 - AI Integration – ensuring Artificial Intelligence is incorporated into curricula responsibly

The Competitive Edge and Parity of Esteem

New Standards for a New Economy

- Quality over cost – competitiveness is now defined by a skilled, adaptable workforce rather than low-cost production
- Parity of esteem – vocational and academic paths hold equal value

The Rise of Higher VET (EQF 5-8)

- Advanced qualifications – pushing for professional degrees that rival university master's programmes
- Professional Doctorates – a surge in high-level technical degrees to meet elite industry needs
- Breaking the stigma – dismantling the ‘lesser than’ narrative
- a Master Craftsman and a Master of Science now stand on equal footing

The Bottleneck – The Teacher and Trainer Crisis

The Critical Obstacles

- The human element – ambitious policies and advanced technologies are meaningless without skilled educators to lead them
- The ‘bottleneck’ – teacher and trainer shortages are identified as the single greatest threat to the success of the Herning Declaration
- Aging workforce – by 2026, nearly 40% of technical trainers in key sectors are nearing retirement

Herning’s Structural Solutions

- Closing the pay gap – addressing the 10% salary disparity between VET teachers and other tertiary-educated professionals
- Flexible career pathways – allowing industry experts to transition into teaching without losing seniority or benefits
- Continuous professional development – providing paid time and resources for veterans to master emerging technologies

The 2030 Benchmarks

- **International mobilities** – a target of 12% of VET learners participating in international programmes by 2030
- **Adult learning** – a goal for 60% of all adults to be engaged in training
- **Accountability** – these statistics are the primary metrics for judging the success of the Union of Skills
- **VET for Europe's sake** – shifting from 'education for education's sake' to a strategic focus on Europe's collective needs

The Twin Transition - Beyond the Buzzwords

- **The context** – in the Herning Declaration and the Union of Skills, the Twin Transition is no longer just a theory
- **A dual shift** – it represents the simultaneous rewriting of what we teach and how we teach it
- **Focusing on the ground** – moving beyond high-level policy in Brussels and to the modern VET centre

The Green Transition – The Circular Mindset

The Evolution of ‘Green Skills’

- The Osnabrück era – green skills were often treated as a separate, elective module added to the end of a course
- The 2026 reality – sustainability is now fully integrated into the core curriculum of every trade
- ‘Green’ is the new ‘safety’ – resource efficiency is now a mandatory certification requirement

Implementing a Circular Economy Mindset

- Beyond installation – training focuses on the entire lifecycle of technology
- Refurbish over replace – a shift in teaching philosophy toward maintaining and repairing systems to extend their use

The Digital Transition - Immersive Excellence

The 'Twin Transition'

- Integrated goals – digital tools are the primary instruments for achieving resource efficiency
- Real-time sustainability – technicians use smart systems to monitor carbon footprints and energy flows
- Industry standards – 2026 VET centres mirror modern industrial environments, managing the circular flow of materials through digital ecosystems

The Backbone of the 'Union of Skills'

- Standardized assessment – integrated digital platforms enable consistent skill evaluation across borders
- Workforce mobility – digital proficiency recognized instantly across all Member States

Digital as the Green Accelerator

A Unified Strategy

- Beyond parallel tracks – the Digital and Green transitions are not separate initiatives, but strengthen each other
- The symbiosis:
 - Digital provides the Intelligence (the *How*)
 - Green provides the Purpose (the *Why*)

Real-Time Agility

- Surgical precision – moving away from a 3-5 year curriculum update cycle
- Real-time monitoring – AI analyses millions of job postings and patent filings to identify emerging ‘green’ skill gaps as they happen
- Micro-credentials: enabling the update of training modules in weeks, not years, to keep pace with industry shifts

The Human Element of the Twin

The VET Mission: Balancing Progress

- Digital ≠ de-humanized – keeping the human element at the center of technological advancement
- Green ≠ expensive – ensuring sustainability is accessible, efficient, and economically viable

Defining the Modern Workforce

- Tech-fluent – mastery of advanced digital tools and automated systems
- Value-driven – prioritizing ethics and environmental stewardship in every technical task

The Union of Skills – a New Political Umbrella

Breaking National Borders

- From fragmentation to integration – moving beyond isolated national systems that are difficult to translate across frontiers
- Collective responsibility – a skill gap in one Member State is no longer a local issue, it is a shared threat to the entire Union's competitiveness

The Holistic Vision

- Universal recognition – valuing skills acquired at all levels and ages, regardless of *how* or *where* they were obtained
- Unified framework – bringing together Action, Investment, and Governance under one strategic umbrella

The 2026 European VET Strategy

The Blueprint for Implementation

- Operationalising the Herning Declaration – moving from high-level policy to tangible, cross-border results
- Skill intelligence – utilizing real-time data to predict labour market shifts and identify exactly where the Union must invest next

Tackling the ‘Recognition Gap’

- Eliminating red tape – streamlining the process for high-level technicians to move between Member States without bureaucratic friction
- A common language – moving away from rigid, country-specific qualifications toward a universal Language of Competencies

Key Strategic Pillar: Portability

- Frictionless mobility – ensuring a technician's expertise is as mobile as the people themselves
- Instant value – competencies are recognized immediately across the Union, ensuring skills are utilized where they are needed most

Micro-credentials and Informal Learning

2026: The Year of the Micro-credentials

- ‘Bite-sized’ learning – standardised European approach to short-form qualifications
- Universal logging – all units, whether from VET centers, company academies, or online platforms, are recorded in European Digital Credentials for Learning
- Stackable success: small credentials that build toward larger, recognised career paths

Validating Informal Learning

- Skills over certificates – giving formal credit to workers with years of ‘on-the-job’ experience who lack traditional degrees
- Recognition of prior learning – bridging the gap between practical expertise and formal qualification

The Goal - A Single Market for Skills

A Revolutionary Milestone

- Parity of esteem – elevating VET qualifications to be as mobile, respected, and understood as university degrees
- The goal – a student finishing an apprenticeship in Riga on Friday can step onto a factory floor in Lyon the following Monday with zero friction
- The benchmark – people should move as easily as goods, capital and services do today

Redefining ‘Vocational’

- The 2030 vision – moving beyond the ‘local’ label
- The European Standard – ‘vocational’ becomes a hallmark of European-wide excellence, not just a regional certificate

Looking Toward 2030

The Strategic Shift

- From silos to synergy – breaking down barriers between industries and education systems to create a unified, collaborative ecosystem
- From ‘one-and-done’ to ‘lifelong’ – replacing the traditional end-point degree with a continuous, evolving Union of Skills

A Legacy of Growth

- The evolution – tracing the journey from the Osnabrück Declaration to the Herning Declaration
- Resilience in action – a VET system that has adapted to global shocks and emerged with ‘immense ambition’

Empowering the European Citizen

- Beyond technical training – we are not just producing labour, but we are empowering citizens
- Leading the transition – equipping the workforce to drive the most significant economic and environmental shift in history

VET – The Strategic Priority

The Journey of Excellence

- The foundation (Osnabrück) – resilience and stability during a global crisis
- The roadmap (Herning) – creating an attractive, inclusive, and high-tech VET ecosystem
- The reality (Union of Skills) – the political framework enabling a Single Market for Talent

The Fundamental Mindset Shift

- From ‘Plan B’ to strategic priority – VET is no longer an ‘alternative’ path, but the engine of European industrial sovereignty
- The competitive edge – vocational excellence is the prerequisite for a green, tech-driven, and socially inclusive Union

The Pillars of Sovereignty

- A green continent – achieving climate neutrality through skilled hands
- A technologically driven Economy – leading the global digital race
- An inclusive society – ensuring no citizen is left behind in the transition

Call to Action – What to Do Tomorrow

For Policy-Makers

- Go beyond funding, become a vocal advocate for VET
- Dismantle the bureaucratic walls hindering cross-border micro-credential recognition
- Operationalise the Herning Declaration through legislative agility

For VET Providers:

- Adopt the 'Twin Transition' as their core identity, not an added burden
- Act as the vital bridge between digital classroom simulations and the physical green economy

For Industry Partners:

- Shift from '*employers*' to '*active educational partners*'
- Invest in workplace trainers and fully engage with Union of Skills mobility programmes

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