



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Ref. GP/DSI/ReferNet_FPA/002/15

Cedefop's European Network for Information on Vocational
Education and Training (VET)

ReferNet

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DEFINITIONS

‘Affiliated entity’

Article 122 FR and 199 RAP of the Financial Regulation distinguishes two types of affiliated entities which, in spite of being third parties to the grant agreement, may take part in the action alongside beneficiaries and declare eligible cost under certain conditions:

(a) several legal entities forming together one legal entity or ‘sole beneficiary’ which may, or may not, have been specifically established for carrying out the action (e.g. groupings, joint ventures, consortia).

(b) legal entities having a legal or capital link with a beneficiary or co-beneficiary, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation (e.g. networks, federations, trade unions).

In both cases, the said affiliated entities:

- shall be identified in the application;
- shall provide the supporting documents allowing the verification of their compliance with the eligibility, non-exclusion and selection criteria;
- shall be entitled to declare eligible costs.

‘Annual ReferNet work plan’: set of activities that are defined annually within the scope of the Framework partnership agreement. It describes the activities to be accomplished and outlines how they will be carried out. The work plan is prepared by Cedefop and agreed after consultation of the network.

‘Applicant’: eligible legal entity or grouping of legal entities having submitted a proposal within the framework of this open call.

‘Beneficiary (Single entity or as per a) above)/**multi-beneficiary’** (as per b) above): any legal person(s) with whom a grant agreement has been signed. Such an entity is called **‘National ReferNet partner’**. On an annual basis, each national ReferNet partner may be the beneficiary of a grant by Cedefop to carry out activities indicated in a Specific grant agreement. National ReferNet partners are key institutions working in the field of VET and VET-related issues. They must demonstrate expertise in VET or labour market issues and the capacity to network with national and international organisations involved in VET or VET-related policy, research and practice. They must ensure broad and active cooperation with the various national VET institutions and stakeholders and be able to mobilise their expertise to carry out the activities. They are responsible for providing deliverables and final implementation reports within the deadlines and to the standards agreed.

‘National ReferNet representative’ (see also Section 2.4.2 below): individual nominated by the national government and approved by Cedefop to support ReferNet work at national level by:

- (a) cooperating with the national ReferNet partner;

- (b) validating, on behalf of the national government, information prepared by the national ReferNet partner;
- (c) attending ReferNet meetings.

National representatives should be selected on the basis of their high level of expertise in national VET, lifelong learning and employment issues. They should also possess good knowledge and understanding of European VET and labour market policies, processes, strategies and objectives and their impact on national systems and policies. Experience in comparative VET research is an additional asset. Furthermore, it is recommended that national ReferNet representatives are nominated in collaboration with social partners. The national ReferNet representative cannot be a member of the ReferNet national team.

‘National ReferNet team coordinator’: individual designated by the national ReferNet partner to coordinate the team implementing the annual work plans. He/She supervises the performance of the agreements, and represents the grant beneficiary at the annual plenary meeting of ReferNet and in Partnership forums.

‘Partnerships’ are implemented through two legal instruments: Framework partnership agreements and Specific grant agreements:

- firstly, the **‘Framework partnership agreement’ (FPA)** sets out the conditions governing grants to partners for carrying out jointly agreed work plans. This does not constitute an obligation for Cedefop to award annual grants; and
- secondly, the **‘Specific grant agreement’ (SGA)**, based upon the Framework partnership agreement, governs the implementation of the annual work plan. The conclusion of a Specific grant agreement will be subject to another grant procedure (‘consultation procedure’).

‘Subcontracting’

Where the implementation of subsidised actions requires subcontracting or the launching of a call for tenders, the partner or co-beneficiary should award this contract to the tender offering the best value for money, respecting the principles of transparency and equal treatment of potential contractors and ensuring that there is no conflict of interests.

Any subcontracting/subcontractor must be approved by Cedefop, either by accepting the applicant’s proposal or, if proposed by the partner after the Agreements’ signature, in writing by an exchange of letters. In the latter case subcontracting/subcontractor will be accepted only if it is judged necessary and does not lead to distortion of competition (if applicable) or to weakening the partner’s or Cedefop’s control over the quality of implementation of the work plan.

The applicant must clearly indicate the foreseen proportion of subcontracting by filling in the related information in Annex 3 of the Grant application form – Involvement of third parties in the action / work plan.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Cedefop: the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Founded in 1975⁽¹⁾ and based in Greece since 1995, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) is an agency of the European Union (EU). Acknowledged as an authoritative source of information and expertise on vocational education and training (VET), skills and competences, its mission is to support European VET-related policy development and contribute to its implementation.

VET addresses young people and adults in a lifelong and lifewide perspective; it prepares for different qualification levels; it takes the form of initial or continuing learning and is offered by a wide range of different institutions; VET(-oriented learning) takes place in formal, non-formal as well as informal settings.

Cedefop's mission and its expertise at the interface between education and training and the labour market have guided its past and current objectives, medium-term priorities and annual work programmes. For 2012-16, Cedefop's strategic objective is to 'strengthen European cooperation and support the European Commission, Member States and social partners in designing and implementing policies for an attractive VET that promotes excellence and social inclusion'. This strategic objective is supported by three priorities, namely:

- (a) supporting modernisation of VET systems;
- (b) careers and transitions – continuing VET, adult and work-based learning; and
- (c) analysing skills and competence needs to inform VET provision.

These priorities⁽²⁾ are aligned to: Europe's strategy for 2020; the current Commission's agenda for jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change; the Education and training 2020 framework (ET2020); and the common vision, objectives and deliverables for VET agreed in 2010 and 2015 within the so-called 'Copenhagen process' (see 1.2 and 2.1).

Sound understanding of the highly differentiated VET systems, policy developments and labour market characteristics across Europe has enabled Cedefop to assist the Commission, Member States and social partners in shaping and implementing common VET-related policies.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of 10 February 1975 establishing a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, *Official Journal of the European Union* L39, 13.2.1975, last amended by Council Regulation EC No 2051/2004. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32004R2051>

⁽²⁾ Cedefop's Medium-Term Priorities 2012-14 were extended until the end of 2016 by Government Board decisions of 24 April 2014 and 25 February 2015 to cover 2015 and 2016 respectively, as Cedefop will have to use a new multi-annual programming cycle as of 2017. At the time of publishing this Call for proposals the agency's future multi-annual objectives and strategic actions were still being discussed. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/what-we-do/medium-term-priorities>

Cedefop has helped design and put in place common European tools and principles that focus on learning outcomes. Their aim is to make people's knowledge, skills and competences better visible and comparable across Europe to make lifelong learning and mobility easier. The agency conducts regular skill needs and supply forecasts ⁽³⁾ and has been given the responsibility to develop and maintain the European Skills Panorama ⁽⁴⁾ in close cooperation with the European Commission. Cedefop's work on qualifications and skills supports the EU-level effort to better match the outcomes of learning with job requirements.

Cedefop supports the European Commission, EU Member States (and associated countries Iceland and Norway) and social partners in developing and implementing European VET policy by:

- (a) monitoring developments at European, national, sectoral or regional level and reporting on VET policies, reforms and systems;
- (b) carrying out applied research, comparative and statistical analyses, as well as producing scenarios and forecasting future trends;
- (c) offering policy-makers, social partners, researchers and practitioners a unique platform for exchanging experiences and promoting mutual learning; and
- (d) disseminating objective, reliable, timely and relevant information to policy-makers and raising awareness on issues related to VET for young people and adults.

Cedefop carries out its role through the tasks set out in its founding regulation. It disseminates information through its website, publications, networks, conferences and seminars.

In the future, while maintaining its focus on analysing cross-country common challenges and trends, the agency will expand its capacity to aid policy learning and support Member States and social partners more directly than in the past in their efforts to adapt their VET systems to changing needs: economic and employment challenges, global competition, and rapidly changing labour markets. Cedefop will also aim to ensure a closer link between research, policy and practice and support policy learning to support EU policy- and decision-makers, Member States, social partners and other VET stakeholders. With its increasing offer of policy learning forums and thematic reviews Cedefop intends to support Member States in their targeted work on specific challenges by bringing together its expertise on skills, VET policies and European tools and principles.

⁽³⁾ Cedefop was entrusted with this task by the Council of the European Union (2010). *Council conclusions on: new skills for new jobs: the way forward*.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/114962.pdf

⁽⁴⁾ Created by the European Commission, the EU Skills Panorama is a central access point for data, information and intelligence on skill needs in occupations and sectors that provides a European perspective on trends in skill supply and demand and possible skill mismatches, while also giving access to national data and sources. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/eu-skills-panorama>

In the current Commission the units responsible for VET and adult learning and skills and qualifications are embedded in DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. This will reinforce Cedefop's role at the interface between education and training and employment.

More information about Cedefop can be found on its website and in its annual work programmes: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu>

1.2. ReferNet: Cedefop's European network for information on VET

Refernet is Cedefop's European network for information on VET. It was set up in 2002 to meet the growing demand for comparative information about VET systems, developments and policies at the time. The network covers EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. Each country is represented by a key organisation involved in VET and/or VET-related research and analysis referred to as the national ReferNet partner.

ReferNet is part of Cedefop's work programme and is therefore subject to decisions of Cedefop's Governing Board and the budgetary authorities. It is regularly evaluated to ensure that the resources allocated are used efficiently and economically, in keeping with the objectives set for the network and with the policy agenda and strategy of Cedefop.

ReferNet's mission is to support cooperation in VET-related issues between the EU (Cedefop) and the Member States and associated countries, but also among Member States, to facilitate the flow of information between the EU and the individual countries and so ensure mutual awareness of EU and national VET developments.

Currently ReferNet supports Cedefop in monitoring, assessing and reporting on countries' progress, in implementing joint priorities for VET agreed under the so-called 'Copenhagen process' ⁽⁵⁾, which aims at strengthening European cooperation in VET and VET's contribution to reaching the goals of Europe's strategy for 2020 ⁽⁶⁾.

ReferNet supports Cedefop by

- (a) reporting on national VET systems and VET-related policy developments; and
- (b) raising the visibility of VET and disseminating information on VET and related issues.

ReferNet informs on VET's role, purpose, governance and structure. It provides insights in developments and trends in VET-related policies, and analyses of how each country is progressing in its implementation of common European policy objectives.

⁽⁵⁾ 'Copenhagen Process' related documents

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1433247701905&uri=URISERV:ef0018>

⁽⁶⁾ European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>
Europe 2020: a new European strategy for jobs and growth: European Council Presidency Conclusions 25-26 March 2010 <http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/docs/en/era-partnership-council-of-the-eu-03-2010.pdf>

ReferNet is a platform to exchange information, share practices and ideas and promote understanding of different VET challenges in the partner countries. Working together provides a stronger evidence base on VET and related issues in Europe. Closer cooperation across the EU will also contribute to raising awareness on the value of VET. ReferNet partners benefit from thematic discussions, peer learning and information exchange. The work also supports the visibility of VET at the national level ⁽⁷⁾.

National ReferNet partners are supported by ‘national ReferNet representatives’ nominated by their governments (see Definitions above). On behalf of the national government the national ReferNet representative validates information by the grant beneficiary, whenever such validation is deemed necessary. In particular, information on national VET systems and policy developments needs to be validated, to ensure that it is accurate and in accordance with national policies and strategies.

ReferNet activities require cooperation with a broad range of national VET stakeholders. Cedefop recommends national ReferNet partners to set up a national consortium of key VET institutions, social partners and VET researchers and mobilise expertise of disseminating widely information on VET and Cedefop’s products.

Further information on ReferNet can be found at:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/index.aspx>

1.3. Objectives and nature of the call

With the objective of establishing a European network for VET – ReferNet –, this call aims at selecting one applicant from **Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland and Malta**, with which Cedefop will conclude a four-year framework partnership agreement, and at concluding with each successful applicant a specific grant agreement for a work plan to be carried out in 2016. ⁽⁸⁾.

Framework partnership agreements are implemented through Specific grant agreements. The Framework partnership agreement defines the legal and financial framework and the scope of activities (see Section 2). Specific grant agreements define the partner’s annual work plans.

Applicants are therefore required to submit:

- (a) a proposal for a four-year framework partnership agreement for the year 2016-2019; and
- (b) a grant application for work to be carried out under a specific agreement for 2016 (1st January – 31 December 2016).

⁽⁷⁾ Cedefop (2015), *Skillset and match: Cedefop’s magazine promoting learning for work*, May 2015, pp. 24-25, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9097> and Cedefop (2015), *Skillset and match*, January 2015, pp. 20-21, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9093>

⁽⁸⁾ The successful applicant could be a single organisation or a grouping of co-beneficiaries.

2. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

2.1. Policy background

The exceptionally extended period of crisis which hit Europe in 2008 has left long-lasting consequences on many economies and labour markets. While economic recovery has shown some gradual improvement, growth varies across countries. The sharp decrease in job opportunities has led to high unemployment rates in the majority of Member States together with increasing risk of social exclusion especially among youth and low-skilled adults.

Despite some improvement, overall employment is still below pre-crisis level and unemployment is expected to remain high, albeit below 10%. In addition, the crisis reverted a long trend of converging labour market conditions within the EU and led to growing disparities across Europe. Unemployment rates are still likely to range from less than 5% in Germany to more than 20% in Greece and Spain. On average, in 2014 nearly half of the jobless in the EU were long-term unemployed.

Substantial inequalities and risk of social exclusion have particularly affected low-skilled adults and young people. In a scenario of growing social inequality as well as geographical disparity the simple fine-tuning of the labour market is not sufficient to avoid the risk of a new prolonged period of jobless growth in the coming years. In addition, there are some deeper challenges which pre-date the crisis and require a renewed approach to education and training policies in Europe. Globalisation, technological advances, ICT revolution have been accelerated by the economic downturn. This has led to speedier structural changes in the economy which will require new and renewed skills profiles and qualifications. Demographic ageing will lead to a progressive – and in some countries sharp – decrease in labour supply.

Education and training per se cannot solve the economic and social challenges currently facing Europe. However, on a longer-term basis it is crucial for creating the necessary conditions for employment, innovation and growth. Already ‘Europe 2020’⁽⁹⁾, the EU’s strategy in response to the crisis, considers investment in education and training a prerequisite for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Benchmarks for education and training feature prominently among its headline targets: reduce early school-leaving to less than 10% and increase the share of 30-34 year-olds with a higher education degree or equivalent to 40%. Despite high youth unemployment rates and high shares of NEETs (young people being neither in education and training nor in employment), the EU is likely to reach these targets.

However, it is not fully clear if this development can solely be attributed to specific policy measures or if it is linked to poor labour market prospects during the crisis.

⁽⁹⁾ European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>
Europe 2020: a new European strategy for jobs and growth: European Council Presidency conclusions 25-26 March 2010 <http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/docs/en/era-partnership-council-of-the-eu-03-2010.pdf>

Young people may have decided to continue their education and/or move into VET to improve their job opportunities hoping the labour market situation may have improved by then. There is also evidence that young people in depressed economic contexts often lack motivation to complete their programmes. Also, many of those who found jobs have a higher qualification level than would be needed for their jobs. Cedefop's European Skills and Jobs Survey suggests that the share of people who have not found / cannot find jobs matching their skills and qualifications has been increasing. The skills workers have tend to be under-used and under-developed by their employers at the detriment of the employees' job satisfaction and the currency of their skills.

VET and VET-related policies also have a role to play in achieving the other Europe 2020 headline targets, which have become more difficult to reach due to the long period of recession. VET's excellence and inclusion dimensions are important building blocks in the EU's effort to realise the current European Commission's agenda and advance towards the Europe 2020 goals which are still considered relevant, as a public consultation in 2014 demonstrated ⁽¹⁰⁾.

A specifically dedicated investment package ⁽¹¹⁾ within the current European Commission's agenda for jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change aims to stimulate job creation, encourage innovation and increase competitiveness. Main elements are to: strengthen Europe's industrial base and its share of renewable energy; speed up diffusion of digital technologies in industry and create a business-friendly environment.

VET will need to help ensure that innovative and skilled jobs will actually lead to higher productivity and growth. At the same time, workers and people hit hard by the crisis need stronger support through a mix of learning and activation policies, which include customised VET provisions and work-based learning; as well as tools and methods to ensure recognition and transferability of their skills and competences. Labour market intelligence combined with guidance and counselling should support finding career development paths that fit best to people's qualifications and aspirations, put their skills to use and continuously develop them.

However, attractiveness and quality of VET vary significantly across Europe. And also countries with traditionally strong VET at upper secondary level face declining enrolment and increased 'competition' with other forms of education, in particular the increasing trend towards tertiary level education and training. VET provision for young people and adults, whether initial or continuing, at secondary, post-secondary or tertiary level, is increasingly complex and offered by a range of different institutions and stakeholders besides the traditional ones. In addition, the outcomes of national initial and continuing VET vary significantly between European countries demonstrating the importance to systematically monitor and review them.

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Commission (2015), *Communication on results of the public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM(2015) 100 final. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/public-consultation/index_en.htm

⁽¹¹⁾ European Commission (2014), *An investment plan for Europe*, COM(2014) 903 final. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2014:903:FIN>

To ensure consistent implementation of Europe 2020 in the different policy areas, the Council of the European Union endorsed an economic governance process, the ‘European semester’⁽¹²⁾, which helps identify the main challenges and provide strategic advice on policies. Within this process Member States receive specific recommendations guiding them towards key action areas. Proposed by the European Commission and endorsed by the Council, these recommendations also address education and training more generally or specifically VET. For the period 2015-16 they focus on growth drivers, cover fewer areas and are more specific than in the past. This means that fewer relate to education and training. Nevertheless, for about half of EU Member States, VET- or employment-related issues are likely to be included: some are on improving participation and learning outcomes of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. migrants); a few refer to apprenticeships or similar schemes, others refer to measures that help increase employment opportunities.

The objective to reduce skills mismatch, prevent early leaving from education and training and improve job prospects of young people and adults, requires close cooperation between education and training and employment authorities, social partners, social sector organisations, employment services, VET institutions, companies, and a range of other stakeholders.

To support Member States in addressing the current challenges, European Commission initiatives and Council documents, which complement one another, focus on the interdependence between employment, economic, social, education and development policies⁽¹³⁾:

- the Education and Training 2020 framework (ET 2020)⁽¹⁴⁾;
- based on its overall objectives, the *Bruges Communiqué* and related Council conclusions⁽¹⁵⁾ combining a long-term view on European cooperation in VET until 2020 with national actions (‘deliverables’) for the periods 2011-14 and 2015-20 and EU-level support measures; the deliverables for the years up to 2020 are expected to be agreed on 22 June 2015 (Riga Presidency conclusions);

(12) European Commission (2014), *European semester: a new architecture for the new EU economic governance* - Q&A. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/11/14>
European semester: who does what and when http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/chart_en.pdf
European semester 2015: country specific recommendations http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm

(13) Council of the European Union (2012), *Towards a job-rich recovery and giving a better chance to Europe's youth*, Council conclusions. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/12/st13/st13907.en12.pdf>

(14) Council of the European Union (2009), Council conclusions of 12 May on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’), *Official Journal of the European Union*, C119, pp. 2-9. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:en:PDF> A report reviewing these objectives and Council conclusions are expected to be endorsed in autumn 2015.

(15) Council of the European Union (2010), Conclusions on priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training for the period 2011-20, *Official Journal of the European Union*, C324, pp. 5-15. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42010Y1201\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42010Y1201(01))

- the communication on *Rethinking education and training* ⁽¹⁶⁾, with a specific staff working document on VET;
- the employment package *Towards a job-rich recovery* ⁽¹⁷⁾, which emphasises the need to invest in and validate people's skills ⁽¹⁸⁾, the youth opportunities initiative ⁽¹⁹⁾, and the communication *Moving youth into employment* ⁽²⁰⁾;
- Member States have established youth guarantees ⁽²¹⁾ and are advised to involve young people in shaping the design of policies that affect them ⁽²²⁾. Youth guarantee measures can be supported by the European Social Fund and the European youth employment initiative. To assist countries facing financial constraints, 1 billion EUR has been frontloaded, thus increasing possible pre-financing up to 30%. Special funding from the European Investment Bank is available to support enterprises engaging in these efforts. Pilots have shown initial results, but it is difficult to establish whether targeted action or economic recovery has led to a recently observed decline in youth unemployment;
- apprenticeship-type schemes, traineeships and other forms of work-based learning have proved to ease entry into the labour market; they are main pillars of the youth guarantees which aim to support NEETs. The European alliance for apprenticeships ⁽²³⁾, which aims to support partnerships between countries and different education and labour market actors to develop or strengthen such

⁽¹⁶⁾ European Commission (2012), *Rethinking education: investing in skills for better socioeconomic outcomes*, and accompanying staff working documents, in particular *Vocational education and training for better skills, growth and jobs*, SWD(2012) 375 final.

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0669:FIN:EN:PDF> and related press release: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm

⁽¹⁷⁾ European Commission (2012), *Towards a job-rich recovery*, COM(2012) 173 final.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7619&langId=en>

⁽¹⁸⁾ Council of the European Union (2012), Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, *Official Journal of the European Union*, C398, pp. 1-5. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

⁽¹⁹⁾ European Commission (2012), *Youth Opportunities Initiative*

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1006>

Implementing the Youth Opportunities Initiative: first steps taken. Staff working document, SWD(2012) 98 final. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7625&langId=en>

⁽²⁰⁾ European Commission (2012), *Moving youth into employment*, COM(2012) 727 final

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0727:FIN:EN:PDF>

and accompanying staff working document SWD(2012) 406 final.

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2012:0406:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁽²¹⁾ Council of the European Union (2013), *Recommendation on establishing a youth guarantee*, Common guidelines, 7123/13 [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426(01))

⁽²²⁾ Council of the European Union, (2013), *Maximising the potential of youth policy in addressing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy*. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/register/en/content/out/?&typ=ENTRY&i=ADV&DOC_ID=ST-9094-2013-INIT

Council recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426(01))

For further information on Youth guarantee schemes see <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

⁽²³⁾ European Commission (2013), *European Alliance for Apprenticeships*

http://ec.europa.eu/education/apprenticeship/index_en.htm

schemes, and mutual learning programmes are meant to support quality of the initiatives; an EU-level working group on VET which focuses on apprenticeship-type schemes supports this strand of work;

- in the 2012 Council Recommendation Member States committed to the goal of establishing validation arrangements by 2018⁽²⁴⁾ which can make an essential contribution to EU's ambition to achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as they make the skills available in the workforce more visible and can help match skills and labour demand better and aid taking them along to other jobs and further education and training;
- to promote digital skills, closely linked to literacy skills, and technology-enhanced learning, the European Commission has launched several initiatives since 2013; these include the Grand Coalition for digital Jobs⁽²⁵⁾ and the communication on opening up education⁽²⁶⁾, which advocates using massive open online courses and different forms of blended learning as well as providing teachers and trainers with an opportunity to acquire the necessary competences;
- Council Conclusions on effective teacher education⁽²⁷⁾ and several EU-level working groups on trainers in VET, reducing early leaving and key competences support the different initiatives.

Reliable evidence, thorough analysis and policy learning opportunities support European cooperation in VET. The governance of Europe's 2020 strategy and the Bruges Communiqué require regular monitoring of VET progress. Cedefop has been entrusted with this task. This acknowledges Cedefop's reports on European cooperation in VET over the period 2002-10⁽²⁸⁾, to which ReferNet contributed substantially. An intermediary review in 2012⁽²⁹⁾ and Cedefop's latest comprehensive report on European VET policy, published in early 2015⁽³⁰⁾, have also made extensive use of ReferNet contributions.

(24) Council of the European Union (2012), *Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning*,
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2012.398.01.0001.01.ENG

(25) European Commission (2012), *Digital agenda for Europe: a Europe 2020 initiative*
<http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/digital-agenda-europe>
Grand coalition for digital jobs <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/grand-coalition-digital-jobs>

(26) European Commission (2013), *Opening up education: innovative teaching and learning for all through new technologies and open educational resources*, COM(2013) 654 final.
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0654&from=EN>

(27) Council of the European Union (2014), *Conclusions on effective teacher education*
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142690.pdf

(28) See Cedefop's four reports on European VET policy published in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010. The Bruges communiqué reflects the findings of the 2010 report. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/reporting-european-training-policy>

(29) Cedefop (2012), *Trends in VET policy in Europe 2010-12: progress towards the Bruges Communiqué*.
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/6116>

(30) Cedefop (2015), *Stronger VET for better lives: Cedefop's monitoring report on vocational education and training policies 2010-14*
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3067>

Stronger VET for better lives assesses to what extent countries have put in place the VET-related actions they agreed on in 2010, and discusses potential areas to focus on in the future. Cedefop's report feeds into the expected Presidency conclusions for VET and informs the European Commission's report on the achievements of ET 2020.

For the period 2015-20, cooperation in VET will focus on a limited number of key areas. A range of transversal principles will support the work. As before, Cedefop will be entrusted with monitoring progress.

The above policy processes not only require regular monitoring and thematic stock-taking but increasingly also systematic country-specific information and analysis. This may also entail responding to ad-hoc requests. In view of this framework, Cedefop aims at increasing synergy and complementarity among its reporting tasks.

2.2. Purpose of the action

VET varies considerably between Member States. Analysis and understanding of policy developments and achievements within and across countries requires thorough information on how VET and labour market work. This requires timely and accurate information on VET's role, purpose, outcomes, governance and structure. Considered in its specific socio-economic and labour market context and tradition, this information helps understand countries' starting points and the progress they have made.

Wide ranging expertise is required to capture VET's role as an interface between education, employment, economic and social policies. To support evidence-based decision-making in VET, research findings, key documents and statistical data need to underpin analyses.

National ReferNet partners are well placed to inform on VET systems and VET-related issues in their specific context and on relevant policy developments. ReferNet partners have the capacity to collect first-hand information from different stakeholders. They can also pool knowledge and experience from policy-making, implementation, evaluation and research at national, regional, local and sectoral levels.

ReferNet is also expected to help raising the visibility of Cedefop, its products and more generally VET issues at national level. The national ReferNet partner acts as multiplier and dissemination channel in the country, targeting various audiences.

National ReferNet partners' online presence, through national ReferNet websites, can help improving visibility and dissemination. ReferNet websites also support exchanges of information with Cedefop and other national ReferNet websites.

Therefore, Cedefop will require national ReferNet partners to:

- (a) report on VET policy and the way VET-related objectives of Europe's 2020 strategy and other European VET and related policy priorities are being addressed in their countries;

- (b) provide up-to-date information on VET systems and the way VET is developing in their country;
- (c) deliver thematic and other support to complement the information on VET systems and/or address topical information needs; and
- (d) carry out visibility activities, including maintenance and update of a national ReferNet site.

2.3. Expected deliverables

The partners shall be requested to perform the activities below and to deliver four types of deliverables:

<i>A. Reporting on national VET systems and policy developments</i>
Deliverable type 1: Reporting on VET and VET-related policy
Deliverable type 2: Reporting on VET systems
Deliverable type 3: Ad-hoc thematic and other support
<i>B. Raising the visibility of VET and online dissemination</i>
Deliverable type 4: Visibility activities, including maintenance and update of a national ReferNet website

All deliverables shall be provided in English. They shall be checked by a native speaker or a professional language editing service familiar with the relevant terminology used at EU level before submission.

Peer review among ReferNet partners is strongly encouraged and, when indicated in the Work plan, shall be mandatory for certain deliverables.

All deliverables type 1-3 shall be checked and validated by the national ReferNet representative before delivery to Cedefop.

The ‘scenario’ presented (Annex V) to evaluate the applicants against the award criteria represents a realistic but non-binding one-year workload.

Deliverable type 1: Reporting on VET and VET-related policy

Based on guidelines provided by Cedefop, national ReferNet partners report periodically on the implementation of national measures and actions that contribute to achieving the objectives of European cooperation in VET. ReferNet informs on policy initiatives, measures and actions in the requested format analysing them in relation to the main features of national VET systems and relevant socio-economic and labour market conditions.

To report on policies, ReferNet should:

- draw on a wide range of sources, including policy papers, legislation, evaluation reports and statistics, research and policy analysis, expert and stakeholder interviews or focus groups, case studies;
- cooperate with the relevant national stakeholders to mobilise their expertise to prepare and validate the information.

To assess progress in implementing the European VET agenda, national ReferNet partners may be asked to comment on or validate their countries' position against quantitative and/or qualitative information prepared by Cedefop.

This deliverable will feed into Cedefop's regular country-specific policy monitoring, its cross-country analysis on European cooperation in VET and its reports on VET policies.

The information can be collected in different ways. Examples include questionnaires, templates, reports, articles, news items. The information collection format will be set in the ReferNet annual work plans.

News items informing on the latest national developments in VET and related issues are screened by Cedefop and published on its website.

Further information on Cedefop's and ReferNet's previous policy reporting exercises can be found at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/reporting-on-european-training-policy/index.aspx>.

Previous news items can be found at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/refernet-national-news-on-VET.aspx>

Deliverable type 2: Reporting on VET systems

Reporting on VET systems takes different formats. The exact format is set in the ReferNet annual work plans.

The ReferNet partner delivers:

- (2a) information on VET systems or updates currently published online as *VET in [country X] reports*, see <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/vet-in-europe-country-reports.aspx>.

Country reports present a brief but comprehensive and coherent picture of national VET systems to foreign readers.

They are based on a common structure provided by Cedefop. Peer review among ReferNet partners, introduced by Cedefop in 2013, aims at improving the quality and consistency of the reports. Applicants may request from Cedefop examples of previous guidelines prepared for ReferNet's *VET in [country X] reports*;

- (2b) brief introductions to national VET or updates currently published online as *Spotlights on VET*, see [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/publications-and-resources/publications?search=spotlight+on&year\[value\]\[year\]=&publication_type=All&theme=&country=&items_per_page=10&sort_order=DESC](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/publications-and-resources/publications?search=spotlight+on&year[value][year]=&publication_type=All&theme=&country=&items_per_page=10&sort_order=DESC)

Based on guidelines provided by Cedefop, Spotlights present key features, challenges and developments within the national VET system in a short format (leaflet);

which are updated periodically, and/or as necessary;

- (2c) based on (2a) and (2b), the EU Presidency countries will also prepare the information for hard-copy publications to raise VET's visibility. Cedefop will be in charge of the publication progress.

Deliverable type 3: Ad-hoc thematic and other support

To respond to topical information needs and to complement the VET systems information, this activity aims to address VET-related issues relevant to the European policy agenda. It may be linked to EU Presidency themes, new initiatives at EU-level or information requests to Cedefop.

The activity may require qualitative and/or quantitative information. It can take the form of articles, surveys or providing direct ad-hoc support to Cedefop activities, such as for instance policy learning forums ⁽³¹⁾. It could also include validation of national information on VET and related issues, involvement in and/or support to stakeholder forums. The themes and working methods may remain open in the annual work plan and be defined at a later stage to be able to meet ad-hoc information requests.

When applicable, the information should be checked and validated by the national representative before delivery to Cedefop.

For previous articles, refer to the information provided under Deliverable type 1. For an example of how the articles can be used, see <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9084>.

⁽³¹⁾ A policy learning forum aims to facilitate national implementation of EU VET policies, recommendations and tools in collaboration with all actors concerned. An example of a policy learning forum can be found at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/policy-learning-forum-writing-and-application-learning-outcomes>

Deliverable type 4: Visibility activities, including maintenance and update of a national ReferNet website

A minimum requirement and expected deliverable is the regular maintenance and update of a national ReferNet website in the national language and also, if national ReferNet partners so wish, in English. The ReferNet website aims to disseminate information and raise visibility of VET and Cedefop's work nationally. Other types of online presence are also recommended, for example participation in social media, blogging online, discussions in VET forums.

Websites can be autonomously hosted on their own domain or a dedicated section in the national ReferNet partners' parent organisation's website. Cedefop provides guidelines to prepare national ReferNet websites as well as technical advice and support for the setup and maintenance of the national ReferNet website. Advice and support can take the form of style guidelines, website libraries, web programming code samples, discussions for optimum solutions. Cedefop looks for solutions that have minimum maintenance effort and cost, for example exchange of content (news, events, publications) via automated RSS feeds.

National ReferNet partners should be ready to adapt visibility and dissemination activities to Cedefop's strategy and annual objectives, and include in annual work plans other deliverables to raise the visibility of Cedefop, of its products and more generally of VET issues at national level. They are requested to report on their visibility actions through a SurveyMonkey questionnaire attached to the Final implementation report to be submitted to Cedefop together with the Grant balance payment request at the end of the action.

National ReferNet websites can be accessed from

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/3314.aspx>

2.4. Working arrangements

2.4.1. Language

The working language for ReferNet activities is English. In particular, all deliverables **must be submitted to Cedefop in English**. They may additionally be provided in the country's official language(s). The national partner will ensure that the deliverables submitted are of high linguistic quality and have been checked either by a native-speaker or a professional language editing service familiar with the relevant terminology used at the EU level.

The national partner will also ensure that the format used for the deliverables follows Cedefop's Style manual and Referencing guide (see Annex IV). Related costs will be considered eligible.

2.4.2. *Validation*

Deliverables reporting on national VET systems and policy developments must be validated by the national ReferNet representative {see Definitions above) on behalf of the national government to ensure that the information provided is in accordance with national policies and strategies.

National ReferNet partners can also use other validation processes depending on the deliverable type. They should always provide comprehensive information on the procedures adopted.

2.4.3. *Peer review*

Peer review among ReferNet partners, introduced by Cedefop in 2013, aims at improving the quality and consistency of the reports. Annual work plans indicate for which deliverable peer review is mandatory and provide guidelines for its organisation.

2.4.4. *Meetings*

Meetings are held in English.

Each year the ReferNet team coordinator and the national representative attend the **annual ReferNet plenary meeting** organised by Cedefop. If one of them cannot attend, she/he may propose a second person from the ReferNet national team. Cedefop will reimburse the attendance of two participants per country.

Two to three **Partnership forums** are co-organised each year by Cedefop and a national partner hosting the meeting. These Forums include various partnership activities, such as knowledge-sharing on a topic from the current ReferNet Work plan, assistance and clarifications on deliverables to be submitted in the same year, workshop sessions, etc. Like all other meetings, they are focused on increasing the quality and the efficiency of our cooperation. Each year ReferNet members shall attend one of the Partnership forums.

To improve, revise and develop specific activities or products, partners may also volunteer to participate in joint **working groups** composed of national ReferNet partners and Cedefop project managers.

Workshops may also be organised to respond to specific needs linked to ReferNet activities (e.g. Terminology).

Induction meetings will be organised for new ReferNet members.

Customised **videoconferences** may be organised with specific partners on request.

ReferNet partners may organise meetings in addition to those above with other national partners. For these meetings, Cedefop will provide information, documentation or other material at the organiser's request. Where appropriate, Cedefop will attend at the organiser's request.

(For further information on the financing of the meetings, see 5.6.1).

2.4.5. *Periodic assessment*

National ReferNet partners will be assessed periodically on the basis of:

- (a) content analysis: concerning relevance and quality of the deliverables; and
- (b) compliance: concerning respect of deadlines.

Both National ReferNet coordinator and representative will receive in July a mid-term report on the state of implementation of the current Work plan.

2.4.6. *Final implementation report*

Within four (4) months of the end of the operational year, the national ReferNet partners will submit to Cedefop a Final implementation report comprising an Activity report and a Financial report supporting the Grant balance payment request for the action. Cedefop will provide a template for these reports.

National ReferNet partners are requested to report on their visibility actions through a SurveyMonkey questionnaire attached to the Activity report.

3. FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Using the eligibility, exclusion, selection and award criteria below, Cedefop will conclude a four-year Framework partnership agreement with one successful applicant from each of Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland and Malta.

3.1. Eligibility criteria

To be considered eligible, applicants (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) should meet the following requirements:

(a) be a public or a private organisation, with a legal status and legal personality (natural persons, i.e. individuals, are not eligible), as demonstrated by the following documents:

Private company, association, etc.:

- financial identification and legal entity form, duly completed and signed (see Annex II);
- extract from the official gazette/trade register and, if applicable, certificate of liability to VAT ⁽³²⁾ (if the trade register number and VAT number are identical, only one of these documents is required);

Public-law entity:

- financial identification and legal entity form, duly completed and signed (see Annex II);
- legal resolution or decision established in respect of the public company or body, or other official document established for the public-law entity;
- certificate of liability to VAT, if any;

(b) have their seat registered in a country where the grant is applied, i.e. in one of the following:

- Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland and Malta.

3.2. Exclusion criteria

Applicants (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) must state that they are not in any of the situations described in Articles 106(1), 107 and 109(2)(a) of the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012) and set out in the Declaration on honour included in the grant application form (see Annex II).

⁽³²⁾ Entities are liable to VAT when they charge VAT for their services to third parties and claim it back from their national taxation authority.

By signing this form, the undersigned acknowledges that they have been acquainted with the administrative and financial penalties described under Article 145 in conjunction with Article 142 of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1268/2012 of 29 October 2012 on the rules of application of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, which may be applied by analogy by Cedefop if any of the declarations or information provided prove to be false.

3.3. Selection criteria

The applicant (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) must have the professional competence required to complete the activities described in Section 2 (Scope of activities) for the duration of the Framework partnership agreement and must provide the information listed below in order to satisfy the following criteria (See also section 2 of Annex II – Application form).

3.3.1. Technical and professional capacity

A. Criteria

The applicant must demonstrate expertise in VET or labour market issues, including in carrying out activities similar in scope and/or nature to those specified in the scope of activities (Section 3), and capacity to network with national and international organisations.

The applicant's team of experts proposed to carry out the activities outlined in Section 2 must have relevant professional competence and qualifications to guarantee their successful implementation. In particular, they must meet the following requirements:

The ReferNet **team coordinator** must have a minimum of 5 years of professional experience in each of the below:

- managing similar projects at national and/or international level;
- conducting policy analysis and/or relevant research on VET, LLL, employment/labour market issues or related fields and/or evaluation of programmes and policies in one or more of these areas;

as well as

- the capacity to understand, speak and write in English to a standard at least equivalent to level C1.

The **members of the ReferNet team** must have altogether a minimum of 3 years of relevant professional experience. They must also demonstrate, as a whole, 3 years of professional experience in each of the below:

- collecting national information and data;

- monitoring, analysing and reporting on developments in national VET systems, arrangements and policies;
- analysing, synthesising and summarising large amounts of information;
- drafting reports, articles and other material on national VET systems, arrangements and policies for national and/or European/international audiences, for publication online or in hard copy;
- managing website content.

In addition, each member of the team proposed to be involved in drafting deliverables type 1, 2 or 3 must demonstrate:

- knowledge of (initial and continuing) VET arrangements, systems and policies and related education, and/or lifelong learning, employment and social policies;
- the capacity to understand, speak and write in English to a standard at least equivalent to level C1.

B. Documents

The following documents or information must be presented as evidence of the technical and professional capacity:

For the applicant (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable):

- a comprehensive presentation of the applicant institution, including its mission and organisational structure and showing the positioning of the service or team intended to deal with ReferNet within the whole structure; the average total manpower and the current number of staff working in the area of VET or labour market issues; in case of network/consortium, its general structure must also be presented;
- a description of regular contacts within the last five years between the applicant and other national and international institutions/organisations involved in VET or VET-related policy, research and practice; if possible, evidence of joint work, for example, projects, reports or events;
- a short description of projects similar in scope and/or nature to those specified in the scope of activities (Section 2), either completed or being carried out;
- a list of reports (maximum five) including titles and abstracts in English and related accessible links, publications, online databases (and the like) describing or providing information on national VET systems / labour market issues, arrangements and policies;
- a description of technical equipment, tools and facilities at the disposal of the ReferNet team;
- an estimate of the proportion of the action which the beneficiary may intend to subcontract;

- a presentation of the applicant's dissemination potential, including examples of visibility activities carried out within the last five years.

For the ReferNet team:

- detailed CVs for all members of the proposed team⁽³³⁾, including the proposed coordinator, underlining relevant professional experience and qualifications as well as English language competence⁽³⁴⁾ and attaching a list of publications, where relevant, preferably in English.

3.3.2. Financial capacity

The applicant (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) must be in a stable financial position and have the economic and financial capacity to carry out the requested tasks.

The average annual turnover of the applicant for the last two financial years should represent at least **twice** Cedefop annual contribution (see maximum grant amount in point 5.2).

<u>Country groups</u>	Minimum average annual turnover required
<u>Country group 1: Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Iceland</u>	EUR 47 230
<u>Country group 2: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Sweden and Norway</u>	EUR 67 250
<u>Country group 3: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom</u>	EUR 87 240

To permit an assessment of their financial capacity, the applicant (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) must submit together with their application the profit and loss accounts and the balance sheet for the last two financial years for which the accounts have been closed. (See also Section 2 of Annex II – Application form).

The verification of financial capacity **shall not apply** to public bodies or international organisations; such status will be verified against the documentation provided by the applicant in relation to point 3.1 above (Eligibility criteria).

⁽³³⁾ The CVs should preferably use the European format (see <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>).

⁽³⁴⁾ The levels of English are available in the Europass Language Passport.
http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/img/dynamic/c1347/type.FileContent.file/ELPTemplate_en_GB.doc.

3.4. Award criteria

Applications meeting the selection criteria will be assessed against the following award criteria. The applicants are requested to provide the information as requested in Section 3 of Annex II – Application form, and **based on a scenario in Annex V**.

For this purpose a ‘scenario’ including deliverables to be submitted and deadlines for submission is presented to the applicant.

This scenario represents a realistic annual workload, which is however non-binding since it will be used for evaluation purposes only.

1. The applicant is requested to describe a detailed methodology to carry out the whole range of activities foreseen in the scenario for the year. All deliverables shall be covered. The methodology will be assessed against Criteria 1-4.
2. The applicant shall draft a news item in English, which will be evaluated against Criterion 5 below.
3. Remark: Criterion 1c will be used only to assess the existence and nature of the letter attached to the application form as indicated under this Section.

	Weight/points
1- Adequacy of the proposed approach to ensure broad and active cooperation with the various national VET institutions and stakeholders: a) variety and relevance of institutions and stakeholders considered (10 pts) b) arrangements proposed to mobilise their expertise to carry out the activities (10 pts) c) cooperation with – and support from – national authorities as demonstrated by a dedicated letter of recommendation issued by relevant government authorities (10 pts)	30
2- Adequacy and efficiency of work organisation including proposed division of roles and responsibilities between the ReferNet team members	15
3- Quality and relevance of: a) working methods, including project management (10 pts) b) data sources (10 pts) c) quality assurance measures, including linguistic editing and terminology, to ensure that the deliverables are of high quality and completed in time (10 pts)	30
4- Relevance of risk analysis and adequacy of contingency measures, back-up provisions, etc.	15
5- Quality of the document (news item or other) submitted, in terms of:	10

a) relevance of the topic addressed (4 pts)	
b) clarity and readability for foreign readers (3 pts)	
c) correct use of English (3 pts)	
TOTAL	100

A committee shall be appointed in order to evaluate the proposals. Outside experts might assist the committee.

Only the proposals scoring in total a minimum of **60 points** (out of max. 100) against the above award criteria will be considered for a Framework partnership agreement.

The Framework partnership agreement (standard model can be found in Annex II) will be awarded to the applicant scoring the highest number of points (out of 100).

4. SPECIFIC GRANT AGREEMENT FOR REFERNET WORK PLAN 2016

All applicants are required to submit a proposal for ReferNet work plan 2016 including an estimated budget in euro. The proposal must fulfil the specifications outlined in Annex I (Specifications for ReferNet work plan 2016).

This work plan will be co-financed by a specific grant agreement (see Section 4 of the grant application form in Annex II) which shall start on 1st January 2016 and end on 31st December 2016.

Cedefop will evaluate the proposal for ReferNet work plan 2016 only of those applicants which meet the eligibility, exclusion, selection and award criteria in Section 3 above.

The proposals for ReferNet work plan 2016 will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- consistency of the proposal with Cedefop specifications and expected deliverables, including timeliness and compliance with Cedefop timetable;
- amount of the grant requested not exceeding ceiling amount and percentage set by Cedefop.

In Section 4.4 of the application form in Annex II, applicants are required to indicate the estimated eligible costs for each activity/output of the 2016 work plan (see 5.6 for costs eligibility).

While the eligibility of the estimated costs will not be checked by Cedefop at the stage of evaluating the proposal, applicants must note that, if awarded a grant for the ReferNet 2016 work plan, they will be required, within two months of the end of the operational period, to submit to Cedefop:

- an activity report,
- a financial report including an overview on actual costs and funding and a summary statement of the receipts and expenditures of the action;
- a certificate on the financial statements and underlying accounts related to the implementation of the work plan, including a report and the relevant checklist, provided

by a national external approved auditor or, in case of public bodies, an independent public institution/officer.

The abovementioned documents shall follow models provided by Cedefop.

5. FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

5.1. General terms and conditions

The estimated total budget available for the four-year duration of the Framework partnership agreements for all countries (2016-2019) amounts to **EUR 4.000.000** (+/- EUR 980.000 per annum) depending on the annual decisions of the Budget Authority.

Acceptance of an application by Cedefop does not constitute an undertaking to award a financial contribution equal to the amount requested by the applicant. Award of a Framework partnership agreement does not establish an entitlement for subsequent years.

Cedefop grants aim to facilitate the implementation of a project which could not otherwise proceed without the EU's support. Cedefop's financial grant is based on the principle of co-financing. It is only an additional financial contribution to the National ReferNet partner's own financial contribution and/or local, regional, national and/or private contributions obtained elsewhere for the project (including sponsoring).

In all cases, Cedefop's total contribution may not exceed 70 % of the eligible costs. Therefore, a minimum of **30 %** of the total estimated eligible expenditure of the project must come from sources other than the budget of the European Union. Proposals must include evidence that co-financing amounting to the remainder of the total cost of the project is available (secured).

5.2. Specific terms and conditions for the 2016 work plan

The total available budget for ReferNet work plan 2016 in all eligible countries ⁽³⁵⁾ is approximately EUR 980.000.

The total available budget for ReferNet work plan 2016 is distributed as follows ⁽³⁶⁾:

<u>Country groups</u>	Maximum grant amount
<u>Country group 1: Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Iceland</u>	EUR 23 615
<u>Country group 2: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovak</u>	EUR 33 625

⁽³⁵⁾ EU-28, Iceland and Norway

⁽³⁶⁾ The allocated amount may not under any circumstances exceed the amounts indicated in the table.

<u>Republic, Sweden and Norway</u>	
<u>Country group 3: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom</u>	EUR 43 620

Applicants must indicate the sources and amounts of any other funding received or applied for in the same financial year, for the same work plan, or for any other action and for routine activities (see application form, Section 5).

Under no circumstances may the grant have the purpose or effect of producing a profit for the partner or co-beneficiaries. Profit is defined as a surplus of receipts over the costs of the work plan. The amount of the grant will be reduced by the amount of any surplus. The Bank account (and/or the sub bank account) indicated by the partner must allow for the identification of the amounts paid by Cedefop and **be denominated in euro**.

5.3. Payment procedures

After approval by Cedefop, a financial agreement (the annual Specific grant agreement), drawn up in euro and detailing the conditions and level of funding, will be concluded between Cedefop and the beneficiary.

The financial agreement will lay down the payment arrangements.

- (a) A pre-financing payment equivalent to 60 % of the total EU contribution will be transferred to the partner within 30 days of the signing of the agreement by the last of the two parties. The pre-financing is aimed at providing cash flow to the partner and co-beneficiaries.
- (b) Cedefop will determine the level of the final payment to be made to the partner within 60 days of Cedefop approving the final report. Requests for final payments have to be accompanied by financial statements and underlying accounts certified by an auditor or, in case of public bodies, a competent and independent public institution/officer.
- (c) Should the actual eligible cost of the project be different from the total estimated cost, Cedefop will maintain or reduce its contribution proportionally, taking into account the maximum contribution amount and the maximum rate of co-funding, both indicated in Art. 3, par. 2 of the SGA. The partner will be obliged to reimburse amounts already paid in excess of the amount thus due.
- (d) The final accounts must be drawn up in euro, balanced, dated, signed and certified by the authorised person as provided for in the partner's articles of association. These must be presented using a specific structure which will be provided by Cedefop in due time.
- (e) Partners undertake to carry out the activities as they are presented in the grant application. Any change to the project must be authorised by Cedefop in advance.

- (f) Should the partner not perform all planned activities, Cedefop will reduce the grant amount proportionally in due consideration of the costs estimations breakdown provided by the partner in the grant application.

5.4. Ex-post control, audit and evaluation

Projects may be subject to ex-post controls, audits, ex-ante and ex-post evaluations. The responsible person representing the partner will confirm, with his or her signature, that the grant has been used correctly and will provide proof if requested. Cedefop, the European Commission, the Court of Auditors of the European Union or any other bodies authorised by them to do so on their behalf may check the use made of the grant at any time during the term of the agreement and during a period of five years following expiry of the agreement.

Furthermore there are audit requirements for the requests for final payments.

5.5. Double financing

An organisation is not entitled to receive more than one grant from the European Union for the activities covered by the selected project.

5.6. Eligible costs

The only costs eligible in the context of this call are those which are:

- (a) directly linked to the project concerned, i.e. generated directly by the project and indispensable for its implementation. These costs have to be necessary and reasonable for the implementation of the project. The project must comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness;
- (b) generated during the lifetime of the project as defined in the agreement;
- (c) actually incurred by the partner and co-beneficiaries and recorded in their accounts in conformity with the applicable accounting principles, and which are declared in accordance with the requirements of the applicable tax and social legislation; and
- (d) identifiable and verifiable with original supporting documents.

The period of eligibility for expenditure resulting from the implementation of the work plan will begin in January 2016 and have duration of 12 months provided the agreement has been signed by both parties.

If the applicant can demonstrate the need to start the action before January 2016, the starting date shall not be earlier than that of the notification by Cedefop of award of the grant while the ending date remains unchanged.

The internal auditing and accountancy procedures of the partner shall make it possible to verify that the stated project costs and receipts correspond to the accounting statements and the supporting documents.

5.6.1. *Eligible direct costs*

‘Direct costs’ of the action are those specific costs which are directly linked to the implementation of the action and can therefore be attributed directly to it. They may not include any indirect costs.

To be eligible, direct costs shall comply with the conditions of eligibility set out in Article II.19.1 of the model Framework Partnership Agreement (See also Annex IIIa).

In particular, the following categories of costs are eligible direct costs, provided that they satisfy the conditions of eligibility set out in Article II.19.1 of the Framework Partnership Agreement as well as the following conditions:

- (a) the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the partner or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the action, comprising actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration, provided that these costs are in line with the partner's usual policy on remuneration; those costs may also include additional remunerations, including payments on the basis of supplementary contracts regardless of the nature of those contracts, provided that they are paid in a consistent manner whenever the same kind of work or expertise is required, independently from the source of funding used;

The costs of natural persons working under a contract with the partner other than an employment contract may be assimilated to such costs of personnel, provided that the following conditions are fulfilled:

- (i) the natural person works under the instructions of the partner and, unless otherwise agreed with the partner, in the premises of the partner;
 - (ii) the result of the work belongs to the partner; and
 - (iii) the costs are not significantly different from the costs of staff performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the partner;
- (b) costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided that these costs are in line with the partner's usual practices on travel;
- (c) the depreciation costs of equipment or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the accounting statements of the partner, provided that the asset has been purchased in accordance with Article II.9 of the Framework Partnership Agreement and that it is written off in accordance with the international accounting standards and the usual accounting practices of the partner; the costs of rental or lease of equipment or other assets are also eligible, provided that these costs do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment or assets and are exclusive of any finance fee;

Only the portion of the equipment's depreciation, rental or lease costs corresponding to the period set out in Article 2.2 of the Specific agreement concerned and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the action may be taken into account.

By way of exception, the Special Conditions or the Specific agreement may provide for the eligibility of the full cost of purchase of equipment, where justified by the nature of the action and the context of the use of the equipment or assets;

- (d) costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are purchased in accordance with Article II.9 of the Framework Partnership Agreement and are directly assigned to the action;
- (e) costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the Framework agreement or the Specific agreement (dissemination of information, specific evaluation of the action, audits, translations, reproduction), including the costs of requested financial guarantees, provided that the corresponding services are purchased in accordance with Article II.9 of the Framework Partnership Agreement;
- (f) costs entailed by subcontracts within the meaning of Article II.10 of the Framework Partnership Agreement, provided that the conditions laid down in that Article are met;
- (g) duties, taxes and charges paid by the partner, notably value added tax (VAT), provided that they are included in eligible direct costs, and unless specified otherwise in the Special Conditions or in the Specific agreement.

5.6.2. *Eligible indirect costs*

‘Indirect costs’ of the action are those costs which are not specific costs directly linked to the implementation of the action and can therefore not be attributed directly to it. They may not include any costs identifiable or declared as eligible direct costs.

To be eligible, indirect costs shall represent a fair apportionment of the overall overheads of the partner and shall comply with the conditions of eligibility set out in Article II.19.1 of the Framework Partnership Agreement.

Unless otherwise specified in the Article 3 of the Specific agreement, eligible indirect costs shall be declared on the basis of a flat rate of 7% of the total eligible direct costs.

5.6.3. *Ineligible costs*

In addition to any other costs which do not fulfill the conditions set out in Article II.19.1 of the Framework Partnership Agreement, the following costs shall not be considered eligible:

- (a) return on capital;
- (b) debt and debt service charges;
- (c) provisions for losses or debts;
- (d) interest owed;

- (e) doubtful debts;
- (f) exchange losses;
- (g) costs of transfers from Cedefop charged by the bank of the partner;
- (h) costs declared by the partner in the framework of another action receiving a grant financed from the Union budget (including grants awarded by a Member State and financed from the Union budget and grants awarded by other bodies than Cedefop for the purpose of implementing the Union budget); in particular, indirect costs shall not be eligible under a Specific grant for an action awarded to the partner when it already receives an operating grant financed from the Union budget during the period in question;
- (i) contributions in kind from third parties;
- (j) excessive or reckless expenditure;
- (k) deductible VAT.

6. PUBLICITY

All grants awarded in the course of a financial year must be published on the Internet site of Cedefop during the first half of the year following the closure of the budget year in respect of which they were awarded. The information may also be published using any other appropriate medium, including the Official Journal of the European Union.

With the agreement of the beneficiary, Cedefop will publish the following information:

- name and address of the beneficiary,
- subject of the grant,
- amount awarded and rate of funding.

Beneficiaries must clearly acknowledge Cedefop's contribution in all publications or in conjunction with activities for which the grant is used.

Furthermore, beneficiaries are required to give prominence to the name and logo of Cedefop on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised under the co-financed work plan. Official logos and guidelines will be provided by Cedefop. If this requirement is not fully complied with, the beneficiary's grant may be reduced.

7. DATA PROTECTION

Your reply to the grant application will involve the recording and processing of personal data (such as your name, address and CV), which will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data. Unless indicated otherwise, your replies to the questions in this

form and any personal data requested are required to assess your grant application in accordance with the specifications of the call for proposals and will be processed solely for that purpose by Cedefop's Finance and Procurement Service. Details concerning the processing of your personal data are available on the privacy statement at the page: http://ec.europa.eu/dataprotectionofficer/privacystatement_publicprocurement_en.pdf.

Your personal data may be registered in the Early Warning System (EWS) only or both in the EWS and Central Exclusion Database (CED) by the Accounting Officer of the Commission, should you be in one of the situations mentioned in:

- the Commission Decision 2008/969 of 16.12.2008 on the Early Warning System (for more information see the Privacy Statement on http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/legal_entities/legal_entities_en.cfm), or
- the Commission Regulation 2008/1302 of 17.12.2008 on the Central Exclusion Database (for more information see the Privacy Statement on http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm#BDCE and http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/sound_fin_mgt/privacy_statement_ced_en.pdf).

8. PROCEDURE AND REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

8.1. Publication

The text of the call for proposals, annexes, and for information purposes a copy of the standard agreement, can be obtained from Cedefop website at the following address: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/public-procurement>.

8.2. Application forms

Applications must be drawn up in one of the official EU languages, preferably in English.

Please note that only typed applications, using the official application form annexed to the present call, duly filled in, signed by the legal representative of the organisation and sent to Cedefop according to the defined schedule, will be examined.

The application must be sent in **four copies** (the original, being identified as such, plus three copies).

8.3. Submission of the application

Deadline for submission of applications: **2/12/2015. Applications submitted after this date will be rejected.**

Applications can be submitted only in the following way:

- **By hand-delivery or courier service.** For security reasons applications by hand-delivery or by a courier service can only be delivered to the central post service of Cedefop with the indication Ref. **GP/DSI/ReferNet_FPA/002/15** on the envelope. In case of hand delivery the submission date is the date of receipt. In case of delivery by a courier service the submission date is the date of receipt by the courier service.

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Procurement Service

Europe 123, GR- 57001 Thessaloniki (Pylea)

Applications submitted by fax or e-mail will **not** be examined.

Contacts between the contracting authority (Cedefop) and applicants are prohibited throughout the procedure save in exceptional circumstances and under the following conditions only:

Before the final date for submission of applications:

- At the request of the applicant, the Cedefop Procurement Service may provide additional information solely for the purpose of clarifying the call for proposals documents. Any request for additional information must be made in writing by fax (fax: +30 2310 490 028) or by e-mail (C4T-services@cedefop.europa.eu).

Requests for additional information/clarification should be received by 18/11/2015. No such requests will be processed after that date.

- The contracting authority may, on its own initiative, inform interested parties of any error, inaccuracy, omission or any other clerical error in the text of the call for proposals.

Any additional information, including that referred to above, will be published on Cedefop's website. Please ensure that you visit regularly the site for updates up to the closing date for receipt of tenders.

After the opening of proposals:

- The contracting authority may contact the applicant, in case clarifications are required or if obvious clerical errors in the proposal need to be corrected. These clarifications should not lead to any amendment of the terms of the call for proposals, nor alter the terms of the proposal itself.
- Applicants should not contact the contracting authority (i.e. Cedefop) on their own initiative after the applications have been opened.
- The applicants cannot change the content of their proposal nor the information submitted in the application form on their own initiative.

9. NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

a) Reception of application

Applicants will be informed of the receipt of their proposal upon request by e-mail at the following address: c4t-services@cedefop.europa.eu.

b) Admissibility of application

Only applications complying with all criteria stated in this open call will be taken into account for the award of a possible grant. If an application is deemed inadmissible, a letter indicating the reasons for the rejection will be sent to the applicant.

c) Selection of application

Applicants will be informed of Cedefop's decision concerning their grant application as soon as possible in writing. No information will be released until Cedefop's decision on partner selection has been taken. It is foreseen that successful applicants shall receive this written information based on the results of the procedure in December 2015.

d) Grant agreement

It is foreseen that successful applicants shall receive a Framework partnership agreement for signature as from December 2015.

10. APPLICABLE REGULATION

The award of EU grants is governed by the legal basis to the Programme and the Financial Regulations, and must respect the procedures laid down therein:

- Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of the Council of 10 February 1975 establishing a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (OJ L 39, 13.2.1975), last amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 2051/2004 of 25 October 2004 (OJ L 355, 1.12.2004)
- Cedefop's Work Programme 2015
- Cedefop's Financial Rules (DIR/RB(2014)00032 of 09 January 2014) and Implementing Rules (DIR/RB(2014)/01414) of 03 June 2014)
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (OJ L 298, 26.10.2012)
- Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1268/2012 of 29 October 2012 on the rules of application of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (OJ L 362, 31.12.2012).

11. CONTACT

Cedefop entity responsible for implementing and managing this call for proposals is 'Procurement Service'.

Additional information can be obtained from:

CEDEFOP

**European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
Procurement Service**

attn. Mr George Paraskevaïdis

Europe 123, GR- 57001 Thessaloniki (Pylea)

or by fax: +30 2310 490 028

or by e-mail at the following address: c4t-services@cedefop.europa.eu

Annexes:

I. Specifications for ReferNet work plan 2016 (including annex 1)

II. Official application form and annexes:

- 1.a. Legal entity form private companies
- 1.b. Legal entity form public entities
2. Financial identification form
3. Involvement of third parties in the action/work plan
4. Check-list for applicants

IIIa. Model of standard Framework partnership agreement

IIIb. Model of standard Specific agreement

IVa. Cedefop's Referencing guide and IVb. Cedefop Style Manual

V. Scenario for a one-year action (Award criteria)