



Applied Innovation and Research in
Vocational Education and Training

DIGEST 14

STRENGTHENING APPLIED RESEARCH IN EUROPEAN VET SYSTEMS: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AIRIN VET PROJECT

This Digest outlines 20 national- and European-level recommendations that underscore the essential role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) as a vital force in applied research and innovation, based on findings from the AIRinVET project. These recommendations aim to provide actionable insights and recognise the unique and diverse approaches to applied research across Europe, reflecting the project's commitment to fostering innovation and collaboration among VET institutions, SMEs, and broader research ecosystems.

National-level Recommendations

1. **Embed applied research in national agendas:** By formally integrating applied research into VET frameworks, curricula, and policies, governments can ensure that VET centres are recognised as key contributors to regional innovation ecosystems.
2. **Foster Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Structured collaboration between VET institutions, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and universities aligns research with industry needs, enhancing the relevance of both educational and business practices.
3. **Promote Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs):** Supporting COVEs as hubs for applied research enables VET centres to lead innovation efforts, leveraging infrastructure and expertise for regional development.
4. **Develop applied research ecosystems:** Establishing local networks that link VET institutions, SMEs, and research bodies strengthens knowledge transfer and fosters collaboration across sectors.
5. **Secure funding for applied research:** Dedicated national funding programmes can build research capacity, ensuring institutions have the resources and trained staff to undertake impactful projects.
6. **Expand human resource investment:** Stable, long-term funding for research personnel ensures sustained institutional growth and helps secure complementary funding sources.
7. **Create national coordinating bodies:** National entities can streamline collaboration between VET and SMEs by managing policies, funding, intellectual property rights, and partnerships.
8. **Broaden the role of VET centres:** Recognising applied research as a core activity for VET institutions elevates their status as equal contributors to innovation and economic development.
9. **Increase regional funding for local innovation:** Targeted funding for applied research projects tied to regional priorities drives economic and industrial growth.
10. **Support lifelong learning pathways:** Flexible qualification systems and bridging courses ensure permeability between professional and academic programmes, fostering lifelong education opportunities.

European-level Recommendations

1. **Disseminate knowledge of applied research:** A pan-European platform can make research methods, best practices, and outcomes widely accessible, empowering VET institutions to build capacity without duplicating efforts.
2. **Align applied research with EU policies:** Integrating VET-applied research into initiatives like the Green Deal and Digital Europe aligns education with Europe's sustainability and digital transformation goals.
3. **Promote work-based learning:** Linking applied research with experiential and dual learning models equips students with practical skills while driving industry innovation.
4. **Integrate applied research into Quality Assurance (QA):** Recognising applied research in European QA frameworks ensures consistent standards and highlights its importance in education and innovation.
5. **Advocate shared responsibility for funding:** Tripartite funding models, involving governments, VET centres, and SMEs, distribute financial responsibilities, making applied research more sustainable.
6. **Ensure long-term funding stability:** Multi-annual funding commitments through programmes like Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ prevent project fragmentation and promote sustained research efforts.
7. **Establish clear intellectual property guidelines:** European-level intellectual property rules protect collaboration partners while enabling broader dissemination of innovations through open access.
8. **Launch public awareness campaigns:** Highlighting VET-applied research success stories can enhance political and societal support across Europe.
9. **Build SME collaboration capacity:** Training, tools, and resources for VET staff involved in research partnerships can strengthen relationships and maximise research impact.
10. **Standardise terminology:** A unified vocabulary for applied research in VET simplifies cross-border communication, with the [AIRinVET framework](#) serving as a blueprint for collaboration.

By addressing the challenges and opportunities within VET systems, the AIRinVET recommendations aim to elevate the quality and impact of applied research across Europe, ensuring that VET institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the future of education, research, and innovation.

