

DRIVES Newsletter Monthly Interview



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Professor James Calleja has been involved in vocational education and training since 2001. Before his appointment as Principal and CEO of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology in June 2018, Mr Calleja was Director of European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) from 2013 to May 2018. Before joining Cedefop, he served as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Employment in his native Malta from 2011 to 2013.

1. The automotive industry is a pillar of European prosperity and growth. How do you see the future of VET in these types of industries?

VET has a promising future in all technology sectors. The automotive industry is one of the most exciting sectors for VET learners in most Colleges and Applied Universities across Europe. Industry 4.0 has transformed this sector into an innovative vehicle towards automation and renewed comfort, speed and potential large-scale employment. From cars to trains to trucks and other vehicles, the automotive industry is by far one of the largest economic pillars of prosperity and growth in Europe. Millions are employed in the sector and new skills for new jobs are in constant demand. Electric and hybrid cars are hitting the markets with unprecedented speed and consumers are realizing that travelling today is made easier, cheaper, accessible and more frequent. It is up to VET Colleges to grasp this opportunity to offer to the industry the venue for development and innovation.

2. VET has gained more importance in recent years and it represents a significant shift from older to today's generations. How will younger generations contribute to the automotive sector?

The language of new generations of young people is technology. No one young person in the developed world is ignorant of the benefits and use of IT, of automation, internet and mobile technology. The new teacher for millions of Europeans is YouTube! It is therefore natural for young people to regard this sector as a natural vehicle for a future career. Working in the automotive sector is being in a high tech environment that offers challenges in learning and opportunities for a better quality of life. VET is changing with societies. It is a sector such as automotive which brings a new lease of life to a challenging learning environment.

3. How do you assess the differences between Member States regarding the provision of VET?

Member States differ in the quality of the provision of VET across Europe. Yet all member states have made significant progress in the infrastructure and quality of teaching in VET. While in the northern countries VET remains an attractive source of learning and job creation, it is less in the

southern and central parts of Europe. The Copenhagen Process, which the EU started in 2002, has made a significant difference to the value teachers, parents and students attribute to VET. Yet we are a long way afar from making VET a first choice. Traditional Universities are better funded and governed. VET institutions are still seen as a second option unless a country runs through an economic crisis and VET is asked to intervene and provide immediate skills and competences to either national or foreign investment. In my view, VET at EU level lacks the momentum and the visibility that the sector deserves to ensure that all learners acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences for the jobs of today and those of the future.

4. Regarding the automotive sector, what, in your opinion, will be more urgent: re-skilling or up-skilling?

All sectors today require re-skilling and up-skilling. The automotive sector is no exception. With regular advancements in technology, no sector can avoid re-skilling and u-skilling of its workforce. Both re-skilling and up-skilling must run parallel to each other without exception. People learn in different ways and in different venues. Workplaces are necessarily becoming learning environments and academies are mushrooming in various industries across and beyond Europe. Is this the end of VET Colleges in the traditional format of today? Well no one can say for certain however, if mismatching continues to grow and people find it hard to be employed, industries will grow also as learning institutions to ensure that up-skilling and re-skilling is done regularly and in a cost-effective and regulated ways.

5. Which are the 2-3 songs you must have in a long car journey?

My choice would be Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, Tom Jones' *My World* and Abba's *The Winner Takes It All*.