

## **EBI response to the upcoming European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

European Boating Industry (EBI), representing the recreational boating and nautical tourism sector in Europe, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a renewed European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training.

The recreational boating industry forms an important part of Europe's blue economy and maritime industry. It is a highly innovative, export-oriented and predominantly SME-based ecosystem, spanning advanced manufacturing, marine equipment production, refit and maintenance activities, and marina and coastal tourism services. The sector is currently undergoing a profound transformation driven by decarbonisation objectives, digitalisation, circular economy requirements and evolving environmental standards while maintaining competitiveness in the face of regulatory, trade and business changes. This transition is not only technological, but also a skills transition. EBI's members at national level, and companies are addressing this with a number of initiatives.

Across the sector, companies increasingly report that access to skilled workers is becoming one of the main constraints to growth, innovation and green transformation. Demand is rising for technicians with expertise in marine electrical and electronic systems, alternative propulsion and battery technologies, sustainable composite materials, digital design and advanced manufacturing tools. At the same time, new competences are required in lifecycle assessment, environmental compliance, energy efficiency integration and the safe handling of emerging fuel systems.

For example, through the EU-funded TEcoNaut project, which assesses green skills needs in the boatbuilding industry, EBI has gathered first-hand evidence that the speed of technological development is outpacing the responsiveness of many existing vocational education and training frameworks. Curricula often struggle to adapt rapidly enough to reflect new materials, hybrid and electric propulsion systems, and digital production processes. This gap risks slowing down the sector's ability to contribute fully to EU climate and sustainability objectives.

The challenge is compounded by the structure of the ecosystem. The recreational boating industry is composed largely of small and medium-sized enterprises. While SMEs are deeply committed to training and apprenticeships, they face practical constraints: administrative complexity, limited supervisory capacity, and insufficient support for in-company trainers. In a context of labour shortages, dedicating experienced staff to training can represent a significant operational cost.

For the Blue Economy and wider manufacturing sector more broadly, this creates a structural risk. Without sufficient skilled workers, investments in green technologies, electrification infrastructure and sustainable production processes cannot be deployed at scale. Skills policy therefore becomes directly linked to industrial competitiveness and to the delivery of Europe's environmental ambitions.

The future European VET Strategy should explicitly recognise maritime manufacturing and the boating industry as part of Europe's strategic industrial and Blue Economy ecosystems. A stronger alignment between VET policy, industrial strategy and green transition objectives would help ensure that training systems anticipate and support technological change rather than react to it. The boating industry is a sector with significant opportunities, a strong manufacturing export base and closely connected to tourism and leisure, providing 280,000 jobs across 32,000 businesses in Europe.

### **European Boating Industry**

Work-based learning remains a cornerstone of high-quality VET, particularly in technical and manufacturing sectors. However, additional measures are needed to ensure that SME-dominated ecosystems can continue to provide apprenticeships effectively. Simplified administrative procedures, targeted financial support reflecting real training costs, and practical guidance tailored to SMEs would significantly strengthen the system.

Finally, improved transparency and portability of vocational skills across Member States would benefit sectors such as recreational boating, where mobility and cross-border cooperation are common. A stronger European dimension in recognition of learning outcomes would enhance labour mobility within the sector and wider Blue Economy while supporting regional development in coastal areas.

In conclusion, the green and digital transformation of the sector depends on a workforce equipped with modern, adaptable and future-oriented skills. The European VET Strategy has a key role to play in ensuring that vocational education becomes a driver of competitiveness, sustainability and resilience. EBI stands ready to continue contributing sector-specific expertise and evidence to support this objective.