



spotlight on VET

UNITED KINGDOM

VET in the UK

Vocational education and training (VET) is offered at most levels of the qualifications frameworks in the UK. A separate qualifications and credit framework exists in England and Northern Ireland from the ones in Scotland and Wales. There are around 200 awarding organisations in the UK and several thousand accredited qualifications. Awarding organisations design and award qualifications while education and training providers deliver learning. VET providers include secondary schools, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education colleges and higher education institutions. Further education colleges represent the largest group of VET providers offering education to learners that are 16 years or older, including a large number of adult learners.

VET qualifications are offered through work-related **Business and Technology Education Council** qualifications, national vocational qualifications/Scottish vocational qualifications and other recognised vocational qualifications. School-based programmes that combine general academic study with vocational elements exist alongside broad vocational programmes and specialist occupational programmes that may take place both in a school setting and the work place. VET is offered on a full-time and part-time basis and students may attend training on a block-release or day-release basis from employers or attend evening or weekend learning.

Apprenticeships are offered in the form of apprenticeship frameworks which include a work contract, an accredited technical and occupational qualification and core, transferable skills such as numeracy, literacy and ICT. Apprenticeships are available at three principal levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and at four levels in Scotland.

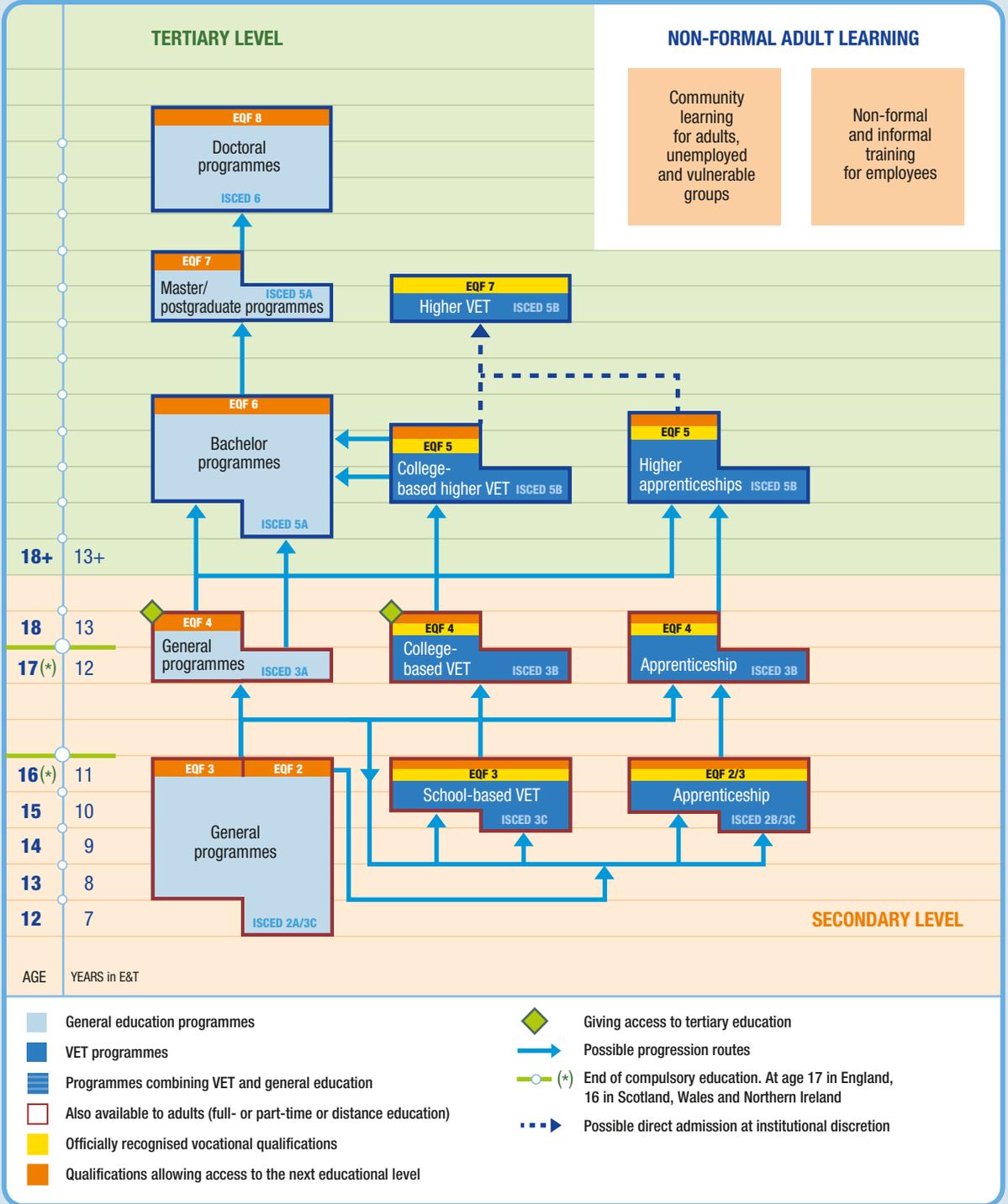
Adult and continuing education forms part of the formal education system in the UK, but is also offered as informal and non-formal training by employers and training providers. Trade unions, employer organisations, sector skill councils and other social partnerships are involved in adult education provision, development of learning resources and anticipating labour market needs. Employers are encouraged to become more closely involved in skill development.

There is a well-established system for VET learners in the UK to progress to higher education. Candidates holding vocational qualifications, at qualifications and credit framework (QCF)/credit and qualifications framework of Wales level 3/Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) levels 6 and 7 (EQF levels 4 and 5), may access selected first-cycle university programmes at institutional discretion. However, there is no automatic right to progression from one qualifications framework level to the next as education providers and awarding organisations retain the right to set entry requirements for individual qualifications.

The recently introduced curriculum for excellence in Scotland creates opportunities for students to combine subjects, which will mean that a larger variety of secondary qualifications may be used to apply for tertiary education in the future. Additionally, there are good articulation options for progression from higher VET programmes at QCF levels 4 and 5/SCQF levels 7 and 8, such as higher national certificates and higher national diplomas, to the second or third year of a bachelor degree in a related field in the UK. However, admission and transfer arrangements are made at the discretion of the admitting institution.

The unit-based structure of qualifications and their alignment to qualifications and credit frameworks open up the possibility of credit transfer between qualifications in line with recognition of prior learning guidelines. It is hoped that credit transfer will occur more frequently in the future. The UK also has the main building blocks to support the European credit system for vocational education and training in place. The UK is now working towards its implementation for international student mobility.

VET in the education and training system in the UK



NB: ISCED 1997 was used on the chart. Conversion to ISCED 2011 is ongoing.
 Source: Cedefop and ReferNet UK.

Distinctive features of VET

The UK government has passed responsibility for several policy decisions to the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including governance of VET. While there are similarities between the systems in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Scottish system is different in many ways to those of the rest of the UK.

Different governance, regulation and quality assurance bodies exist in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a complex institutional framework in the UK VET sector with the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) sharing policy-making responsibilities in England. The policy-making authorities for VET in Northern Ireland are the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Scottish and Welsh governments in Scotland and Wales respectively. The qualifications market in the UK is jointly driven by government policies and private interests. This has led to a large choice of qualifications and awarding organisations.

Challenges

The UK has experienced increased youth unemployment in recent years and VET systems are subsequently under review to improve quality and relevance of VET to labour market needs. There is an aim to increase VET graduates and employees with intermediate skill levels as well as to decrease young people leaving school with low basic literacy and numeracy skills. Initiatives such as raising the age of compulsory participation in education or training to 18 years are being implemented in England and a place in education or training up to this age is already guaranteed in England and Scotland.

Further challenges in England include a move to consider only good-quality vocational qualifications as equivalent to general academic secondary subjects in terms of the school ranking exercise. It is hoped that more students will study subjects considered relevant in the labour market as a result. The new Scottish curriculum for excellence offers a broader range of education with more choices for specialisation and further study. It is hoped that this will help prepare young people for a fast-changing world, as today's young people change jobs more frequently and technology advances quicker than ever.

The Welsh secondary education system is under review and priorities include that vocational qualifications meet labour market needs. The upper secondary level Welsh baccalaureate (*) may also be awarded to post-16 students purely based on vocational qualifications, to raise VET's status. The entitlement framework is being introduced in Northern Ireland, which encourages collaboration between post-14 school provision and vocational further education college provision. Qualifications under the new entitlement framework will contain a range of courses that can be individually tailored to improve students' employment chances and meet priority skills areas.

Several incentives for employers to take on apprentices are in place. Apprenticeship starts are on the rise in the UK, but with adult apprenticeships accounting for the largest increase in recent years. Challenges include increasing numbers of young apprentices in sectors with skill shortages and raising higher-level apprenticeship starts. A reform of apprenticeships in England is underway.

Career guidance is vital to increasing interest in VET. There are separate information, advice and guidance services in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The service in England is currently undergoing a change.

(*) www.welshbaccalaureate.org.uk/Welsh-Baccalaureate-Home-Page



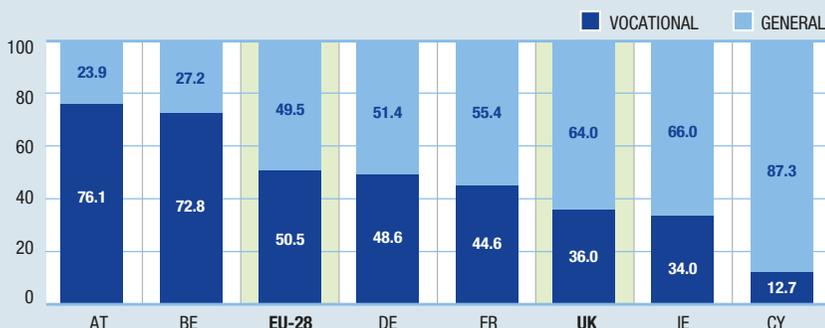
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Education and training in figures

Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

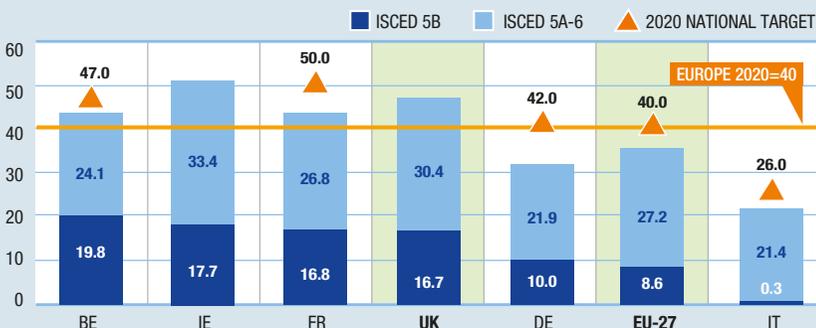
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2011



Source: Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 28.6.2013.

Tertiary education by type

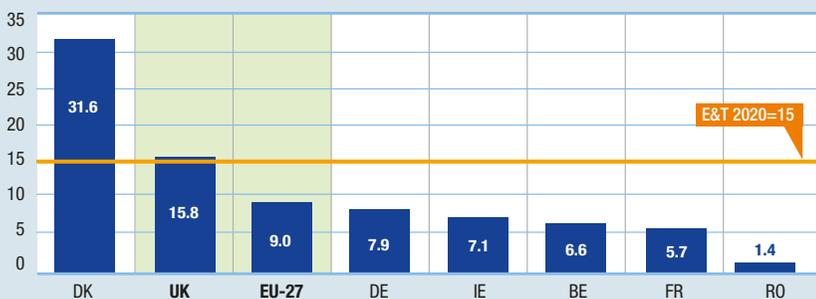
% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2012



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 8.7.2013.

Lifelong learning

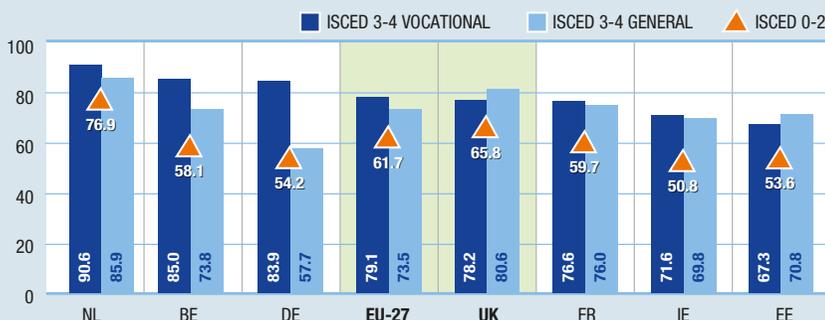
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2012



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 3.7.2013.

Employment rates by highest level of educational attainment

20-34 year-olds no longer in education by highest level of educational attainment, 2009



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, 2009 ad hoc module of the EU labour force survey, date of extraction 19.9.2012.



Further information

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www.education.gov.uk	Department for Education
www.delni.gov.uk	Department for Employment and Learning
www.deni.gov.uk	Department for Education
www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk	Lifelong learning programme
www.ofqual.gov.uk	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
www.refernet.org.uk	ReferNet UK
www.scqf.org.uk	Scottish credit and qualifications framework
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education	Scottish Government
www.sqa.org.uk	Scottish Qualifications Authority
www.naric.org.uk/NARIC/Default.aspx	UK NARIC
www.ukces.org.uk	UKCES
http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en	Welsh Government



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