

# ***“The Changing role and nature of VET in Europe”***

**Findings from ongoing Cedefop research**

**Meeting of Directors general of vocational  
education and training (DGVT)**

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## Overall Project Aim

An effort to “take one step back” and get a deeper understanding of

- the ‘VET system’ itself, its characteristics and dynamics
- the relationship of the ‘VET system’ to other education and training sectors
- the impact of external factors on the ‘VET system’, demography, occupational change, etc.
- To understand differences across Europe, in the 28 EU member states as well as Iceland and Norway
- To improve our understanding of change and development
  - Developments over the last two decade
  - Stability vs. change



## Six work assignments

1. Systematically map the definition and conceptualisation of vocational education and training at national level
2. Analyse how external factors, notably demography and changes in occupational structures, influence VET
3. Analyse the developments of initial VET at upper secondary level (EQF 3-4)
4. Analyse VET from a lifelong learning perspective;
5. Analyse the role of VET at higher levels (EQF5 and above) and the issues of 'academic' versus 'vocational drift'.
6. Outline possible developments paths (scenarios) for European VET into the 21<sup>st</sup> century



## **Key findings from work assignment 3: Developments of initial VET at upper secondary level (EQF 3-4)**

- The research uses national data covering enrolment at VET programme level to establish a better overview of long-term trends
- The research questions the reliability of international statistics as regards VET enrolment



## Is the importance of upper secondary IVET in Europe dwindling?

- International data (Unesco, Eurostat and OECD) indicate a decreasing share of enrolment in VET among upper secondary students (ISCED level 3) in Europe since 1995
- This have given rise to the notion that “VET is under threat”
- The reliability of these data can be discussed,
  - breaks in data-series undermines their ability to capture long term trends
  - Differences in the interpretation of VET between countries influences the aggregated international statistics
- The project ‘went to the source’ and collected national enrolment data at programme level in 30 countries for the period 1995-2015



## Initial VET at upper secondary level - stability rather than decline

- While declining in a few European countries,
  - ✓ There is no overall trend towards declining enrolment in VET
  - ✓ There is no general move away from VET towards general education
- Demographic changes has led to a drop in the total number of young people attending upper secondary education and training
  - ✓ VET has been able to retain its position relative to general education at this level

## Changing VET influences statistics

- The borderline between VET and general education is blurring. We increasingly find
  - ✓ programmes leading to dual qualifications\* (i.e. a VET diploma AND access to HE)
  - ✓ new programmes including both VET and GE pathways\*
  - ✓ new modular VET programmes allowing different combinations of vocational and general modules
- The borderline IVET-CVET is blurring. We increasingly find
  - ✓ Modular programmes and online learning open up IVET programmes to adults
  - ✓ IVET is in many cases opened up to adults, for example via recognition of prior learning



## **Key findings from work assignment 2: How external factors influence VET**

- Study draws on analysis of statistical data, desk research, and country case studies: DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, NL, NO, PL, UK (England)
- Looks at change over the period 1995 to the present



## Initial findings from the country case studies (I)

- The evidence suggests that the provision of VET has changed substantially since the early 1990s:
  - In many countries, VET has matured into a major constituent part of the education and training system during the period
  - The degree of policy attention to VET varies – VET is currently ‘in fashion’, reflecting the attention to skills mismatch in the economy
- Demographic challenges in several instances results in a declining population of young people. Consequently:
  - there are considerable efforts to improve attractiveness of IVET to young people (for example by designing progression routes to Higher VET and Universities);
  - in some countries, VET providers are being pushed into a market environment to survive
  - Countries are seeking new sources of skills supply (hence emphasis on accrediting skills acquired informally and making more efficient use of skills of migrants)

## Initial findings from the country case studies II

- All countries recognise the need to improve matching skills supply to skills demand. The response has been to invest in skills anticipation systems, but also:
  - to introduce output / competence-based systems; and
  - to involve employers / industry more in the design of competence standards at the occupational level
  - to devolve or decentralise authority relating to certain aspects of VET e.g. to local / regional levels or even to the level of the individual vocational school

## Initial findings from the country case studies III

- Pace of technological change means that skills systems need to be flexible in responding to the emergence of new skills / new occupational standards:
  - A tension between focussing on narrow occupational skills or a broadening where transversal skills play a bigger role. In a majority of countries the latter seems to be the preferred option (Cedefop 2017)
- Technological change places considerable pressure on providers:
  - Schools have to compete to keep skilled teachers – they are often in high demand by the labour market,
  - Access to the latest technologies often limited
  - The funding of VET is under considerable pressure
  - Closer cooperation with employers – work based learning – is increasingly seen as a strategy to circumvent these problems



## Initial findings from the country case studies IV

- EU policy has - in selected countries - acted as a catalyst for change especially in the development of qualification systems, the recognition of competences, and developing skills anticipation systems (c.f. use of ESF funding)
- In general, many countries are faced with a situation where much is expected of the VET system – but more is sometimes required with no increase or even a decrease in funding
- In general, research paints an optimistic picture but points to a range of factors potentially disturbing the stability characterising 1995-2015 period.



## Issues for debate

- ✓ *Do we underestimate (and fail to communicate) the strength of VET sector (as demonstrated by its relative stability of VET over time)?*
- ✓ *Do we operate from a too narrow definition and conception of VET – contributing to an underestimation of its importance?*
- ✓ *Does this underestimation contribute to the lack of esteem influencing VET in a negative way?*



## Issues for debate

- *Distinctions between sub-sectors of education and training (general, vocational and higher education) are blurring; what is the implication for VET policy post 2020?*
- *The blurring distinction between IVET and CVET and the increasing importance of HVET challenges our understanding of VET. What is the implication for VET policy post 2020?*
- ✓ *The increased attention to lifelong learning will require policies allowing for progression between different types and levels of education and training and work. What is the implication for VET-policies beyond 2020?*

## Issues for debate

- ✓ *VET policies require strong evidence, including reliable statistics. How can VET statistics be improved?*