Attractive vocational education and training: what really matters?

Workshop
9 and 10 October 2012
Brussels

General information

Workshop venue
The European Economic and Social Committee
Trèves Building, Meeting room TRE 7701 (7th floor)
74, rue de Trèves
1040 Brussels
BELGIUM

Organisers: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop); The European Commission, DG Education and Culture, Unit B4 and The European Economic and Social Committee

No. of participants: About 60

Working language: English

Thematic introduction

Vocational education and training (VET) has demonstrated wide benefits to individuals and society, aiding economic growth, cohesiveness and equality. At the same time, the attractiveness of initial vocational education and training (IVET) appears to be decreasing in several countries. VET lacks esteem when compared to general education.

If trends in skill supply and demand will continue, there may be significant skill shortages and mismatches on European labour markets. Despite continuing decrease in new job openings in certain traditional occupations (e.g. agriculture, manufacturing), replacement demand remains very high for typical VET qualifications.

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1 Special EUROBAROMETER 369 (2011), Attitudes towards vocational education and training
2 Cedefop (2012), Europe’s skill challenge. Lagging skill demand increases risks of skill mismatch. Briefing note
The need to increase the attractiveness of VET has been acknowledged and underlined at the European level since the launch of the Copenhagen process in 2002. Recently, ministers, the Commission and European Social partners have reaffirmed such a need. ‘Making IVET an attractive learning option’ is one of key strategic policy objectives chosen for the period 2011-2020.\(^3\)

The concept of attractiveness in relation to IVET is complex and not easy to define, partly because of the heterogeneity of IVET systems which are organized very differently in different countries due to historical factors, differing economic situations and political traditions. The definitions centre on two themes: the subjective nature of attractiveness (taking into account the role of communication and personal perceptions) and the factors that impact on the ‘objective’ attractiveness of IVET programmes (e.g. relevance to the labour market, quality assurance, recognised qualifications). Generally, two types of factors influence the attractiveness of an IVET programme: those which are intrinsic to the IVET programme and those that are part of the wider context, which may be just as important as the influence VET outcomes.

Becoming attracted to IVET involves some changes in decisions and actions following an assessment of external conditions by various stakeholder groups. The student, for example, makes a decision to enrol or not enrol in a programme. The employer decides whether to hire graduates of IVET programmes or whether to be involved in delivery of IVET schemes (e.g. offer an apprenticeship). Therefore, personal decision making is crucial to attractiveness and an understanding of human behaviour is necessary to gain a full understanding of the factors influencing IVET attractiveness.

**Purpose of the workshop**

The main aim of the workshop is to validate preliminary findings of a Cedefop study on IVET attractiveness, which will be presented and debated on first day of the workshop. Many policy initiatives in Member States were mapped and compared and various stakeholder groups were surveyed, to understand how the attractiveness is perceived, what works, where, and why, taking into account IVET’s wider economic, social and behavioural context.

Linked closely to the findings, the discussion will be organized around a new conceptual framework of IVET attractiveness which was developed based on identification of relevant system characteristics, policy levers and drivers of IVET attractiveness. In this conceptual framework, the attractiveness of IVET is understood as the outcome of interest, which is influenced by:

- The outcomes of the IVET system
- The communication of these outcomes
- Exogenous drivers of the supply side of IVET attractiveness
- Exogenous drivers of the demand for IVET graduates
- Policies aimed at bridging the gap between desired outcomes and measured outcomes of interest.

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Relying on the soft and hard evidence, policy makers, researchers, social partners and practitioners will debate

1) Trends and developments affecting attractiveness of IVET;
2) Approaches to measuring the attractiveness of IVET across countries;
3) Emerging patterns and trends in policy measures taken to increase the attractiveness;
4) Recommendations for actions at national and European level.

In particular, the following research questions will be discussed:

A. Scope:
   - Are the building blocks of the conceptual framework of IVET attractiveness - system characteristics, policy levers and drivers - defined and conceptualised in a relevant way? Does the suggested conceptual framework reflect whole story?
   - How can IVET attractiveness be measured?

B. Drivers of IVET attractiveness
   - What are the drivers of IVET attractiveness?
   - To what extent:
     - Are these drivers specific to the IVET system (endogenous)?
     - Are they external to the IVET system, either nationally or internationally (exogenous)?
     - Can they be influenced by policy (policy levers)?

C. Perspectives of IVET attractiveness
   - What are the perspectives of IVET attractiveness among relevant stakeholders in different countries, in particular employers, teachers and guidance counsellors?

D. Policy efforts and effectiveness
   - What have been the policy efforts in Member States and some third countries to increase the attractiveness of IVET?
   - Of these policy efforts, what have been the:
     - Intended outputs, impacts and outcomes?
     - Intervention logic?
     - Perceived effects?
     - Realised impacts and potential side effects?
     - Influence of outcomes of previous policies on policy-making?

E. What works?
   - What is the evidence on policy effectiveness teaching us about 'what works' taking into account different types of IVET systems, different stakeholder groups, different country-specific characteristics, etc.?
   - What are the characteristics of successful policy programmes or initiatives in their specific contexts?
Learning mobility in VET

On the second day of the workshop, special attention will be devoted to the mobility of VET learners as a factor having impact on the attractiveness of IVET.

Mobility is also high on the policy agenda and discussion in Europe. In its fourth strategic objective, the Bruges Communiqué advocates the development of ‘a strategic approach to internationalisation of VET and promoting international mobility’. The objectives are quantified in terms of European benchmarks for 2020, namely: the share of the young adult population going abroad should reach 6% in IVET; and the share of higher education graduates should with a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad reach 20%.

In the context of high youth unemployment and increased internationalisation of labour markets, learning mobility is expected to contribute to strengthening the employability as well as personal development of VET graduates. Various national campaigns and initiatives for internationalisation of VET show that learning mobility is increasingly (even though very gradually) an integral part of the VET programmes. Mobility does not only mean moving to another country but it also implies the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one learning or working context to another building professional identity across borders.

The focus of the session is on transnational learning mobility. Workshop participants will reflect upon attractiveness and learning mobility having in mind the practical/operational level, the individual/behavioural level and the policy level.

The workshop will discuss organised learning mobility and related experience of companies and VET providers. Several European projects and national initiatives (such as EuroApprenticeship and Mobility coaches) stem from the genuine interest of companies and social partners for providing graduates with European learning experiences. Mobility schemes such as Leonardo da Vinci actions contribute to enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility for individuals and to facilitate the mobility of working trainees.

The workshop will also explore in how far lessons can be drawn from higher education. Unlike in VET learning mobility in higher education has become common practice. Comparative analysis in higher education research shows that opportunities for mobility such as the ERASMUS programme impact on the student decision, not least since mobility in higher education contributes to their international professional profile.

The discussion on mobility with country experts will be developed along the following main questions:

1. How to improve conditions for learning mobility? What are the prerequisites for successful mobility (success factors, constraints) to make VET more attractive?
2. Which are the key areas to improve conditions for learning mobility? What are pertaining barriers and which measures are undertaken to overcome them?
3. What lessons can be drawn for VET from HE for the issue?
Workshop structure and working method

9 October 2012

On the first day, 9 October, the workshop will be focussed on preliminary results from the Cedefop study on attractiveness of IVET in Europe. Workshop participants and discussants will be invited to discuss the study findings in details. Then, specific aspects and drivers having impact on IVET attractiveness will be addressed in a more detailed way in four separate sessions.

In each session, the presentation of findings (about 15 minutes) will be accompanied by short interventions (5 minutes per each intervention) of 2 - 3 discussants followed by plenary discussion. Discussants are invited to debate and validate the findings from the perspective of different stakeholder groups.

Background documents will be circulated in advance, in particular country fiches. Participants representing countries involved in the study will be asked to validate the information summarised in their country fiche in writing within 2 weeks after the end of the workshop. An opportunity to comment on country fiches will be also given during the plenary sessions where relevant.

10 October 2012

On the second day, 10 October, the workshop will focus in how far and under which conditions learning mobility can prove a driver of IVET attractiveness referring to the concept of attractiveness discussed on day 1.

A brief overview on recent relevant policy developments at European level will be given. Experience with organised mobility based on selected projects and initiatives will be shared with participants. Then conditions for learning mobility will be explored. Based upon the positive results achieved with mobility programmes in higher education, the discussion will aim to draw lessons for VET.

Country experts are asked to contribute briefly to all discussions by referring to selected national mobility initiatives (good practices).