



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

# The conceptual shaping of learning outcomes: are we practising what we preach?

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# Shaping VET

## Cedefop

- looks into the future of VET
- monitors VET policy developments across the EU
- actively supports the development and use of European tools, such as the European qualifications framework



# Learning outcomes

*[ˈlɜːnɪŋ ˈaʊtkʌmz]*

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Learning outcomes are statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy

# Cedefop's long standing research on learning outcomes

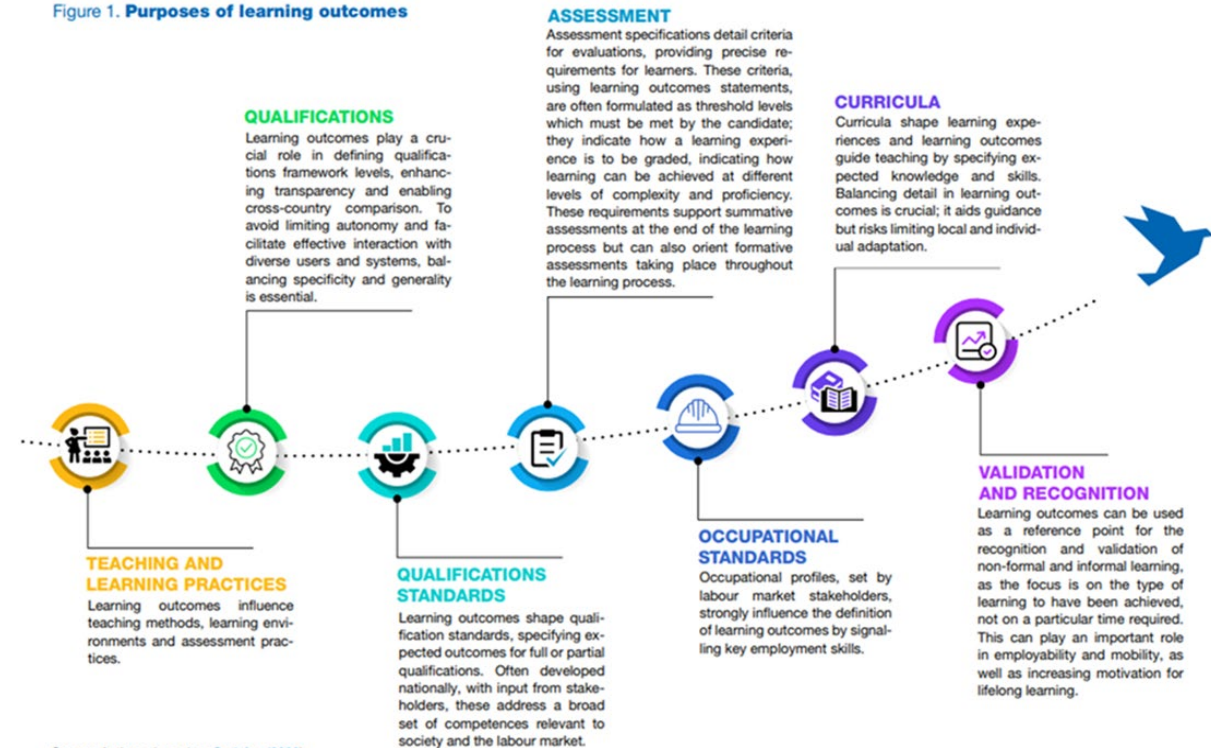
- ❖ The learning outcomes principle is - **explicitly since 2004** - systematically promoted in the EU policy agenda for education, training and employment
- ❖ Cedefop has carried out a number of [studies](#) mapping and analysing the use of learning outcomes for **different purposes**.



# Learning outcomes in European education and training policies

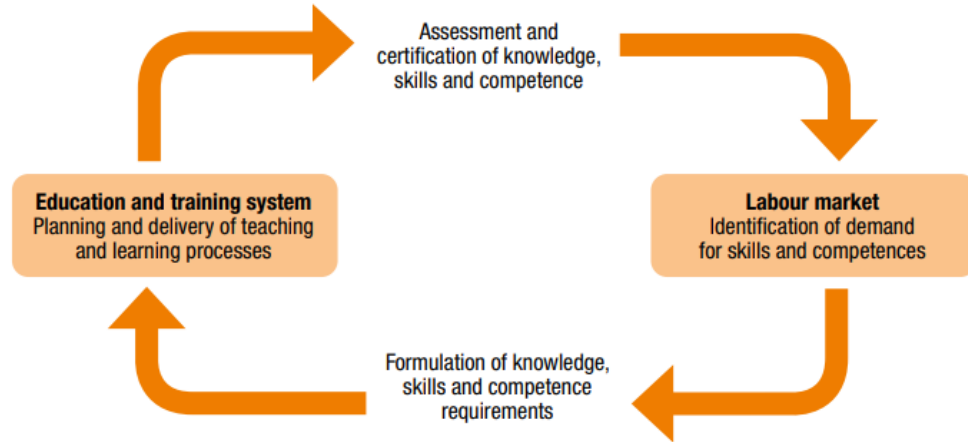
- The LO principle: a more **explicit** and **visible** building block for VET. A way to:
  - ❖ Increase **transparency** of VET
  - ❖ Broaden **access** to VET
  - ❖ Improve **relevance** of VET
  - ❖ Put the **learner** at the centre of the process
- LO influence the description and definition of curricula, programmes and qualifications! But the **impact** on **teaching, learning and assessment**
  - ❖ is less researched and
  - ❖ **more difficult to judge** especially due to the emergence of many on-line provisions

Figure 1. Purposes of learning outcomes



Source: Authors, based on Cedefop (2022).

# The feedback loop education-training and labour market-society



Source: Cedefop (2013; 2021).

Intended learning outcomes	Achieved learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are related to principles and concepts</li> <li>• might be observed: NQF descriptors, curricula, qualification descriptions, standards</li> <li>• have formal meaning</li> <li>• people involved in developing learning outcomes are defining their shape. Those people are specialists in writing learning outcomes in general. They include researchers, specialists from national/regional authorities for education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are related to theory and practice</li> <li>• might be observed (or rather are the result of) training and assessment process</li> <li>• have practical meaning</li> <li>• people involved in developing learning outcomes are defining their content. Those people are specialists in defining and providing learning outcomes for a particular sector/occupation. They include practitioners, education providers, social partners, sector representatives</li> </ul>

Balance and comparability between intended and achieved is ensured when they are working together. In this way, flexibility and adaptability of learning outcomes as well as fulfilment of different aims of using learning outcomes is also ensured.

Source: Cedefop.



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# Cedefop project: The shift to learning outcomes (2023-25)

## Five key objectives

Influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools

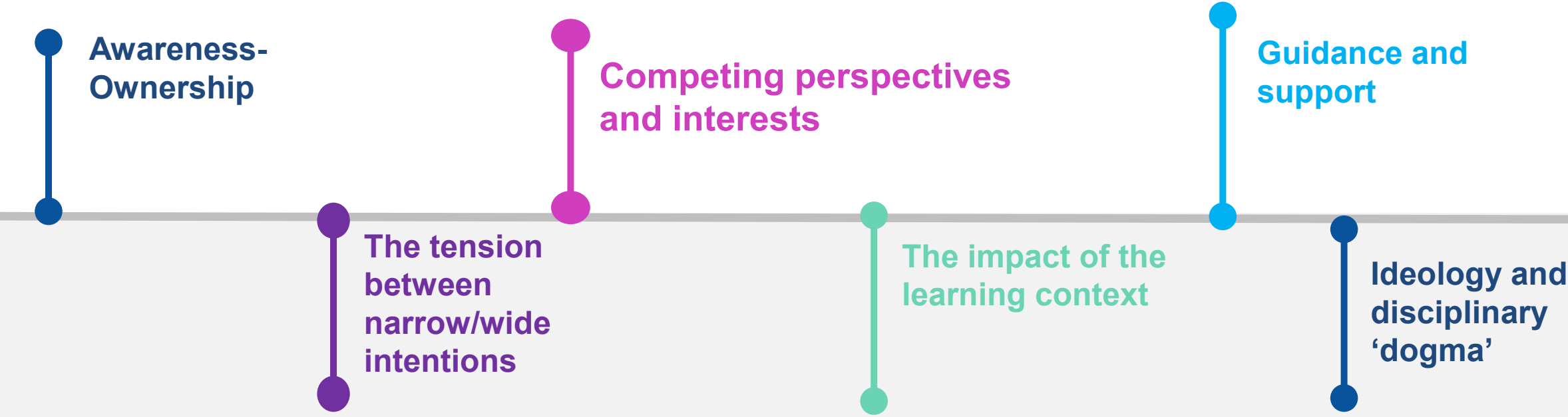
Influence of learning outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices

Influence of learning outcomes on assessment

Influence of learning outcomes-based curricula in company training

Suggestions/ lessons for the way forward

# Transformation from intended to achieved learning outcomes



Macro – Meso - Micro levels / Stakeholder engagement





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# Methodology of the study

## 10 case studies

(Included national desk research, visits to VET providers and companies, interviews with national-level stakeholders, and validation workshops)

## EU level seminar

(only for WA5)

**Synthetic reports**

Survey

Desk research and literature review



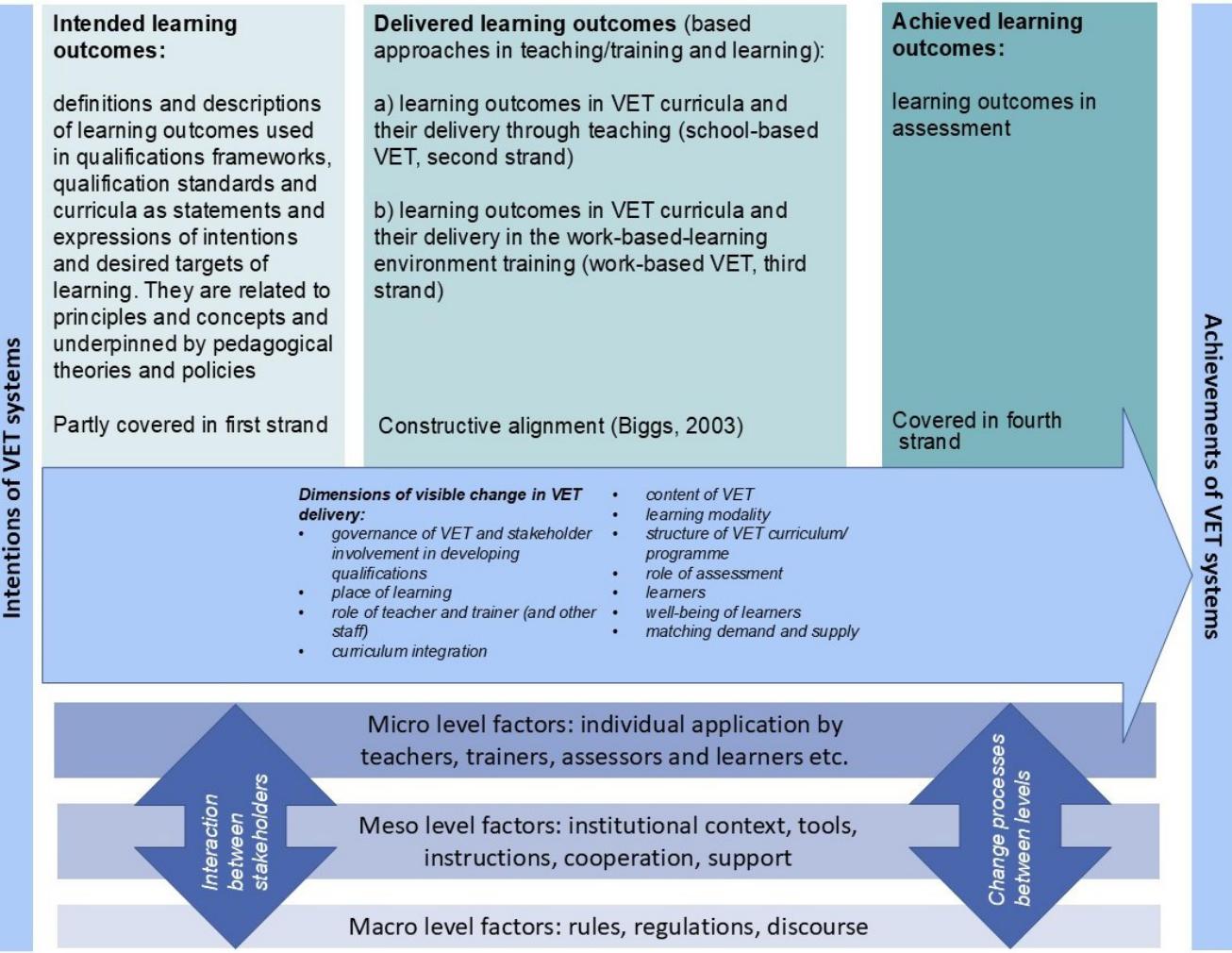
**50**  
YEARS

SHAPING LEARNING AND  
SKILLS FOR EUROPE



# Overarching analytical framework

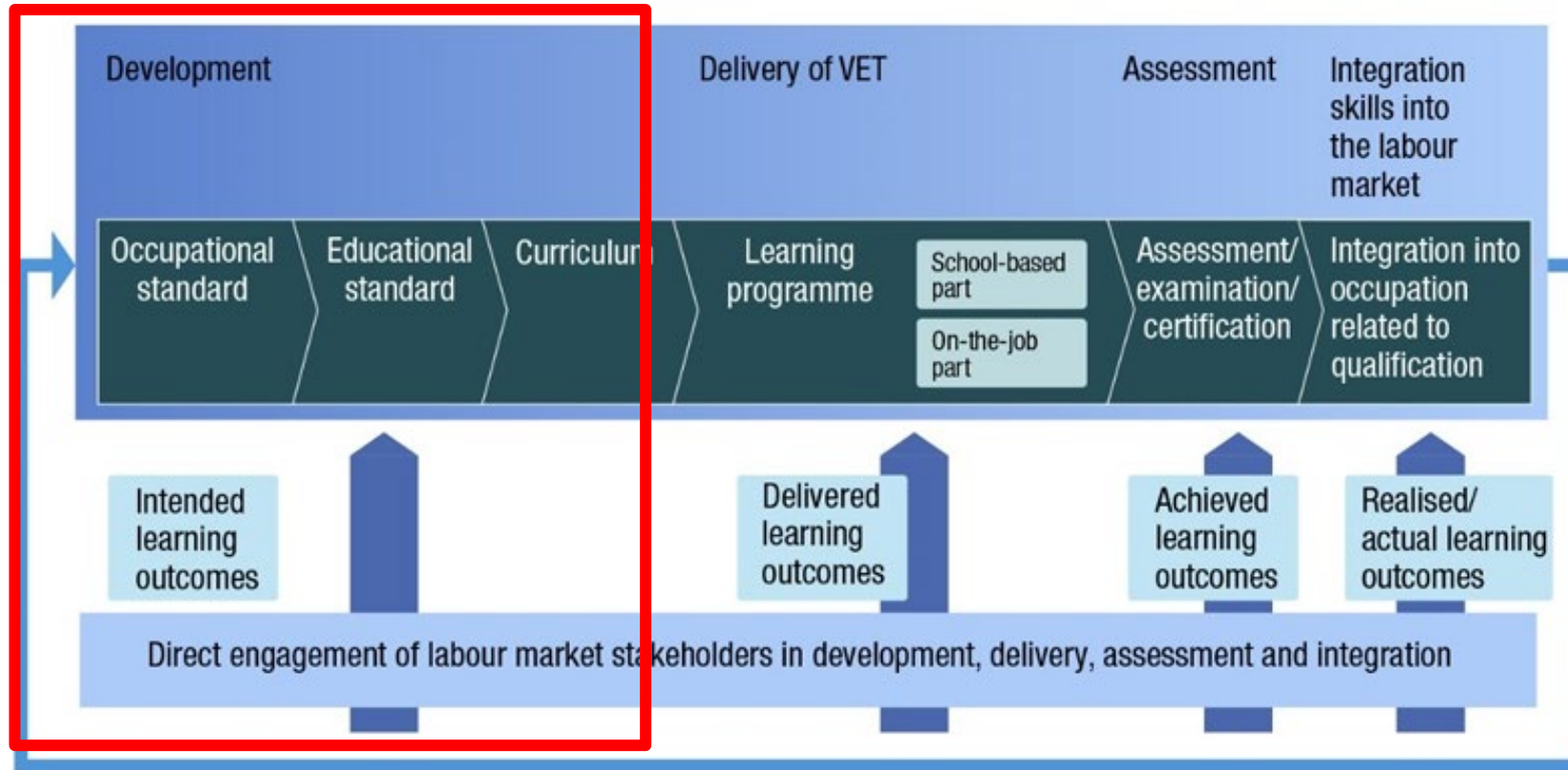
**Aim: to map and analyse the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning**



**Fifth strand: compare different country situations and reflect on overarching dynamics and conclusions**



# Idealised model of the transformative journey of LO



Feedback-loop based on consultation, labour market information and surveys

Source: Cedefop. (2025)

# Perspectives and practice of teacher training providers



Selected countries show **differences** in how learning outcomes approaches are integrated in the theoretical foundation of VET teacher training programmes



Overall, when it comes to the practical embedding of learning outcomes in teacher training programmes, the **implicit** approach (BG, FI, FR, MT, PL, PT, SL) prevails over the **explicit** approach (IE, LT, NL).

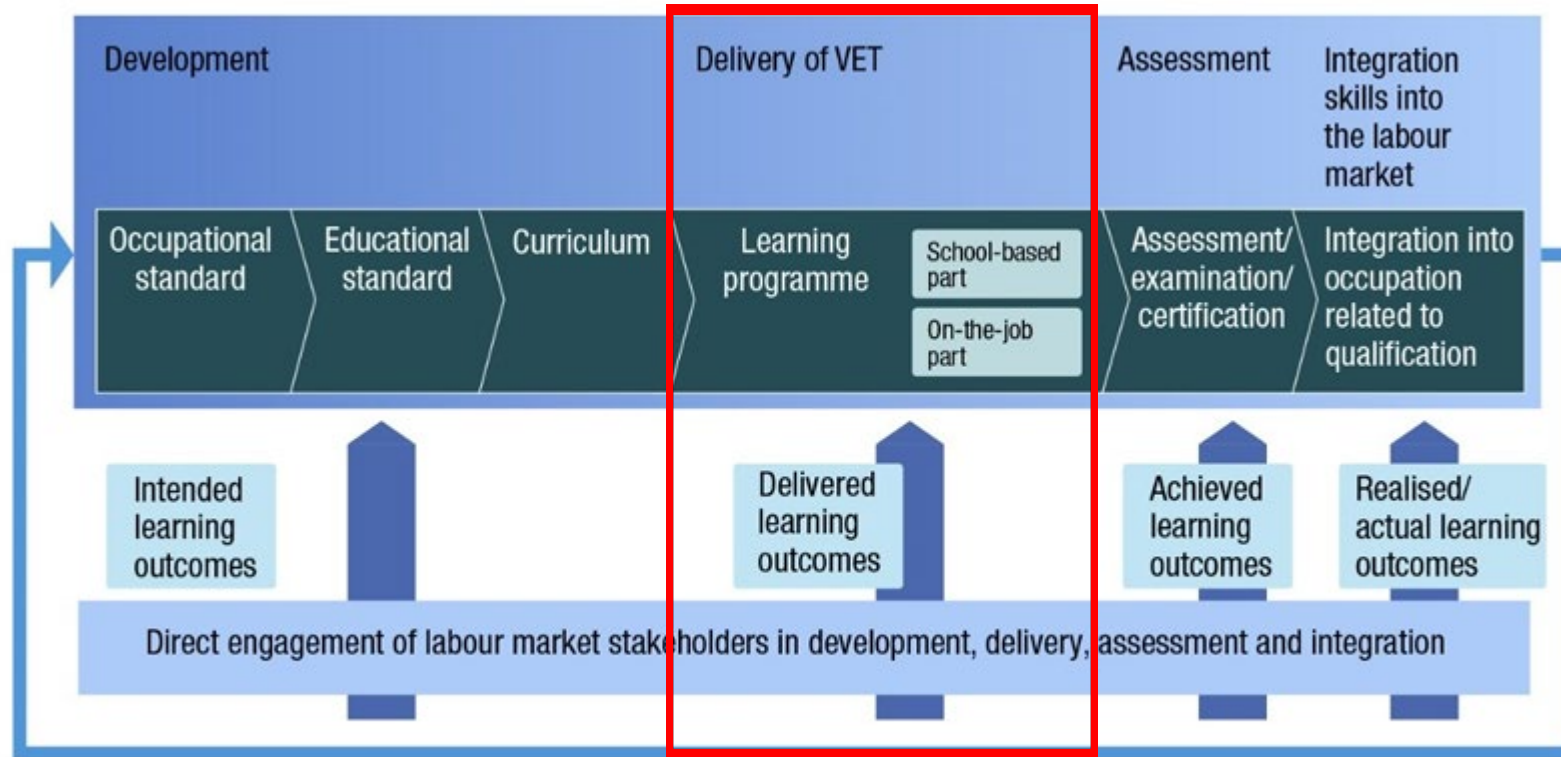


In most countries, VET teachers and trainers are introduced to how LO are defined in occupational, educational standards, qualifications and/or national curricula as part of their **professional training**. In some countries, though, this is less explicit.



Critical comments refer to an unsatisfactory form of **implementation** of the approach, which requires further **consideration, awareness raising and training**.

# Focus on delivery of VET



Feedback-loop based on consultation, labour market information and surveys

# Learning outcomes in teaching practices

- Countries analysed are at **different stages** of integrating learning outcomes into VET policies and curricula.
- While national progress is robust, **implementation** at the school and classroom levels is **slower**.
- The **pedagogical uptake** of learning outcomes appears **stronger** in **classroom practice** than in broader school planning.
- **No major public or professional debate** has accompanied their introduction in many countries.

Country	Policy embedding of learning outcomes in VET	Learning outcomes in reference documents	Support and guidance offered to schools at the national level	Overall assessment of national-level support for learning-outcomes-based approaches
Bulgaria	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Ireland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	No data	Firmly embedded
France	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding	Firmly embedded
Lithuania	Advancing in embedding	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding
Malta	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding
Netherlands	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded
Poland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded
Portugal	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Slovenia	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Finland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded

NB: 'Advancing in embedding' means that learning outcomes are generally applied but are not yet seen as foundational to developments and perspectives. In this case, they are related to policies, reference documents, and support and guidance offered to schools. 'Firmly embedded' means that learning outcomes are foundational to the main developments and perspectives.

Source: Authors.

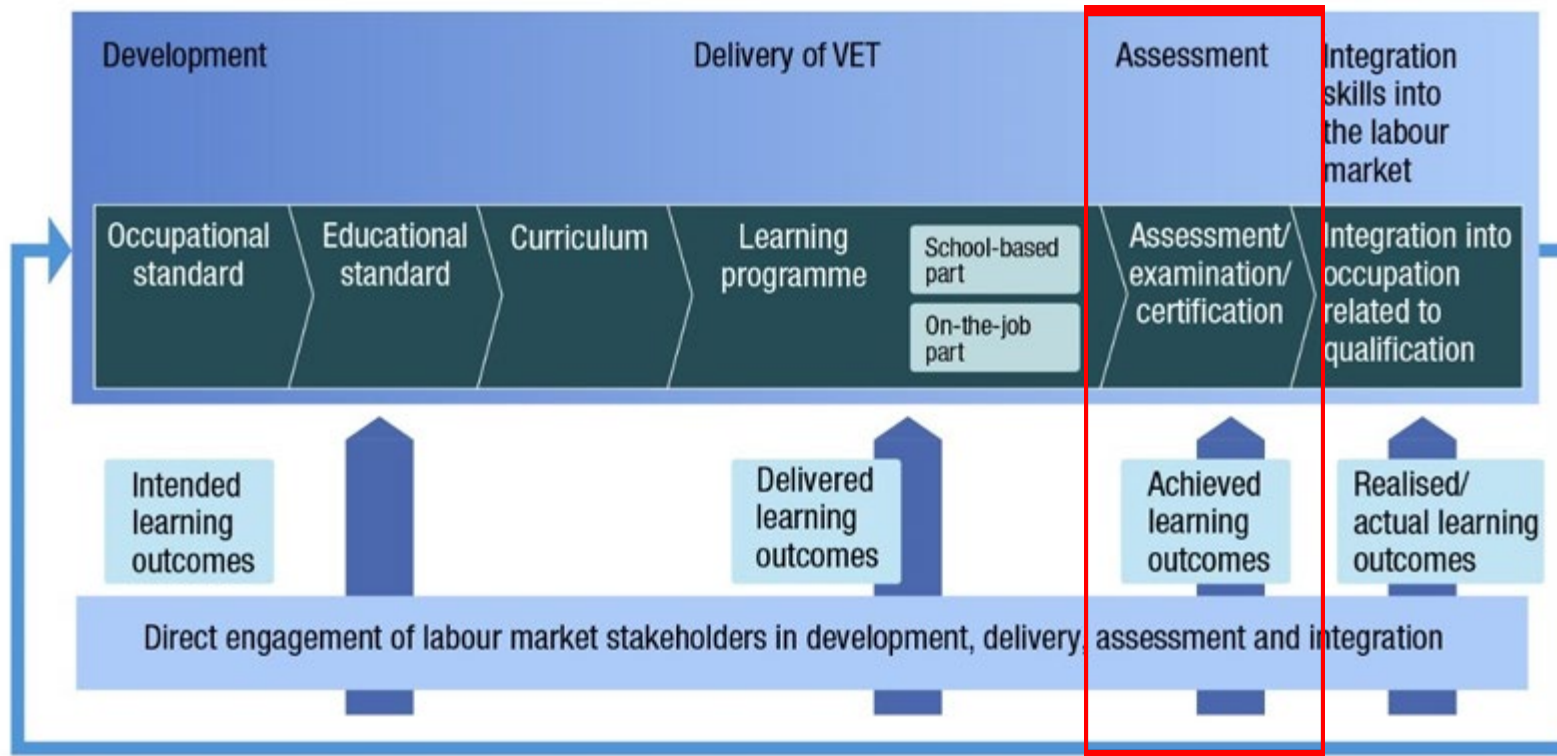
# Learning outcomes in work-based learning (WBL)

- In mature WBL systems, learning-outcomes-based curricula **align** training, assessments, and employer-VET collaboration with **labour market needs**.
- Strong national policies don't guarantee consistent application of learning outcomes in companies; **integration varies across firms and countries**.
- **Limited CPD** for trainers hampers effective use of learning outcomes.
- Trainers often use learning outcomes **intuitively**, leaning more on industry expertise than formal frameworks.
- **Apprentice awareness of learning outcomes is higher in mature work-based learning systems**; in less developed systems, focus remains on immediate tasks.

Country	National policies and arrangements	Perspective and practice of companies	Perspective and practice of in-company trainers	Perspective and practice of learners
Bulgaria				
Finland				
France				
Ireland				
Lithuania				
Malta				
Netherlands				
Poland				
Portugal				
Slovenia				

*Dark green: firmly embedded;  
Light green: advancing to embedding*

# Learning outcomes and assessment



Feedback-loop based on consultation, labour market information and surveys

# The impact of learning outcomes on assessment

- Learning outcomes: **core component of national assessment regulations** in all countries covered by the study
  - **Assessment criteria:** defined at the national level in most cases (differences in terms of scope, detail and implementation)
  - **Transversal skills and competences:** only to some extent reflected in assessment criteria, often assessed implicitly or informally
  - **Formative assessment:** generally, less regulated than summative assessment
- 
- ❖ **Teachers and trainers:** value learning outcomes for enhancing transparency in expectations; often rely on intended learning outcomes to guide formative assessments and use detailed criteria for summative purposes.
  - ❖ **Learners:** awareness and understanding differs, often stronger focus on assessment criteria

# The way forward

- ❑ Which **conceptual, structural and political** factors hinder and/or facilitate the transformation of learning outcomes into actual learning achievement?
- ❑ How do the above factors **influence learners, teachers, trainers, assessors** as well as **policy makers**?
- ❑ Which **practical recommendations** can improve the transformation of intended to achieved learning outcomes?

An attempt to develop **practices and relevant guidelines for practitioners** that could form part of an **electronic toolkit** on learning outcomes.



# Impact of LO in the wider landscape of ET

- **Conceptual diversity and uneven integration:** Learning outcomes stem from diverse educational traditions, leading to varied interpretations and inconsistent embedding in curricula, teacher training, and teaching practices across countries.
- **Implementation gaps at practitioner level:** While national reforms establish LO-based frameworks, practical use in classrooms, work-based learning, and assessments depends heavily on teacher and trainer support, which remains uneven.
- **Need for systematic support and clearer guidance:** Limited CPD, vague outcome statements, and a lack of holistic training constrain effective implementation; stronger support structures and clearer LO formulations are needed



- ❖ **Path dependency and policy framework**
- ❖ **Political consensus and EU support**
- ❖ **Governance and stakeholder involvement**

# Thank you

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## Project page

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/learning-outcomes>



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