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European Centre for the Development  
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50  
YEARS  
SHAPING LEARNING AND  
SKILLS IN EUROPE

# European VET for the 21st century

The balancing of excellence  
and inclusion

# Decline or Expansion?

## Where is European VET heading?

### The negative story

VET is declining and losing out to general and academic education

Digitalization and job polarization renders VET skills less relevant

### The positive story

VET is expanding to higher levels and forms the backbone of lifelong learning

The skills provided by VET are essential for growth and welfare

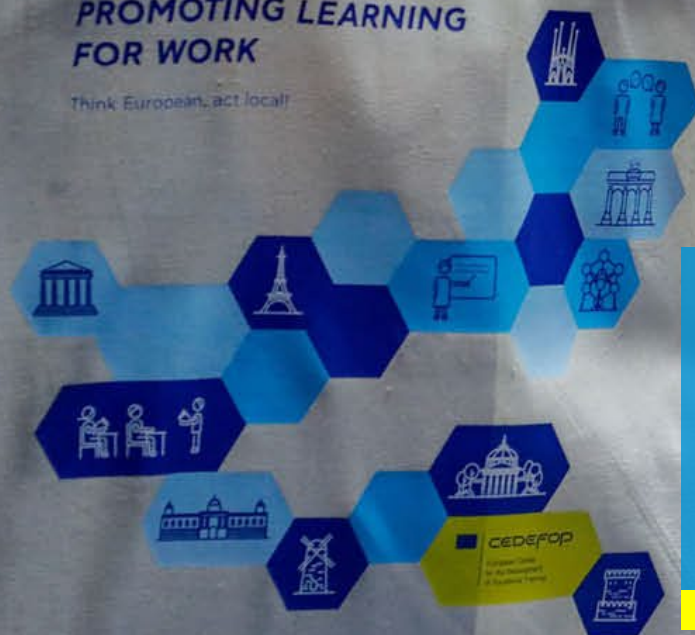


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**PROMOTING LEARNING  
FOR WORK**

Think European, act local!



**The Changing Nature and Role of VET (2016-19)  
The Future of VET in Europe (2020-22)  
Balancing of Excellence and Inclusion (2023-26)  
EU-27 + IS, NO, UK**

# Conceptual background: The balancing of excellence and inclusion



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# Context of the study

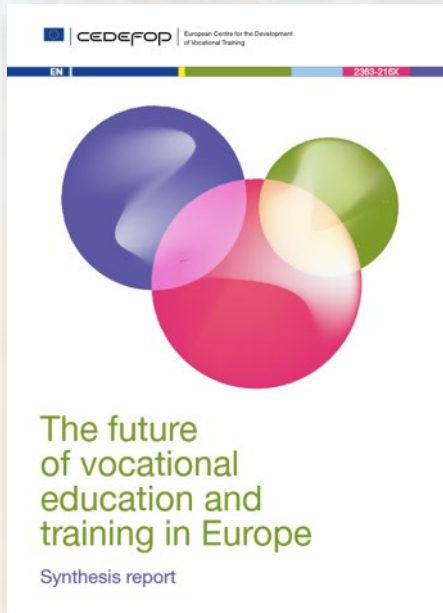
- **In EU:** need for specialised VET skills at the **highest possible levels of performance** – focus on **excellence**
- VET is viewed as a tool to include and **integrate learners at risk of exclusion** from the labour market and society – focus on **inclusion**



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The study seeks to deepen Cedefop's understanding of the challenges facing VET systems in the coming decade..



# Cedefop Future of VET study

## National workshop in Slovenia(2022)

### Inclusive excellence scenario

#### Understanding of VET:

VET is understood as a highly diversified form of education and training with a strong element of work-based learning provided at all levels, and serving learners at all ages and with different backgrounds realizing the idea of lifelong learning.

#### Role of VET:

The principle of inclusive education has become an integrative element of a broader concept of quality assurance and therefore VET plays an important socio-integrative role. VET has become also further professionalised in terms of quality of qualifications and teachers, their education and cooperation with the environment and business. The lack of workers allowed trade unions to fight for higher pay leading to better services/conditions resulting in more professionalism and a higher reputation of VET. The transfer of knowledge between the spheres of education and work is an important dimension of education. In practice, it is expressed by the exchange of staff between industry/businesses and schools (VET programme providers). It is for the learners to choose whether to study in school or in the company. Open qualifications are managed by the social partners. The link between different chambers and entrepreneurs is highlighted, which contributes to the contribution of VET and time-appropriate green and fair products. It all contributes to the acquisition of a quality brand.

#### Target groups:

VET addresses diverse target groups across all levels and serves learners at all age groups, including the disadvantaged. VET accounts for the highest share of learners compared to general education.

#### Learning provision:

Most VET takes place in large school centres, which are specialised in content and provide educational programmes at ISCED 3-5 levels, as well as various forms and types of non-formal education. They combine technical/professional gymnasiums where schooling culminates in a general baccalaureate and it is possible to enter higher education and vocational/professional schools where students can pass a final exam or a vocational bachelor's degree.

#### Learning approach:

Key focus and the starting point is the individual career development of young people based on their talents. Talent & Career centres are intended for wider population and represent a public interest. Support and funds are coming from different sources (public & private). Furthermore, they bring together various counsellors covering all aspects of education (general, VET, adults). Cooperation between different stakeholders, in particular the labour market (entrepreneurs) and chambers is effective.



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# Can excellence and inclusion be two sides of the same coin?

- Excellence and inclusion have been a key part of the European policy context for VET and **different layers** to address them can be discerned:
- Focus on **national level priorities**;
- Focus on national VET **objectives**;
- Focus on **policy documents, national curricula**.



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### 3 Main thematic areas

Map how national VET systems have addressed the objectives of excellence and inclusion.

Explore the conceptual foundation of these objectives and how they inform practical policies and reforms

Examine the expansion of VET at higher levels and how this influences the objectives of excellence and inclusion

**The findings of the study will support policy makers and stakeholders in strengthening the overall relevance and quality of European vocational education and training in 21st century.**

# Research questions (WA1)

1. How have the objectives on excellence and inclusion been addressed in **national policy documents** over the last 25 years?
2. To what extent have priorities and objectives linked to excellence and inclusion **triggered and influenced reforms and practical policies**?
  - 2.1. Have they influenced **learning outcome expectations** (in standards and curricula)?
  - 2.2. Have they affected **resource allocation and distribution**?
  - 2.3. Have they influenced **individual learning opportunities**?
  - 2.4. Have they influenced **sectoral policies**?
3. To what extent do policies on excellence and inclusion **contradict or complement** each other?



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# Research questions (WA2)

1. How are the concepts of excellence and inclusion **understood at national level?**
2. Which **instruments** are used to promote excellence and inclusion at national level:
  - 2.1 **Institutional initiatives** and reform;
  - 2.2 **Pedagogical and content** (curricular) reform;
  - 2.3 **Stakeholder involvement** and coordination (inside and outside the VET system).
3. How do the **conceptualisation** and comprehension of these concepts **vary across Europe?**
4. Which **future scenarios** for the **promotion** and **balancing** of excellence and inclusion could be developed?



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# Research questions (WA3)

1. To what extent are **HVET institutions and systems** addressing the objectives and priorities of E and I?
2. How are the concepts of excellence and inclusion understood and **operationalised in HVET**?
  - 2.1. Which types of learners are targeted?
  - 2.2. Which pedagogies are used?
3. How do HVET systems, in relation to excellence and inclusion **differ** across Europe?
4. What are **the institutional and pedagogical factors** influencing excellence and inclusion at higher levels?
5. What type of **stakeholders** are brought together?



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# A summative, but holistic approach to excellence and inclusion

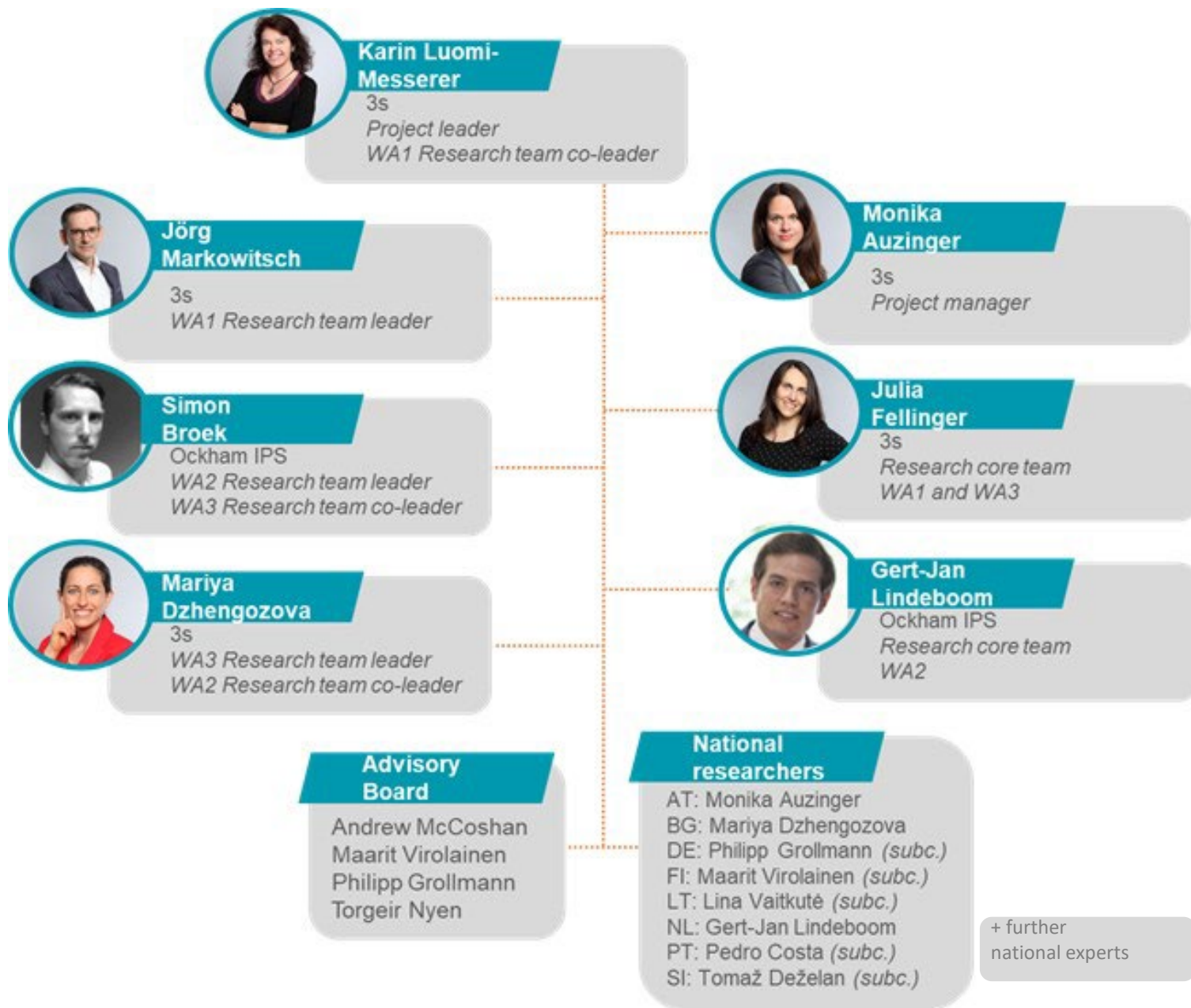
- ❖ Excellence found at all levels of education and training - 'inclusion' at a **specific educational level**, the provision is open, accessible and valuable for all potential learners.
- ❖ 'Excellence: finding the **unique quality within a specific education and training provision** - 'inclusion' means that **all potential learners can benefit from this unique quality** in the same way.
- ❖ 'Excellence' refers to the **positioning of an education and training sector in the whole skills formation system** - 'inclusion' refers to the specific sector of education and training so that **all learners can find their way through the systems and that pathways** are open to all.



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# Study team



# Methodology

**WA1: Evolving national VET objectives and priorities - excellence and/or inclusion**

30 countries (EU-27 + NO + IS + UK)

**Expert survey:**

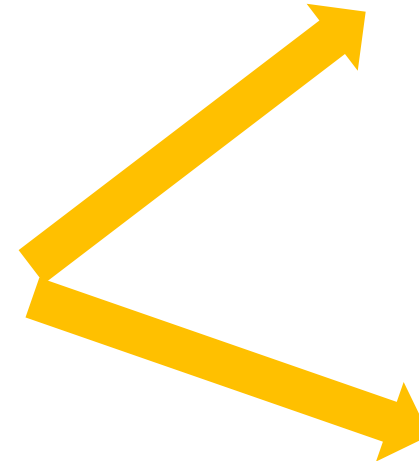
- Selection and analysis of 5 key policy documents/country
- General assessment of situation in the country



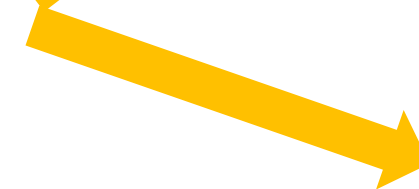
**Case study countries**



**WA2: Excellence and inclusion – concept exploration and inclusion in national VET objectives**



**WA3: Expanding VET at higher levels and the implications for excellence and inclusion**



**Case studies**

- Desk research
- Expert interviews

**Scenario development**

- future scenarios for the promotion and balancing of excellence and inclusion (workshops)

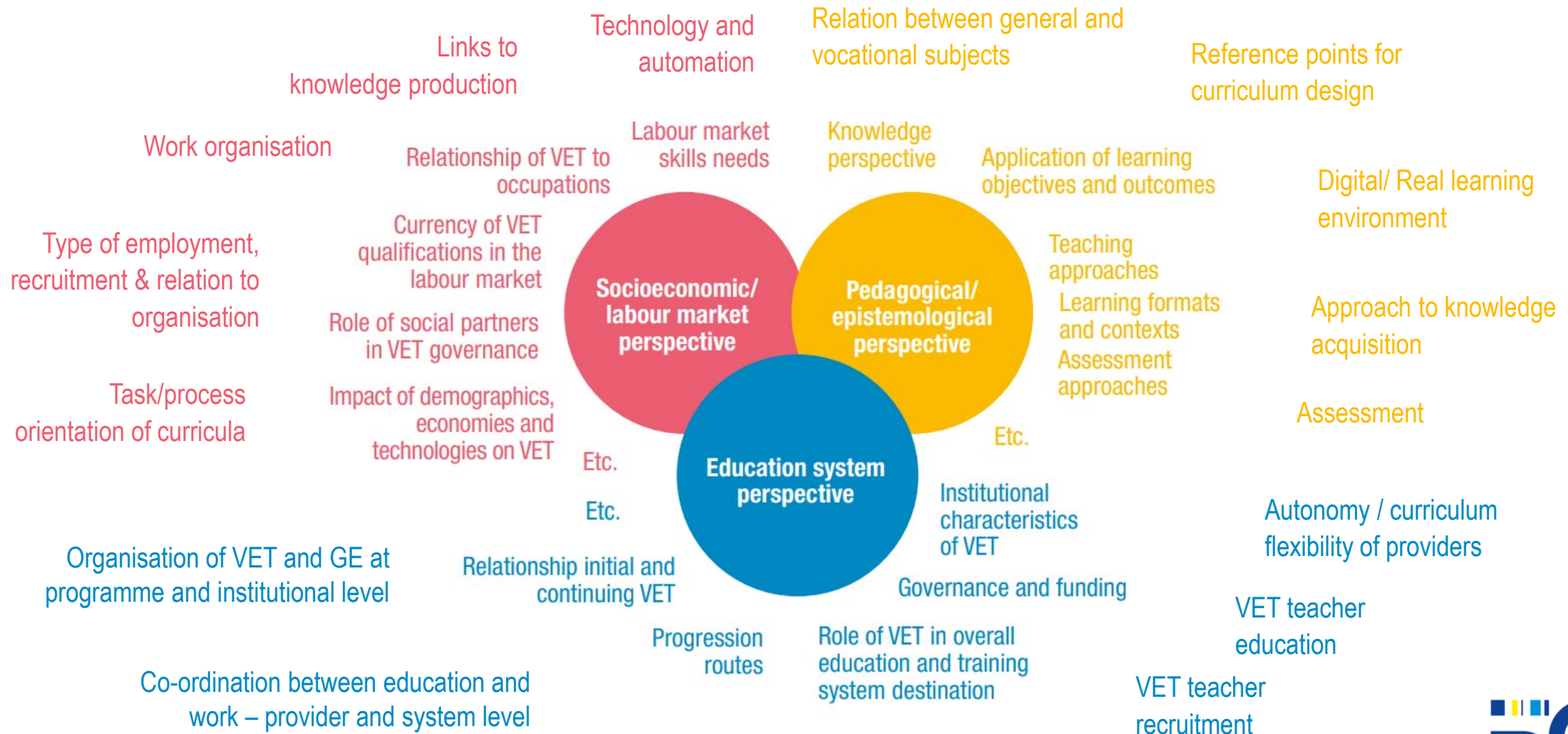
**Case studies**

- Desk research
- Expert interviews

**Overview all EU countries**

- Desk research
- Cedefop ReferNet questionnaire (27 EU Member States)

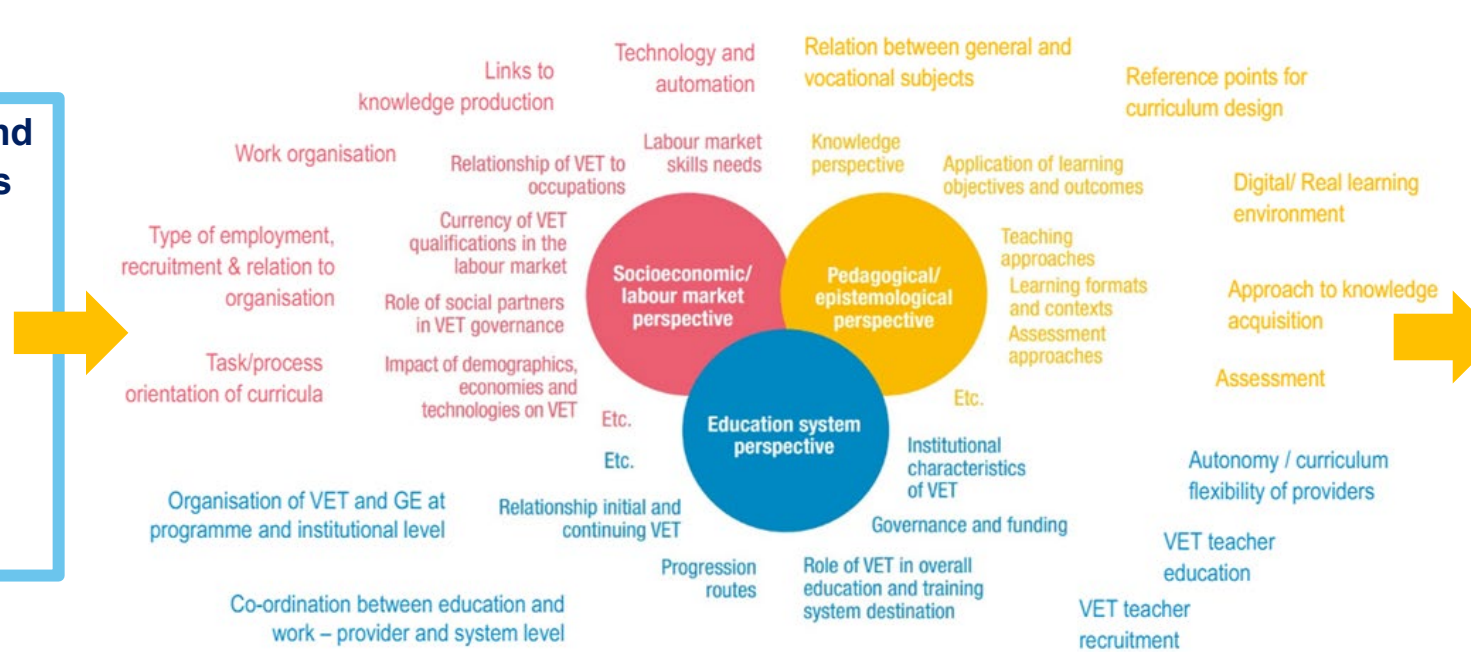
# The three-perspective analytical model – defining ‘signals’ to track excellence and inclusion



# Applying the three-perspective model for analysing excellence and inclusion

**Vocational excellence and inclusion in VET policies at European level (past 25 years)**

**The concepts of vocational excellence and inclusion in VET in literature**



## Dimensions used:

- Central aim
- Target group
- Content of curriculum
- Delivery
- Funding

## Theory of convention/orders of justifications in VET

- Market-based
- Industrial
- Domestic
- Civic
- Inspired
- Fame-based
- Project-based

# The concepts of vocational excellence and inclusion

## Multifaceted concepts

- ❖ defined in diverse ways
- ❖ focus on individual features
- ❖ influenced by different theoretical perspectives, assumptions and positions

## Contradictory or complementary?

- ❖ narrow or broad understanding

## Holistic approach

- ❖ essential components of an effective education system
- ❖ mutually enforcing
- ❖ help create an environment in which all learners can flourish (quality, diversity, equity, empowerment)
- ❖ 'inclusive excellence' as a framework that addresses all levels, components and aspects of VET as part of skills ecosystems
- ❖ economic, social and educational aims and values

# Data collection and analysis

Elements	Explanation
<b>Introduction of the VET policy document</b>	
<b>General information</b>	Title, date of its issue, type (regulation/legislation, strategy/action plan, other policy), link to further information, short description of its content, its scope (whether it refers to a part of the VET system or the entire VET system or whether it goes beyond the VET system) and validity
<b>Overall positioning of the policy document</b>	
<b>Relevance</b>	Assessing the positioning of the policy document in relation to excellence and inclusion – based on a rating scale from 5 (strong focus) to 1 (no relevance) for each concept separately.
<b>Implicit/explicit</b>	Indication whether these concepts are explicitly or only implicitly mentioned in the document and justification
<b>Key characteristics</b>	
<b>Central aim</b>	Primary focus or central objective of the VET policy in relation to the 'level of VET' it addresses in particular
<b>Target group</b>	Answer options with different types of target groups are provided.
<b>How does the VET policy address or intends to have an impact on the following dimensions?</b>	
<b>Content of curriculum (intended learning outcomes)</b>	Transversal competence, occupational competences, other or no impact; brief explanations to justify the selection.
<b>Delivery</b>	Modularisation/partial qualification, new programme or learning pathway, pedagogical and didactical approach - incl. learning format and context, guidance and support, other or no impact: brief explanations to justify the selection
<b>Funding</b>	Specific funding line
<b>Other intended impact</b>	Other or additional (to the above possibilities) intended impacts.
<b>Economic sector</b>	Focus on a specific economic sector or applicable to all sectors.

## Expert survey:

- ❖ analysis of 5 policy documents/country
- ❖ overall assessment

## Analysis

- ❖ changes over time
- ❖ patterns

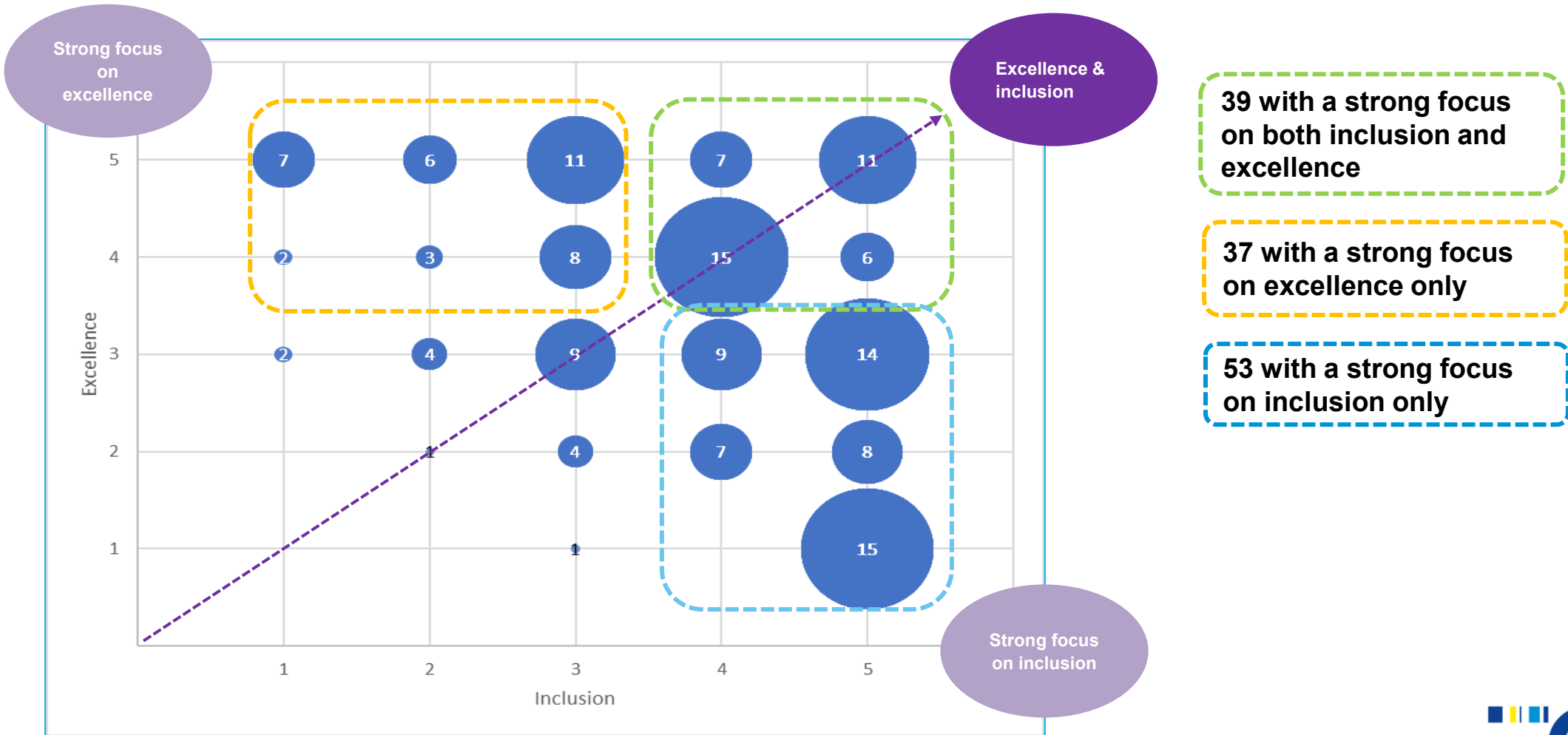
# Findings and observations



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# Overview: Focus of the 150 policy documents



## Overview:

# Characteristics of the 150 policy documents

- ❖ Policy documents that focus exclusively on **inclusion** are more frequently categorised as **regulations/legislation**
- ❖ Those with a strong focus on vocational **excellence** or with a shared high relevance to both goals are more common from around **2014 onwards**
- ❖ 40 percent have a **broad scope** and go beyond the VET system - more often the case with policy documents that have a strong focus on inclusion only



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# How have the objectives on excellence and inclusion been addressed in national policy documents over the last 25 years?

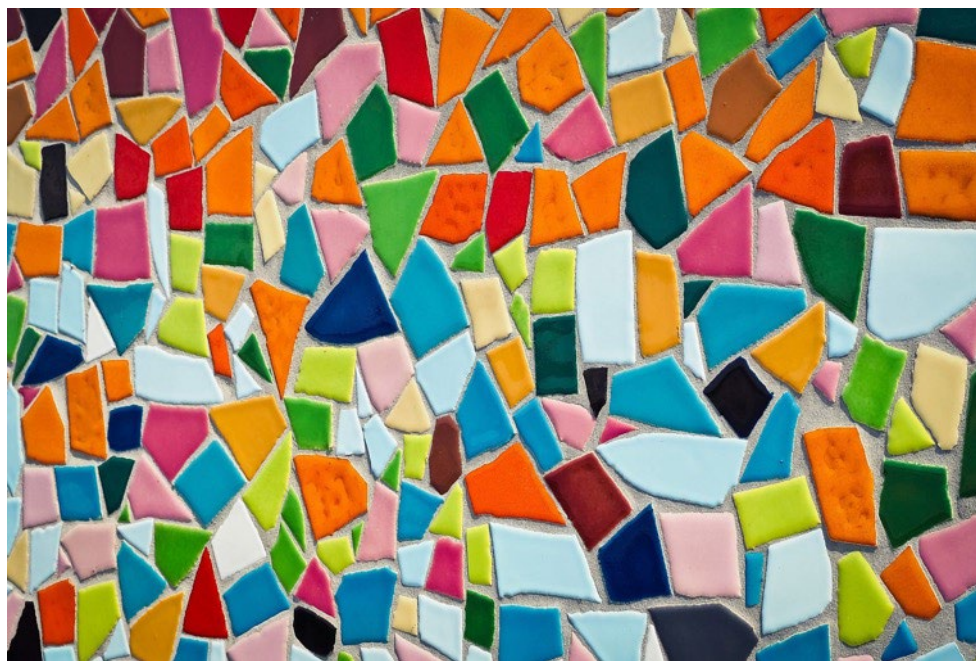
- ❖ **Explicit reference** to the policy objective inclusion occurs more often than that to vocational excellence (increased from 2014 on)
- ❖ **Target group** – narrow/broad; expanding over the years
- ❖ **Flexible pathways** – access and/or progression
- ❖ **Expected learning outcomes:** transversal competences
- ❖ **Vocational excellence:** Teacher/trainer CPD; CoVEs; attractiveness, image of VET
- ❖ **Overall trend:** Focus on inclusion aspects; increased focus on vocational excellence in the last 10 years; more balanced approach; increasing emphasis on both objectives, especially in recent times



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# To what extent do policies on excellence and inclusion contradict or complement each other?



## **Rather complementary - but in some cases/countries:**

- ❖ rarely combined in the same policy documents
- ❖ policies related to inclusion are not related to excellence, but policies related to excellence address inclusion-related aspects
- ❖ relate to different types of VET provision
- ❖ appear to be complementary, but there is some unclarity around the concepts
- ❖ some degree of contradiction

# Towards 'inclusive excellence' in VET... ...getting the balance right...

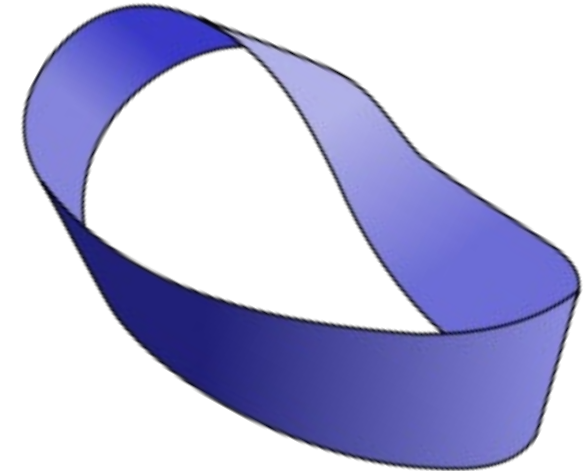
'two sides of the same coin'



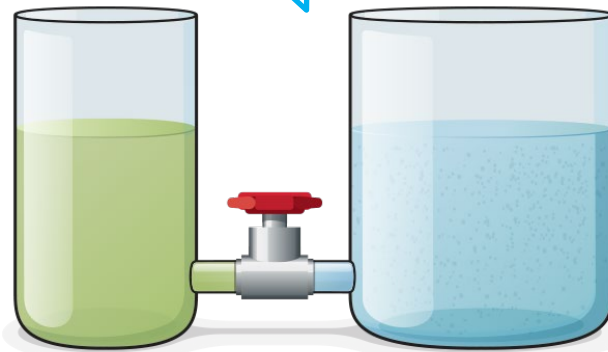
'scale with two (un)equal weights'



'Möbius strip'



'communicating vessels'



# TVET-IAG on Future of TVET

## Wordskills competition Lyon 2024

A global agenda  
on Future of TVET



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# Thank you

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For further information:

[anastasia.pouliou@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:anastasia.pouliou@cedefop.europa.eu)

[www.linkedin.com/in/anastasia-pouliou-03309117](https://www.linkedin.com/in/anastasia-pouliou-03309117)

[karin.luomi-messerer@3s.co.at](mailto:karin.luomi-messerer@3s.co.at)

[www.linkedin.com/in/karin-luomi-messerer-4567316/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/karin-luomi-messerer-4567316/)

Project pages

[www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/vet-excellence-and-inclusion-21st-century](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/vet-excellence-and-inclusion-21st-century)

[www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/themes/future-trends-vet](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/themes/future-trends-vet)



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