

VET in the United Kingdom

Vocational education and training (VET) is available at secondary and higher education levels through public and private providers. VET qualifications exist in a wide variety of sectors and prepare learners for work and further study. Education or training is compulsory up to age 16 (18 in England). For learners up to 18, VET is funded by government agencies. Adult learners are eligible for grants and, in some parts of the UK, also loans.

Predominantly school-based programmes, combining general academic study with VET elements, exist alongside broad VET programmes and specialist occupational programmes. Work-based learning may take place both in a VET provider setting and a workplace.

Most VET programmes can be accessed from age 15/16, although learners can be introduced to VET earlier. VET is offered full- and part-time; students may attend training on a block- or day-release basis from employers, or attend evening or weekend learning. Programme duration varies by subject area and type of learning and is between one and four years.

Apprentices are employed and are taught core, transferable skills. Technical and occupational learning take place on and off the job. A national qualification is awarded on completion. Demand for apprenticeships is rising and competition for the best apprenticeship places is increasing. More apprenticeships are being developed at higher education level in response to current labour market needs.

There is a well-established system for VET learners in the UK to progress to higher education. Candidates holding an EQF level 4 VET qualification, or a combination of VET and general qualifications and subjects, may access selected first-cycle university programmes at institution discretion depending on the subjects' relevance to future studies. However, there is no automatic right to progression from one qualifications framework level to the next as education providers and awarding organisations can set entry requirements for individual qualifications.

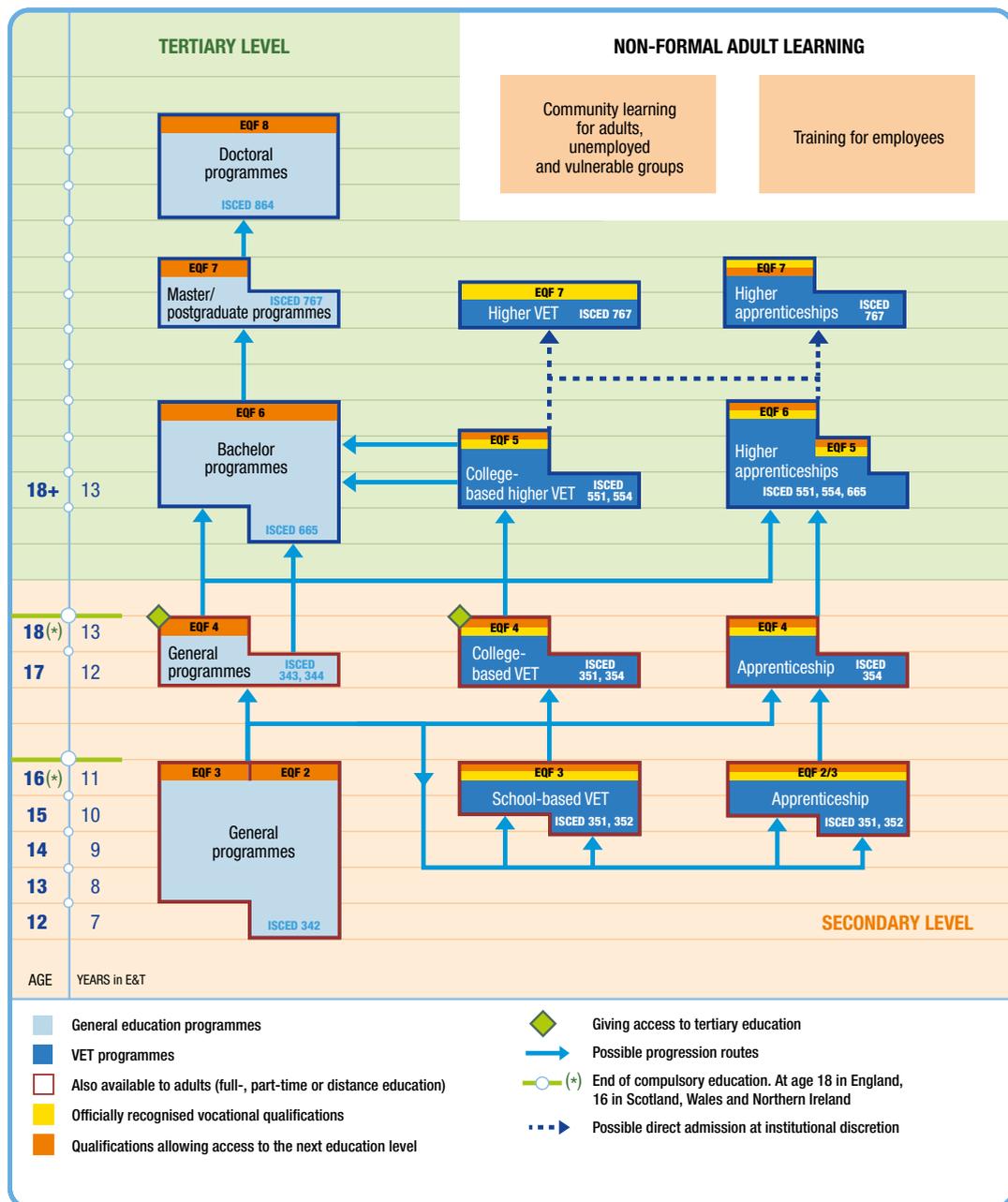
Across the UK there are also good articulation options for progression from higher VET programmes (EQF level 5) to the second or third year of a bachelor degree in a related field.

The UK government has devolved decision-making powers in several areas of policy, including governance of VET, to the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. While there are similarities between education and training systems in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, reforms are creating greater divergence. Qualifications and the qualifications framework levels are different in Scotland from the rest of the UK.

The qualifications market in the UK is jointly driven by government policies and private interests, increasingly through direct employer engagement in VET qualifications design. This has led to a large choice of qualifications and awarding organisations. Qualifications are designed and issued by independent awarding organisations. Some offer a large variety of qualifications, often both general and vocational; smaller ones often specialise in a specific professional area.

VET providers include secondary schools, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education colleges, higher education institutions, private training providers, and employers. The regulated qualifications framework for England and Northern Ireland has, from 2015, removed prescriptive unit and credit requirements to give awarding organisations increased freedom and flexibility to develop VET qualifications that meet labour market needs. Qualifications frameworks in Scotland and Wales have retained their unit and credit structure.

Many VET learners are adults. Adult and continuing education is part of the formal education system, but is also offered as non-formal training by employers and training providers. Trade unions, employer organisations, sector skill councils and other social partnerships are involved in providing adult education, developing learning resources and anticipating labour market needs.



NB: ISCED-P 2011. ISCED classification based on the 2015 mapping of UK classifications by the Department for Education.
 Source: Cedefop and ReferNet UK.



Publication:

Spotlight on VET – 2018 compilation:
vocational education and training systems in Europe.

Access the full publication at:

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4168

Please cite this chapter as:

Cedefop (2019). VET in the United Kingdom. In: Cedefop (2019). Spotlight on VET – 2018 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office, pp. 70-71. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/009>

© Cedefop, 2019

