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THE WAY FORWARD IN LEARNING OUTCOMES IMPLEMENTATION

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Chapter 1. Introduction	2
Chapter 2. Literature review	4
2.1. The shift of focus from inputs to outputs of learning	4
2.1.1. Conceptual ambiguity and the transparency paradox	5
2.1.2. Reductive effects on curriculum and pedagogy	6
2.1.3. Assessment-led distortion of learning	7
2.1.4. Power, participation, and equity concerns	8
2.2. From policy to practice: implementation challenges	9
Chapter 3. Methods	12
3.1. Analytical framework.....	12
3.2. Data sources and analytical approach	13
Chapter 4. Findings	15
4.1. Stakeholder engagement with learning outcomes	15
4.2. Factors shaping the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches	17
4.2.1. Conceptual factors.....	17
4.2.2. Political factors.....	19
4.2.3. Structural factors	21
4.2.4. Understanding implementation: the interaction of conceptual, political and structural factors	22
4.3. Translating learning outcomes into practice: from intended to achieved outcomes	23
Chapter 5. Concluding remarks	26
5.1. The transparency paradox and the need for professional literacy	26
5.2. Learner engagement and the role of assessment	27
5.3. Pedagogical theories in tension	28
5.4. Governance, participation, and sustainable implementation	28
5.5. Implications for policy and practice	29
List of abbreviations.....	31
References.....	32

List of figures and tables

Figures

1. Analytical framework of the study.....	12
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Tables

1. Embedding learning outcomes at the macro, meso, and micro levels, 2025.....	24
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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

This working paper builds on the wider Cedefop project [The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality?](#), which explores the transition of 10 initial vocational education and training (IVET) systems in Europe from traditional input-based models, focused on teaching duration and resources, to learning outcomes-based approaches centred on the knowledge, skills, and competences acquired by learners. While the adoption of learning outcomes at the policy level has been well documented over the years (Cedefop, 2009; 2010; 2016; 2021; 2022), empirical evidence on how these reforms translate into daily teaching, training, and assessment practices remains limited. Cedefop's research tried to address this gap by examining how the shift occurs at policy, institutional, and individual levels.

The paper draws on evidence generated through this research, which analysed the [impact of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and teacher-training tools](#); [the use of learning outcomes-based approaches in classroom teaching practices](#); [the influence of learning outcomes on work-based learning](#); and [the role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment](#). By bringing together findings from these different strands of research, the paper identifies the factors that drive the use of learning outcomes in teaching and assessment, as well as the recurring conditions that facilitate or hinder the transformation of intended learning outcomes, as defined in policies and curricula, into achieved learning outcomes demonstrated by learners.

The following research questions guide the paper:

- (a) How do different stakeholders understand, perceive and engage with learning outcomes in practice?
- (b) Which conceptual, structural and political factors facilitate or hinder the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches?
- (c) How do these factors influence the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes across different levels of the VET system?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical foundations of learning outcomes and examines both the policy rationales underpinning their adoption and the main criticism raised in the literature. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach and analytical framework used to synthesise evidence from the wider Cedefop research project. Chapter 4 presents the findings in three stages: first, by examining how different

stakeholders understand, perceive and engage with learning outcomes; second, by analysing the conceptual, political and structural factors that facilitate or hinder implementation; and third, by exploring how learning outcomes are translated into practice across macro, meso and micro levels, focusing on the relationship between intended, delivered and achieved learning outcomes. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings for policy and practice and reflects on the conditions necessary for learning outcomes to support meaningful pedagogical change within VET systems.

CHAPTER 2.

Literature review

2.1. The shift of focus from inputs to outputs of learning

As education systems transition toward competence-based approaches, learning outcomes have gained prominence as key instruments for guiding curriculum design, assessment, qualification development and validation. This shift marks a paradigmatic departure from traditional, subject-centred pedagogies toward learner-centred models that prioritise individualised pathways, lifelong learning, and learner autonomy.

The growing use of learning outcomes-based education in Europe has been linked to the introduction of national qualification frameworks (NQFs), inspired the need for more transparent qualification systems and more flexible approaches to qualifications and learning (Birtwistle et al., 2016). Over the past two decades, Member States have increasingly adopted such approaches (Cedefop, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2024a), albeit at different times and at varying speeds, depending on national policy priorities, institutional structures, and capacities for reform.

The widespread adoption of learning outcomes has contributed to greater coherence in European VET policy by establishing a common language among stakeholders and Member States. From the outset, advocates of learning outcomes approaches have argued that they enhance the transparency of learning for stakeholders across all levels of the education process (Otter, 1992; Adam, 2004; Ellis, 2004; Harris & Clayton, 2019), particularly when teaching activities and assessment practices are aligned with intended learning outcomes (see Loughlin et al., 2021).

In practice, increased transparency facilitates the comparison of qualifications across institutions and countries (EQF-Europass project group, 2024), potentially supporting international cooperation and enabling learners to move more easily between educational systems and labour markets. It also promotes the international alignment of qualifications frameworks and the development of joint initiatives based on shared reference points (Cedefop, 2024c). Transparency further helps bridge the divide between education and training by providing a common framework through which learning can be compared, recognised and valued. Credits and learning acquired through different pathways - including formal, non-formal, vocational, and academic routes - can more easily be combined or transferred when expressed in terms of learning outcomes. Such

flexibility is central to lifelong learning, as it enables individuals to build upon prior learning and transition more effectively between education, training and employment (Cedefop, 2024c).

Nevertheless, the widespread shift towards learning outcomes has also attracted considerable criticism. A substantial body of scholarship has highlighted a range of conceptual, pedagogical, and political concerns associated with these approaches in practice. These generally cluster around four interconnected themes: the paradox of transparency, the reductive effects on curriculum and pedagogy, assessment-driven distortions of learning, and broader issues of power and equity.

2.1.1. Conceptual ambiguity and the transparency paradox

The assumption that learning outcomes enhance transparency has been challenged by several scholars. One major criticism concerns the conceptual vagueness of the terms 'learning outcomes' and 'competences', which are often used interchangeably within outcome-based education frameworks, despite carrying different meanings across countries and policy contexts (Anderson-Levitt & Gardinier, 2021; Schaffar, 2021). Schaffar (2021) argues that such ambiguity limits the usefulness of competences in both theory and policy because the term frequently conflates two distinct educational aims: the broader personal development of the learner and more practical, skills-oriented training. By encompassing both dimensions simultaneously, the concept obscures important distinctions and reduces conceptual clarity in educational debates.

Beyond terminological ambiguity, critics argue that the transparency promised by learning outcomes is, in practice, somewhat illusory. To be applied in teaching and learning contexts, learning outcomes require interpretation by practitioners. Teachers rely on their disciplinary expertise and professional judgement to make sense of outcome statements, inevitably adding layers of meaning that are not explicitly contained in the written formulations. As interpretations vary across disciplines, institutions, and individual educators, learning outcomes are often applied inconsistently in practice (see, for example, Hussey & Smith, 2002; Entwistle, 2005; Allais, 2012).

Research also suggests that learning outcomes do not necessarily increase transparency for students. Unlike teachers, students often lack the disciplinary background needed to interpret the implicit meanings embedded in learning outcomes. As a result, they tend to read outcome statements literally and at a surface level, undermining the assumption that outcomes clearly communicate expectations (Erikson & Erikson, 2019). This challenge is particularly pronounced for students who are new to higher education or come from non-traditional

educational backgrounds, as the gap between the wording of a learning outcome and the cognitive demands it implies may be difficult to bridge.

The reliance on prior knowledge and interpretive capacity has led Hussey and Smith (2002) to argue that learning outcomes should function primarily as broad guiding statements rather than as precise criteria for grading and assessment. More recently, Zelinka et al. (2025) have similarly highlighted a significant disconnect between the expectations attached to learning outcomes and the clarity of their actual definition. Stakeholders are often expected to deliver measurable and high-quality results through learning outcomes frameworks, despite the fact that the concept itself remains vague and inconsistently understood (Zelinka et al., 2025).

2.1.2. Reductive effects on curriculum and pedagogy

A second strand of criticism focuses on how learning outcomes shape and potentially constrain the educational process itself. Several scholars argue that learning outcomes may compress the complexity of learning (e.g., Reindal, 2013; Bone & Ross, 2021; O'Connor, 2022). In practice, teachers may feel pressured to organise teaching around discrete behaviours that can be demonstrated through assessment rather than broader forms of intellectual development fostered through inquiry, dialogue, and reflection (Murtonen et al., 2017). As a result, curriculum goals may become narrower, with complex subject knowledge increasingly reduced to what can readily be specified and measured.

According to Loughlin, Lygo-Baker, and Lindberg-Sand (2021), the educational value of learning outcomes is undermined when they are implemented primarily as instruments of accountability and quality assurance through top-down policy measures. Although learning outcomes are frequently expected to support both quality enhancement and accountability, the authors argue that these objectives are difficult to reconcile. When priority is given to demonstrable outcomes rather than to the educational processes through which learning develops, quality assurance risks becoming a procedural exercise that fails to capture the complexities of teaching and learning.

A further concern is that not all forms of learning can be meaningfully expressed as discrete and measurable outcomes. Higher-order capacities such as critical thinking, creativity, judgement, and the ability to deal with uncertainty often emerge gradually through inquiry, discussion, practice, and reflection rather than through linear progression towards predefined objectives. Drawing on the complexity of critical thinking, Erikson and Erikson (2019) argue that an excessive emphasis on intended learning outcomes may divert attention from broader educational purposes. Similarly, learning outcomes specified in advance may limit

opportunities for open-ended and unexpected learning by defining beforehand what counts as legitimate achievement. This is particularly problematic in fields where interpretation, creativity, design, or inquiry are central, as some of the most valuable educational outcomes may be those that could not have been anticipated at the outset. Over-specification may therefore suppress curiosity, constrain originality, and reduce opportunities for intellectual discovery (Erikson & Erikson, 2019). Zelinka et al. (2026) reinforce this critique by arguing that learning outcomes have often become associated with a narrow conception of learning that overlooks learners' lived experiences, the complexity of policy implementation, social inequalities, and the diversity of educational contexts.

Importantly, this reductive trajectory was not inherent in the original theoretical foundations of learning outcomes-based education. Revisiting Biggs's (1999) formulation of constructive alignment, Loughlin et al. (2021) note that Biggs explicitly recognised the legitimacy of desirable but unforeseen learning outcomes and described higher-level learning as fundamentally open-ended, with the educational process rather than the precise outcome requiring alignment. They argue, however, that subsequent institutional interpretations have become increasingly prescriptive, replacing this original flexibility with highly specific, observable learning outcomes. The widespread use of prescribed lists of approved verbs for drafting learning outcomes exemplifies this shift towards a more restrictive interpretation of constructive alignment.

These criticisms raise important questions about the extent to which learning outcomes may encourage behaviourist conceptions of education and narrow understandings of knowledge. Nevertheless, Loughlin et al. (2021) contend that many of these concerns arise from conflating learning outcomes as pedagogical tools for enhancing learning with their use as instruments of institutional regulation and accountability.

2.1.3. Assessment-led distortion of learning

A related but distinct criticism concerns the central role that learning outcomes increasingly play in assessment. Several authors argue that the close alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria encourages assessment to become the principal driver of learning rather than one component of the educational process (e.g., Bennett & Brady, 2012, 2014; Scott, 2020). When learning outcomes are explicitly linked to assessment, students are incentivised to concentrate on meeting predefined criteria rather than engaging more broadly with the subject matter. Consequently, learning may become increasingly strategic, with students focusing on what will be assessed while disregarding valuable learning opportunities that fall outside the specified outcomes. In this way, the

clarity provided by learning outcomes can inadvertently encourage a 'study for the test' mentality.

The centrality of assessment also influences curriculum implementation. When learning outcomes are formulated in narrowly measurable terms, assessment tends to shape teaching decisions, shifting the focus from broader educational purposes towards what can be most easily evaluated. Rather than assessment supporting learning, learning increasingly becomes organised around assessment, resulting in what Jervis and Jervis (2005) describe as an assessment-led curriculum.

Furthermore, learning outcomes frequently communicate the minimum threshold required for successful performance. This may unintentionally encourage students to aim only for the specified requirements rather than extending their understanding beyond them, thereby creating a 'ceiling effect' (Scott, 2020). The problem is compounded by students' limited understanding of the richer forms of learning implied by learning outcomes, leading them to interpret outcomes as checklists rather than as indicators of broader intellectual development. Empirical evidence from Allais (2014) reinforces these concerns. Her analysis of South Africa's learning outcomes-based education reform found that task-driven curricula encouraged students to demonstrate prescribed performances without necessarily developing conceptual understanding or the ability to transfer knowledge to unfamiliar contexts. The eventual abandonment of the reform illustrates the limitations of assessment systems that privilege observable performance over deeper learning. More broadly, the case highlights how narrowly specified learning outcomes may allow assessment to displace learning as the organising principle of education.

2.1.4. Power, participation, and equity concerns

A final strand of criticism argues that the dominant use of learning outcomes is closely associated with neoliberal forms of educational governance, raising concerns about their capacity to promote educational equality and social inclusion (Sandel, 2020; Tikkanen et al., 2026). From this perspective, learning outcomes are often shaped by dominant cultural, economic, and political actors - particularly policymakers and industry representatives - which can reinforce existing hierarchies by privileging certain forms of knowledge, values, and worldviews over others. As a result, the kinds of learning that are recognised and rewarded may reflect prevailing economic and political priorities rather than broader educational or democratic aims, potentially reproducing rather than reducing social inequalities (Young & Muller, 2014).

A persistent criticism concerns the imbalance in the actors involved in the design and implementation of learning outcomes. Teachers and practitioners - those most directly responsible for applying learning outcomes in educational settings - are frequently excluded from their development. Research suggests that policymakers and practitioners conceptualise learning outcomes in significantly different ways, although policymakers themselves tend to share relatively similar understandings despite differences in policy priorities (Prøitz, 2014, 2015). According to Prøitz, this convergence among policymakers may reduce opportunities for meaningful debate about the broader purposes and outcomes of education. By contrast, evidence indicates that teachers respond more positively when they are able to define learning goals locally and when implementation processes support professional agency rather than mere compliance with externally imposed standards (Havnes & Prøitz, 2016). Questions concerning who defines learning outcomes, whose knowledge is prioritised, and for what purposes these frameworks are implemented therefore reveal deeper tensions surrounding educational purpose, professional autonomy, and democratic participation in educational governance.

Even the most recent critical reviews of learning outcomes do not reject them outright (Tikkanen et al., 2026; Loughlin et al., 2021). Rather, these scholars argue that many of the identified problems arise from the ways in which learning outcomes are implemented and operationalised in practice.

2.2. From policy to practice: implementation challenges

While the previous section highlighted the promises and criticism associated with learning outcomes, a related body of research has focused on the challenges involved in translating learning outcomes from policy frameworks into everyday educational practice. Despite their widespread adoption within European VET systems, the implementation of learning outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment remains uneven and complex. Evidence increasingly suggests that formal policy commitments do not automatically translate into pedagogical change at institutional and classroom levels. Studies on English language teachers (Ortega & Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2016; Poulidou, 2014), for example, show that willingness to adopt outcomes-based education depends heavily on professional development and institutional support.

At the European level, Europass (2025) notes that learning outcomes are still not consistently included in published qualifications or learning opportunities, and it remains unclear to what extent schools and initial VET systems have embraced

these changes in practice. Questions persist about whether curricula have been updated to reflect an outcomes-based focus, whether lesson plans and teaching methods are aligned with learning outcomes, whether teachers and trainers have the necessary competences to implement outcomes-based approaches effectively, and whether assessments actually measure learning outcomes rather than simply test knowledge recall. Although policy documents strongly endorse learning outcome descriptions, evidence of practical change in VET schools and companies is limited. The transition in teaching practices and learning modes is slower than policy reform, reflecting the complexity of institutional change, path dependency (Cedefop, 2023), reluctance to shift established practices, as well as the influence of multiple actors, including teachers, trainers, learners and assessors, each with different levels of engagement and capacity (Europass, 2025).

Holmes (2019) identifies a more fundamental tension that may help explain this implementation gap. Although learning outcomes have often been associated with constructivist approaches to learning, constructivist theory views learning as an active process through which learners construct understanding based on prior knowledge, experience and interaction. From this perspective, the outcomes of learning cannot always be fully specified in advance, as learning trajectories and understandings may develop in different ways across individuals. Consequently, learning outcomes should remain sufficiently flexible to accommodate different learning pathways and should be discussed with learners in ways that make them meaningful and relevant. Assessment should likewise recognise that learners acquire knowledge at different paces and through different processes. Yet, institutional assessment and administrative structures require that both learning outcomes and assessment methods be fixed prior to teaching, leaving little room for such flexibility (Holmes, 2019).

Recent literature reviews have begun to identify cross-cutting factors that hinder or support the application of the learning outcome approach, though further synthesis is needed, particularly in VET systems where implementation contexts differ significantly from those in higher education (Piyasena et al., 2023; Santos & Clemente-Faustino, 2025). Edwin and Susanta (2025) emphasise that successful implementation requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving educators, administrators, policymakers and students. Alignment between curriculum design, teaching, and assessment is essential, along with ongoing feedback and strong quality assurance to support continuous improvement. This shows that implementation is not a one-off decision but requires long-term commitment and institutional support.

The literature also highlights the importance of teacher preparation and organisational support. Halász (2017) notes that teacher educators often do not train student teachers to use learning outcomes in school practice. This gap leads to weaker implementation overall. Similar challenges may affect in-company trainers, who play a central role in supporting work-based learning and facilitating learners' transition into employment. Yet, these actors often operate without clear regulatory frameworks or structured opportunities for professional development (Grollmann, 2008; Illeris, 2011). Furthermore, managerial support from companies regarding the purpose, content and organisation of training has been identified as an important enabling factor (Ellström & Ellström, 2014), although its role remains relatively underexplored in the literature.

Taken together, these findings point to a persistent gap between the policy vision of learning outcomes and the realities of implementation within VET systems. While previous initiatives have documented the formal adoption of learning outcomes and examined their role in qualifications frameworks and curriculum reform, less attention has been paid to how they are understood, interpreted and enacted by those directly involved in teaching, training and learning. Existing evidence remains fragmented across educational sectors and geographical contexts, with much of the literature focusing on higher education rather than VET.

Moreover, as Erikson and Erikson (2019) observe, empirical evidence on how teachers and learners perceive and experience learning outcomes in practice remains limited. Concerns raised in the literature regarding interpretation variability (Hussey & Smith, 2002), the compression of learning into measurable statements (Murtonen et al., 2017), and the potential disconnect between intended and achieved learning outcomes have received growing theoretical attention, but systematic evidence from VET practitioners and learners across multiple European contexts remains scarce.

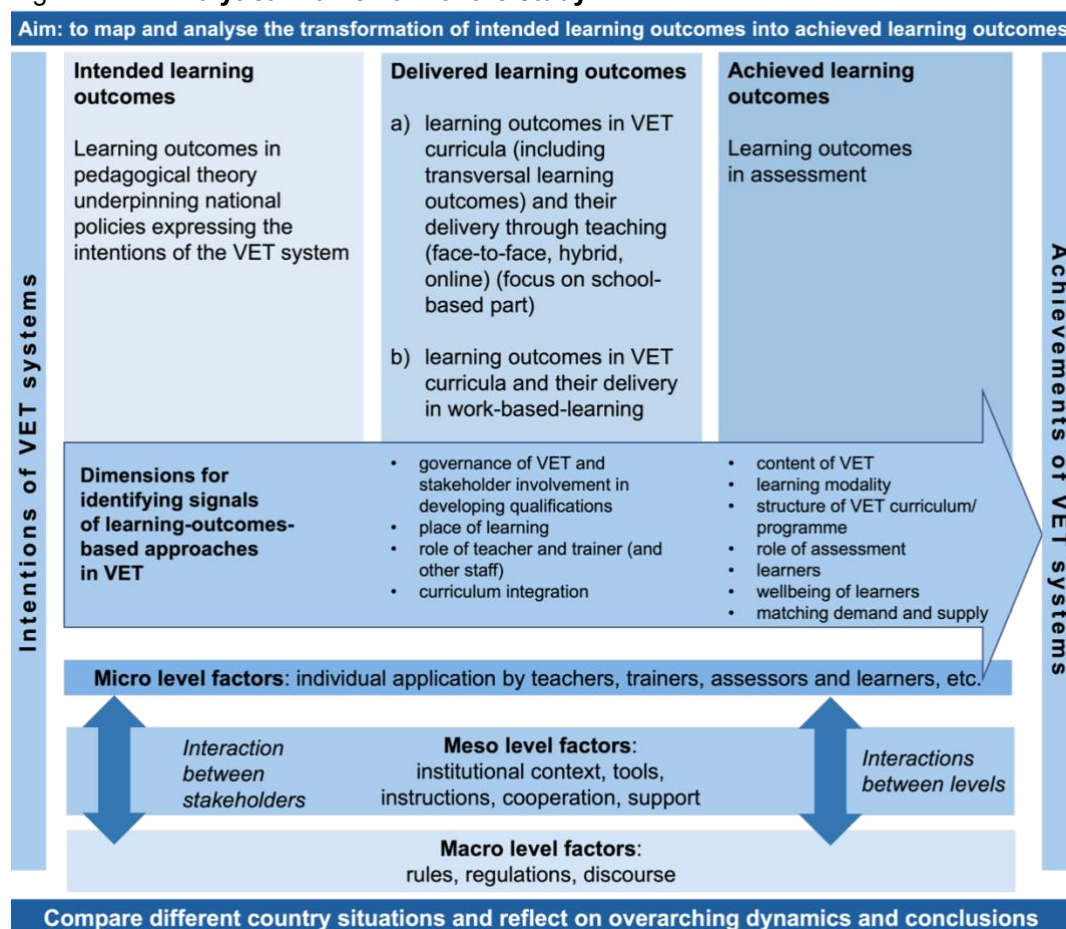
CHAPTER 3.

Methods

3.1. Analytical framework

This paper, as part of the Cedefop project on [‘The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality?’](#), adopts a multi-level analytical framework to examine how learning outcomes are translated from policy intentions into teaching, learning and assessment practices within VET systems (for more details see: Cedefop 2024b; 2025; 2026a; 2026b). The framework is based on the premise that the implementation of learning outcomes extends beyond formal changes in curricula and qualifications and requires changes in institutional arrangements, pedagogical practices and stakeholder behaviour.

Figure 1. **Analytical framework of the study**



Source: Cedefop, 2026b.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework combines three complementary perspectives. The first examines the transformation journey of learning outcomes from intended learning outcomes, expressed in policies, qualifications and curricula, to delivered learning outcomes through teaching and training processes, and finally to achieved learning outcomes demonstrated by learners through assessment. The second adopts a multi-level perspective, examining implementation at the macro (policy), meso (institutional) and micro (individual) levels. The third focuses on the role of stakeholders - including policymakers, school leaders, teachers, trainers, assessors and learners - in shaping the interpretation and implementation of learning outcomes.

Together, these perspectives provide a basis for analysing how learning outcomes are translated into practice, where implementation challenges emerge, and which factors facilitate or hinder the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes.

3.2. Data sources and analytical approach

The analysis draws on evidence collected through the wider Cedefop project mentioned above, which examined the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches across ten IVET systems: Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. The wider project combined desk research and fieldwork. The desk research included a review of legislation (for the last five years), policy documents, qualification standards, curricula and national studies relevant to the implementation of learning outcomes. The fieldwork component involved interviews with system-level stakeholders, site visits to VET institutions and companies ⁽¹⁾, classroom and assessment observations where feasible, interviews with school management, and interviews and focus groups with teachers, trainers, assessors and learners ⁽²⁾. Company

(1) In total, the research encompassed 80 site visits across all work areas: 23 VET provider visits (school-based learning), 37 combined company and school visits (for the research on work-based learning) as well as 20 school visits (for the research on assessment).

(2) The fieldwork generated approximately 580 interviews with national and regional VET authorities responsible for implementing learning outcomes-based approaches (e.g. ministries, local governments, qualifications agencies, national VET institutes, and curriculum commissions), social partner organisations (e.g. employers organisations, professional organisations for teachers, learner associations, etc.) - averaging six to seven interviews per country – 20 companies (May to June 2024) across diverse sectors (including engineering, information technology, logistics, finance, hospitality, and childcare) as well as VET provider management, teachers and trainers and

visits additionally included interviews with company managers and in-company trainers, as well as observations of work-based learning activities.

The project generated evidence across four areas where learning outcomes are expected to influence VET practice: pedagogical approaches and teacher preparation, classroom teaching and learning practices, work-based learning, and assessment ⁽³⁾.

While the wider project examined these themes separately, the present working paper adopts a cross-cutting analytical perspective. Rather than focusing on a specific dimension of implementation, it synthesises findings across all four strands of the research to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes.

The analysis applies the framework presented in Figure 1 to organise evidence according to the transformation journey of learning outcomes, the levels at which implementation takes place, and the stakeholders involved in the process. Particular attention is paid to identifying recurring conceptual, structural and political factors that influence how learning outcomes are interpreted, implemented and used in teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Drawing on comparative evidence from the 10 participating countries, the paper seeks to identify common patterns, implementation challenges and enabling conditions across different national contexts. The objective is not to assess the effectiveness of individual reforms or countries, but rather to develop a broader understanding of the conditions under which learning outcomes are translated into practice and the factors that contribute to alignment - or misalignment - between intended and achieved learning outcomes.

students. National-level workshops were also carried out from April to June 2025. Overall, around 162 participants (14 in Bulgaria, 29 in Ireland, 11 in France, 11 in Lithuania, around 30 in Malta, 10 in the Netherlands, 20 in Poland, 18 in Portugal, 11 in Slovenia, 8 in Finland) attended them.

⁽³⁾ Access to the [publications of this research](#).

CHAPTER 4.

Findings

4.1. Stakeholder engagement with learning outcomes

The evidence suggests that stakeholder engagement with learning outcomes follows a progression from awareness and understanding, to acceptance and perceived value, and ultimately to motivation and ownership. However, progress through these stages varies considerably across stakeholder groups and national contexts.

Awareness and understanding are generally highest among VET teachers, particularly in countries where learning outcomes have been embedded in VET systems for many years, such as Finland and the Netherlands. In these systems, learning outcomes are widely regarded as an integral part of educational practice. By contrast, understanding is more uneven in countries where reforms are more recent or less systematically implemented. In Portugal and Slovenia, for example, teachers are often unfamiliar with the term ‘learning outcomes’, although they frequently apply similar principles under different terminology.

Awareness among employers and in-company trainers is generally lower than among teachers. Evidence suggests that understanding improves if social partners are actively involved in curriculum development and qualification design. Strong cooperation between educational institutions, employers and public authorities, as observed in Portugal and Finland, appears to strengthen both understanding and ownership of learning outcomes. A recurring finding across countries is the gap between school-based learning and work-based learning. While teachers are increasingly familiar with learning outcomes, in-company trainers often lack the pedagogical preparation and structured support needed to apply them effectively in workplace settings.

Among learners, awareness is typically limited. Although students are introduced to learning outcomes through curricula, learning plans, and assessment requirements, many focus primarily on examinations and certification rather than on the competences they are expected to develop. Across several countries, learners are more familiar with assessment criteria than with learning outcomes themselves. Consequently, learning outcomes are often perceived as abstract requirements rather than meaningful tools for guiding learning and skills development.

Stakeholders generally recognise the value of learning outcomes, although perceptions differ considerably. Teachers in Ireland, Malta, Poland and Portugal

highlighted their role in clarifying educational objectives, supporting curriculum planning, facilitating communication with learners and strengthening links with labour market requirements. At the same time, concerns emerged regarding the potential reduction of learning to predefined and measurable achievements. Teachers in France, Lithuania and the Netherlands reported difficulties with abstract or highly technical descriptors and questioned whether learning outcomes always capture broader educational objectives, such as critical thinking, values and personal development.

Employers' perceptions of learning outcomes are strongly influenced by their level of involvement in their development. In the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland, employers generally view learning outcomes positively because they support alignment between education and workplace requirements. By contrast, where employers have limited opportunities to contribute to the design of qualifications and curricula, learning outcomes are more likely to be perceived as administrative requirements rather than practical tools for improving training quality and employability.

Learners' perceptions also vary. In several countries, students appreciate the clarity that learning outcomes provide regarding expected skills and occupational competences. Finnish learners, for example, value personalised learning pathways and workplace learning opportunities that make competences visible and relevant. However, in most countries, learners continue to associate learning outcomes primarily with assessment and certification, limiting their broader educational value.

Motivation to engage with learning outcomes is closely linked to awareness, understanding and perceived usefulness. Among teachers and trainers, motivation tends to be strongest in Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland, where learning outcomes are deeply embedded within VET systems, practitioners enjoy greater autonomy in adapting them to local contexts, and professional development opportunities support implementation. Collaboration between educational institutions and employers further contributes to stronger ownership and commitment.

By contrast, motivation is generally weaker in Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia, where highly centralised systems, limited flexibility and insufficient support often lead practitioners to view learning outcomes as formal requirements rather than practical tools for improving teaching and learning. France and Malta occupy an intermediate position, with practitioners recognising the potential benefits of learning outcomes while expressing concerns about excessive prescription and 'box-ticking' approaches.

For learners, motivation depends largely on whether learning outcomes are made visible and relevant throughout the learning process. Motivation is stronger when outcomes are regularly revisited, linked to authentic workplace tasks and reinforced through meaningful feedback. In countries such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, learning outcomes are sufficiently embedded to support learner engagement and self-direction. In contrast, where learning outcomes remain abstract or poorly communicated, learners struggle to perceive their relevance and motivation declines.

The findings suggest that the degree to which learning outcomes are embedded within a VET system moderates the influence of individual and institutional barriers. In mature systems such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, learning outcomes have achieved a degree of systemic resilience. Although practitioners may continue to express concerns regarding the wording of learning outcomes or implementation challenges, the approach remains widely accepted and routinely applied in practice. This suggests that long-term institutionalisation reduces the impact of factors that might otherwise hinder implementation and contributes to more consistent stakeholder engagement over time.

4.2. Factors shaping the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches

The findings indicate that the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches is shaped by the interaction of conceptual, political and structural factors. While each category influences implementation in different ways, their effects are closely interconnected. Conceptual factors shape how stakeholders understand and interpret learning outcomes; political factors influence the governance arrangements and reform trajectories within which they are implemented; and structural factors determine whether the resources, capacities and support mechanisms necessary for implementation are in place.

4.2.1. Conceptual factors

Conceptual factors relate to the underlying assumptions, definitions and pedagogical principles that shape how learning outcomes are formulated, interpreted and applied in practice.

Learning outcomes are formally defined at national level in all countries analysed and are intended to provide a common reference point for curriculum design, teaching and assessment. However, the existence of nationally defined learning outcomes does not automatically ensure a common understanding of their

meaning or consistent implementation in practice. The way learning outcomes are formulated - and the extent to which stakeholders perceive them as clear, relevant and usable - strongly influences how they are interpreted and applied.

A recurring finding across countries is the challenge of balancing clarity and flexibility in the formulation of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes that are overly complex, technical or highly prescriptive can be difficult for practitioners, learners and employers to interpret and use effectively. This challenge was reported in France and Finland in relation to competence descriptors, and in Malta and Poland in relation to highly prescriptive curricula. Conversely, learning outcomes that are too broad or abstract require substantial interpretation by practitioners, potentially resulting in inconsistent implementation. This challenge was particularly evident in France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia.

The findings suggest that effective implementation requires learning outcomes that provide sufficient clarity to support consistency while retaining enough flexibility to accommodate local contexts, learner needs and changing labour market demands. Countries such as the Netherlands and Finland realise this balance through layered approaches that combine broad national descriptors with programme-specific learning outcomes, assessment criteria and implementation guidance.

A second conceptual factor concerns the perceived relevance of learning outcomes. Stakeholders are more likely to engage with learning outcomes when they are viewed as meaningful and connected to occupational practice. Across several countries, including Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta and Poland, concerns were raised regarding the alignment between learning outcomes and labour market requirements. By contrast, countries with strong collaboration between education providers and employers, such as the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland, generally demonstrate higher levels of acceptance and engagement. Continuous feedback mechanisms, such as Malta's annual revision processes, Finland's external evaluation arrangements and Ireland's ongoing monitoring discussions, further support the responsiveness of learning outcomes to changing labour market demands.

Strong alignment between learning outcomes, curriculum design, and assessment is essential for coherent implementation. Countries such as Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Finland, show more systematic alignment supported by quality assurance frameworks and external verification systems. For example, in Finland assessment is directly linked to competence requirements, while in the Netherlands qualification files form the basis for examination design. By contrast, Bulgaria and Portugal show weaker alignment due to incomplete implementation of learning outcomes-based curricula. Lithuania and Slovenia

illustrate mixed cases, where alignment exists at design level but breaks down due to differing interpretations in practice. Institutional mechanisms such as peer review (Malta), harmonisation meetings (France and Finland), and shared assessment tools (France, Ireland, Portugal) help strengthen consistency but do not fully eliminate variation.

Finally, pedagogical traditions and professional beliefs strongly influence how learning outcomes are understood and used. Countries such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, demonstrate strong alignment between learner-centred, competence-based pedagogies and learning outcomes. In contrast, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia exhibit weaker integration due to transitional reform contexts or limited pedagogical guidance.

Teacher education and professional development also play an important role in supporting practitioners' capacity to interpret learning outcomes and translate them into meaningful learning experiences. Ireland and Finland integrate learning outcomes into initial teacher education, whereas Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Portugal demonstrate more fragmented or optional provision. Similar challenges affect in-company trainers across most countries, particularly in France, Malta, Poland and Slovenia, where limited pedagogical preparation reduces the effective implementation of learning outcomes in work-based learning.

4.2.2. Political factors

Political factors relate to the policy choices, governance arrangements and stakeholder participation mechanisms that shape the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches. The findings suggest that political factors influence implementation in two main ways: through the historical trajectory of reform and through the degree of stakeholder involvement in governance processes.

A first political factor concerns the historical trajectory of reform. The implementation of learning outcomes requires changes across multiple components of the VET system, including qualifications, curricula, assessment practices and governance arrangements. Countries that adopted learning outcomes early and embedded them within broader system reforms generally demonstrate more mature and coherent implementation. In Finland and the Netherlands, learning outcomes have functioned since the 1990s as a common organising principle for VET, supporting learner-centred and flexible systems. In Ireland, learning outcomes largely formalised pedagogical approaches that were already present, facilitating acceptance while allowing for variation in implementation.

Different reform trajectories can also be observed among countries that introduced learning outcomes more recently. In Lithuania and Malta, reforms were

strongly influenced by European instruments such as the EQF and national qualifications frameworks, leading to substantial structural changes in VET systems. Lithuania was able to build on an existing competence-based tradition, while Malta introduced a highly structured regulatory framework to support implementation. Slovenia represents a more uneven trajectory, where learning outcomes were introduced into an existing competence-based system but did not achieve the same level of conceptual clarity and stakeholder ownership. Similarly, Bulgaria and Portugal continue to face challenges associated with partial or uneven implementation, resulting in divergent interpretations of learning outcomes and weaker coherence across the system.

These findings suggest that learning outcomes are more likely to become embedded when they are introduced as part of a coherent and sustained reform process rather than as isolated policy measures. The maturity of a system therefore appears to influence not only the consistency of implementation but also stakeholders' willingness to engage with learning outcomes in practice.

A second political factor concerns governance and stakeholder participation. Across all countries analysed, employers and social partners play an important role in defining learning outcomes and shaping qualifications. However, teachers, VET providers and learners are generally less systematically involved in these processes. The findings suggest that implementation is more effective when governance arrangements balance labour market priorities with educational perspectives and create opportunities for meaningful stakeholder participation.

Countries such as the Netherlands and Finland provide examples of more inclusive governance models, where collaboration between public authorities, education providers and employers contributes to stronger ownership and acceptance of learning outcomes. By contrast, limited stakeholder involvement can weaken the perceived relevance and usability of learning outcomes. In France, increasing employer influence within curriculum commissions has raised concerns regarding the balance between labour market and educational interests. In Portugal, strong central control can reduce practitioner ownership, while in Bulgaria weak coordination mechanisms and funding constraints limit stakeholder participation.

Although learners are rarely directly involved in the formulation of learning outcomes, countries such as the Netherlands and Finland demonstrate that personalised learning pathways and transparent qualification structures can strengthen learners' understanding of and engagement with learning outcomes. More broadly, the findings indicate that stakeholder participation is closely linked to ownership. Where stakeholders perceive learning outcomes as something imposed upon them, implementation tends to be weaker. Where they are actively

involved in shaping and applying learning outcomes, implementation is generally more consistent and sustainable.

4.2.3. Structural factors

Structural factors refer to the resources, institutional arrangements and support mechanisms that enable stakeholders to translate learning outcomes into practice. While conceptual and political factors influence how learning outcomes are understood and governed, structural factors determine whether practitioners possess the capacity and support necessary to implement them effectively.

A first structural factor concerns practitioner capacity. The implementation of a learning outcomes-based approach in VET depends heavily on the preparation, continuous development, and support of teachers, trainers, and workplace mentors across countries. Across all systems explored, teacher education is the primary mechanism for developing understanding of learning outcomes. Embedding learning outcomes in initial teacher education and continuing professional development (CPD) strengthens practitioners' ability to apply them effectively (Cedefop, 2024b; Symeonidis et al., 2025). However, many teachers report feeling insufficiently prepared, especially those trained before the shift to outcomes-based systems.

Countries like the Netherlands and Finland demonstrate strong integration of school-based and workplace learning supported by adequate resources and collaboration with industry. Portugal also shows relatively strong WBL integration, though uneven across providers. In contrast, Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia face constraints related to limited infrastructure, SME capacity, time pressure, and fragmented funding, which weaken implementation.

Several countries show additional challenges:

- (a) France: fragmented training between general and VET teachers; limited CPD for trainers;
- (b) Malta: no standardised training for workplace mentors;
- (c) Portugal: non-mandatory training leads to inconsistent implementation;
- (d) Poland: initial training exists, but no continuous professional development for trainers.

Overall, fragmented training systems, optional participation, and lack of CPD integration hinder consistent implementation. Most countries provide some learning outcomes materials, but structured support varies widely. France, the Netherlands, and Poland have specialised support bodies, while Bulgaria and Portugal lack sufficient guidance, leading to confusion and low motivation. In Slovenia, gaps exist in assessment support aligned with learning outcomes.

Effective implementation often depends on combining national guidance, school-level support, and peer learning. Finland and Ireland demonstrate the value of communities of practice and collaborative networks. In more mature systems such as Finland and the Netherlands, informal professional networks reduce the need for extensive formal guidance.

Learning outcomes act as a shared language between education and the labour market, but effectiveness depends on structured collaboration. Strong models in Finland (personal competence development plans) and the Netherlands (workplace-based assessment integration) show high alignment between learning outcomes and workplace training. Although most teachers report adequate resources, structural constraints remain widespread. The Netherlands and Finland provide highly integrated systems where classroom and workplace learning are seamlessly combined, enabling effective application of learning outcomes. Across systems, time constraints, lack of coordination, and limited industry capacity hinder implementation. Integrated environments, sufficient resources, and strong school-industry collaboration are essential for effective outcomes-based learning.

4.2.4. Understanding implementation: the interaction of conceptual, political and structural factors

The evidence from the 10 countries suggests that the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches is shaped not by individual factors operating in isolation, but by the interaction between conceptual, political and structural conditions. Successful implementation depends on the extent to which these dimensions are aligned and mutually reinforcing.

Taken together, the findings suggest that learning outcomes should be understood not merely as curriculum statements or policy instruments, but as part of a broader implementation ecosystem. Their effectiveness depends not only on how they are formulated, but also on how they are interpreted by practitioners, supported by institutions and embedded within governance structures. In this respect, practitioner capacity emerges as a particularly important mediating factor. The evidence indicates that even broadly formulated learning outcomes can be applied successfully when teachers and trainers possess the knowledge, autonomy and support necessary to translate them into meaningful learning experiences.

The findings further suggest that pedagogical culture and professional judgement act as important filters through which learning outcomes are interpreted and enacted. Across all countries analysed, teachers retain considerable autonomy in determining how learning outcomes are translated into teaching, learning and assessment practices. Consequently, similar learning outcomes

frameworks can produce different implementation outcomes depending on institutional cultures, professional beliefs and local practices.

Understanding how intended learning outcomes are translated into practice helps explain why countries with broadly similar learning outcomes frameworks often experience different implementation outcomes. It also provides an important foundation for examining the transformation journey from intended to delivered, and ultimately achieved, learning outcomes, as explored in the following section.

4.3. Translating learning outcomes into practice: from intended to achieved outcomes

This section explores whether the shift towards a learning outcomes-based approach is evident at macro, meso, and micro levels across the 10 countries analysed. It first considers whether national policies and administrative arrangements provide a macro-level framework for defining and integrating learning outcomes into VET programmes. It also presents how these policies are implemented in practice, at the meso and micro level.

Comparing the pace of change across these three levels highlights the complex relationship between policy design, institutional implementation and practitioner-level application. The analysis reveals consistent progress in embedding learning outcomes within VET systems at the macro level, with all countries having established national policies and frameworks that define and support the use of learning outcomes. However, important differences emerge between countries in terms of how far these policies have been translated into institutional practices and everyday teaching and learning.

A clear distinction can be observed between countries that adopted learning outcomes earlier and embedded them as part of broader and sustained reforms, and those where implementation remains more recent or uneven. Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland demonstrate a high degree of coherence across macro, meso and micro levels, suggesting that learning outcomes have become embedded not only in qualifications and curricula but also in institutional practices and pedagogical processes. By contrast, several countries display stronger implementation at policy level than at institutional and practitioner levels, indicating that formal adoption alone is insufficient to ensure consistent application in practice.

National policies establish the overall direction of VET systems and provide the framework within which institutions, teachers, trainers and learners operate. They therefore constitute an important precondition for the implementation of

learning outcomes-based approaches. However, the findings suggest that the relationship between policy and practice is neither automatic nor linear. As learning outcomes move through the system, they are interpreted, adapted and operationalised by different actors, creating opportunities for both alignment and divergence between intended, delivered and achieved learning outcomes.

The heatmap below synthesises the extent to which learning outcomes-based approaches are embedded at the macro, meso and micro levels across the 10 countries analysed.

Table 1. **Embedding learning outcomes at the macro, meso, and micro levels, 2025**

	Macro	Meso	Micro
Bulgaria	Advancing in embedding	Challenges in embedding	Challenges in embedding
Ireland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded
France	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding	Challenges in embedding
Lithuania	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Malta	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Netherlands	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded
Poland	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Portugal	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding	Challenges in embedding
Slovenia	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding	Advancing in embedding
Finland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded

Legend: 'Challenges in embedding' means that consultations revealed substantial challenges in the application of the learning outcomes approaches. 'Advancing in embedding' means that learning outcomes are generally applied but are not yet seen as foundational to developments and perspectives. 'Firmly embedded' means that learning outcomes are foundational to the main developments and perspectives.

Source: Authors.

The heatmap comparison across the three levels highlights:

- (a) The integration of learning outcomes is generally more advanced at the national regulatory level (macro) compared to its application at the institutional (meso) and individual (micro) levels. This outcome is to be expected, given the high degree of individual autonomy at the micro level. Achieving buy-in

and ensuring consistent application by all actors at the micro level presents is a challenge.

- (b) Meso- and micro-level practices often do not align with macro-level policy intentions. This variation highlights the need for targeted support and clearer guidance to bridge the gap between policy intent and everyday practice.
- (c) The shift towards a learning outcomes-based approach does not necessarily follow a linear, top-down trajectory from policy development to practice. However, the analysis suggests that more mature systems apply such an approach more consistently. This suggests that sustained policy commitment, combined with time and targeted support, contributes to deeper integration and coherence throughout the system.

Bringing these findings together, the analysis suggests that fully embedding learning outcomes in policy frameworks is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for their consistent application at the meso and micro levels.

CHAPTER 5.

Concluding remarks

This paper examined how learning outcomes are translated from policy intentions into teaching, learning and assessment practices across 10 European VET systems. The findings demonstrate that learning outcomes increasingly shape educational practice across all countries analysed. However, their integration into institutional practices and pedagogical processes remains less advanced than national policy frameworks suggest. This gap reflects neither incomplete implementation nor resistance to reform alone. Rather, it illustrates that the shift towards learning outcomes is a complex and non-linear process in which policy intentions are continuously interpreted, adapted and negotiated by institutions, teachers, trainers and learners.

A central conclusion emerging from the analysis is that learning outcomes do not automatically translate into changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices. Their effectiveness depends not only on how they are formulated, but also on how they are understood, valued and applied by the actors responsible for implementing them. Across the 10 countries studied, the successful translation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes depends on the interaction between conceptual clarity, governance arrangements, practitioner capacity and institutional support. The findings therefore suggest that learning outcomes should be understood not merely as policy instruments or curriculum statements, but as part of a broader implementation ecosystem.

5.1. The transparency paradox and the need for professional literacy

The findings suggest that the transparency promised by learning outcomes is neither automatic nor self-evident. Across all countries analysed, VET practitioners reported the need to interpret intended learning outcomes before they could be translated into teaching and assessment practices. This process can result in a single intended learning outcome being operationalised in different ways across institutions, programmes and classrooms, echoing concerns raised in the critical literature regarding the variability of interpretation (see Allais 2012 and Rambla et al., 2026). However, the need for interpretation should not be viewed as a weakness of the learning outcomes approach. Rather, it reflects the reality that

professional judgement is required to translate broad learning objectives into meaningful learning experiences.

The findings therefore suggest that the implementation challenge is not how to formulate learning outcomes so precisely that they require no interpretation, but how to ensure that practitioners possess the capacity to interpret them coherently and contextually. This points to the importance of what may be termed professional literacy in learning outcomes. Teachers, trainers and assessors require not only subject expertise but also the ability to understand, adapt and apply learning outcomes within diverse educational and workplace settings.

Evidence from the study indicates that this capacity remains unevenly developed. Insufficient CPD, limited guidance and support, and the weak integration of learning outcomes into teacher education continue to hinder implementation, confirming concerns raised in previous research (Halász, 2017; Symeonidis et al., 2025). These challenges are particularly evident among workplace trainers, who often receive little or no pedagogical preparation. As a result, WBL emerges as one of the areas where learning outcomes face their greatest implementation challenges and where the gap between intended and achieved learning outcomes is most pronounced.

5.2. **Learner engagement and the role of assessment**

Building on the transparency challenge, a second pattern emerges regarding how learners themselves engage with learning outcomes. Across most countries, students are generally more familiar with assessment criteria than with learning outcomes themselves and often perceive learning outcomes primarily through the lens of certification and examinations. These findings provide some support for concerns regarding the potential ‘ceiling effect’ of learning outcomes (Scott, 2020), whereby learners focus on meeting minimum requirements rather than pursuing broader learning objectives.

However, the findings also indicate that such effects are not inherent to learning outcomes themselves. In systems where learning outcomes are embedded within coherent support structures and linked to personalised learning pathways, learners demonstrate greater awareness of their progression and learning goals. The evidence therefore suggests that assessment-driven approaches emerge not from learning outcomes per se, but from implementation contexts in which learning outcomes are insufficiently connected to broader learning processes.

At the same time, practitioners generally do not perceive learning outcomes primarily as assessment tools. Instead, they report using them to structure

teaching, plan learning activities and guide curriculum delivery. This distinction highlights the importance of examining learning outcomes from multiple stakeholder perspectives and reinforces the need to align assessment practices with broader educational objectives.

5.3. Pedagogical theories in tension

The evidence reveals an ongoing tension between the learner-centred aspirations often associated with learning outcomes and the realities of implementation. While learning outcomes are frequently justified through constructivist understandings of learning, their introduction has often occurred through top-down policy reforms rather than through bottom-up pedagogical innovation.

Countries where learning outcomes aligned with existing learner-centred traditions, such as Ireland, generally experienced smoother implementation. In contrast, teachers and trainers in several countries reported constraints that limited their ability to adapt learning experiences to individual learner needs, including limited planning time, diverse learner groups and competing institutional demands.

These findings suggest that learning outcomes alone do not create learner-centred teaching. Rather, they can support learner-centred approaches when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical cultures, practitioner competences and institutional conditions. The study therefore reinforces the view that learning outcomes should be understood as enabling tools rather than as direct drivers of pedagogical change.

5.4. Governance, participation, and sustainable implementation

The challenges outlined above ultimately reflect governance choices, particularly regarding who participates in defining and revising learning outcomes. Practitioner involvement in design processes strongly influences implementation success. The findings align with earlier Cedefop work (Cedefop, 2021), which stresses the need to revise learning outcomes regularly and incorporate feedback from practitioners and labour market actors. Mature systems maintain inclusive and active governance arrangements in which multiple stakeholders contribute to the ongoing definition and renewal of learning outcomes. They also allow bottom-up approaches in VET programme design. In these situations, how systems are organised and managed is more important than having a perfectly balanced definition of learning outcomes.

At the national level, structured and inclusive governance is essential to improve both acceptance and coherent implementation of the learning outcome approach. Many countries achieve this through formal collaborative bodies (such as councils and committees) where central authorities engage primarily with employers and representatives from the labour market. This framework can support bottom-up implementation by granting practitioners sufficient autonomy to design programmes that respond directly to industry needs. Examples include Bulgaria, where a pilot project successfully aligned curricula with labour market requirements through bottom-up approaches, and Finland, where learning objectives are jointly agreed by the student, the VET provider, and the company. This multi-level participation helps ensure that the learning outcomes-based approach becomes embedded in practice rather than imposed from above.

Findings align with existing scholarship on power and participation (Rambla et al., 2026): learning outcomes developed solely by policymakers or industry representatives, without meaningful teacher and practitioner involvement, risk strengthening top-down control rather than supporting professional practice. Teachers respond better if they are able to set learning goals at a local level and when implementation supports their professional autonomy rather than focusing on compliance. For stakeholders to engage, there must be not only clear communication but also real involvement in designing and updating learning outcomes.

Overall, this suggests that moving to learning outcomes should be seen as a long-term process, not a one-time reform. Different countries follow different paths depending on past policy decisions and their impact on current practice. Long-term political commitment and regular system updates are needed to ensure learning outcomes stay relevant and match changing labour market needs.

5.5. Implications for policy and practice

Findings show that implementation challenges are systemic rather than technical. Policy intentions do not translate into change without the structures required to enact them. The analysis identifies several pathways to strengthen the implementation of the learning outcome approach, which require building professional literacy, adjusting governance structures, aligning institutional incentives, and investing systematically in capacity. The findings confirm both the potential and the limitations of learning outcomes but suggest that context and implementation shape which effects prevail. Learning outcomes function effectively when:

- (a) systems invest in long-term capacity building rather than expecting immediate uptake;
- (b) practitioners participate in defining and revising learning outcomes rather than only applying pre-set specifications;
- (c) flexible formulations are accompanied by strong guidance and professional development;
- (d) governance structures enable sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration from policy design to delivery;
- (e) assessment supports learning rather than constraining it, with safeguards against ceiling effects;
- (f) implementation is treated as systemic transformation, affecting curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, professional development, and institutional culture, rather than as terminology change.

These factors operate as an integrated system; partial implementation of any single element cannot offset weaknesses elsewhere. The transition to learning outcomes-based approaches is therefore not a straightforward technical reform. It is a complex process of educational change whose success depends on how it is understood, supported, and enacted across all levels of VET systems.

While this paper provides important insights into how learning outcomes are used in teaching and learning practices, further research and operational tools (for example an online learning outcomes tool for practitioners) are needed to strengthen the evidence base concerning the relationship between intended, delivered and achieved learning outcomes, particularly within work-based learning environments and across different vocational sectors.

List of abbreviations

CPD	continuing professional development
EQF	European Qualification Framework
EU	European Union
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	quality assurance
VET	vocational education and training
WBL	work-based learning

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THE WAY FORWARD IN LEARNING OUTCOMES IMPLEMENTATION

This working paper synthesises findings from Cedefop's project 'The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality?', examining implementation across 10 European initial vocational education and training (IVET) systems. Although learning outcomes are embedded in European VET policy, evidence of their influence on teaching, training and assessment remains limited.

The paper examines stakeholder engagement with learning outcomes, the factors shaping their implementation, and their translation from policy intentions into practice and learner achievement. Findings show that this translation is shaped by the interaction of conceptual, political and structural factors, with practitioner capacity, professional judgement and autonomy mediating how learning outcomes are interpreted and applied within institutional cultures and governance arrangements. Implementation at institutional and practitioner levels remains uneven and non-linear, with more mature systems showing greater coherence.

The paper concludes that successful implementation requires the professional capacity to interpret and apply learning outcomes, learner engagement, supportive pedagogical and institutional conditions, and governance that enables stakeholder participation.

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