



Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015–17

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Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies

**Developments in vocational education and training
policy in 2015-17**

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This report was produced by Cedefop and reflects contributions from Cedefop's VET policy and systems team, and Cedefop experts working on common European tools and principles for education and training, and statistics. It is based on detailed information on VET policy implementation submitted by Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET (ReferNet) and other sources.

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Aspects of vocational education and training context in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, the proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) programmes in Belgium was above the EU average: 59.7% in 2014 compared to 48% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29); 60% in 2015 compared to 47% in the EU ⁽¹⁾. However, only 5.9% of upper secondary initial vocational education and training (IVET) students were following work-based programmes in 2014, against 34% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29). The employment rate of recent upper secondary education graduates was also below the EU average: 67.4% in 2014 compared 70.8% in the EU (European Commission, 2015, p. 10). However, the rate was higher when taking VET graduates only: 75.6% in 2014, compared to the EU average of 73% (European Commission, 2016, p. 9). Adult participation in lifelong learning was low: 6.9% in 2015 compared to 10.7% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29) (Table 1).

VET in the country faced the challenges of addressing early school leaving and resulting NEETs (not in education, employment, or training). On the adult side, a shared focus among all three regions/communities was to provide adults with additional qualifications and recognise their skills. In the German-speaking Community, a skills validation system was being developed.

⁽¹⁾ Eurostat, data for 2015.

Table 1. Framework data: score on VET indicators in Belgium and in the EU: 2010, last available year and recent trend

Indicator label	2010		Last available year		Recent trend (per year)		
	BE ^f	EU ^f	Yr	BE ^f EU ^f	Range	BE	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility							
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students	A	A	'14	59.7 ^b 48.0 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ 0.5	▪ -
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET	A	A	'14	5.9 ^b 34.0 ^b _{E2}	'13-'14	▪ 0.0	▪ 0.1
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET			'14	20.9 69.2 ^{E3}	'13-'14	▪ 0.2	▪ -
Employees participating in CVT courses (%)	52.0	38.0 ^e	'10	52.0 38.0 ^e			
Employees participating in on-the-job training (%)	21.0	20.0 ^e	'10	21.0 20.0 ^e			
Adults in lifelong learning (%)	7.4		'15	6.9 10.7 ^b	'13-'15	→ 0.0	→ 0.0
Enterprises providing training (%)	78.0	66.0 ^e	'10	78.0 66.0 ^e			
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students	A	A	'14	58.0 ^b 42.7 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ -	▪ -
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)	34.0	25.0 ^e	'10	34.0 25.0 ^e			
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)			'15	37.7 ^b 33.0 ^b	'14-'15	▪ -	▪ -
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)	4.6	5.3	'15	4.5 6.9	'10-'15	→ 0.0	↗ 0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)	3.2		'15	3.0 ^c 4.3 ^b _C	'13-'15	→ 0.0	↘ 0.1
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)	9.7		'15	9.0 9.5 ^b	'13-'15	↗ 0.3	↘ 0.4
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)	12.8 ^B	9.5 ^{eB}	'11	12.8 9.5 ^e			
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)	89.3 ^B	80.2 ^{eB}	'11	89.3 80.2 ^e			
Skill development and labour market relevance							
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)			'13	1.18 ^b 0.56 ^b _{E4}			
IVET public expenditure per student (1 000 PPS units)			'13	10.9 ^b 6.4 ^b _{E5}	'12-'13	▪ 0.7	▪ 0.0
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost	0.9	0.8 ^e	'10	0.9 0.8 ^e			
Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET			'14	1.4 ^b 1.0 ^b _{E6}	'13-'14	▪ 0.1	▪ 0.0
STEM graduates from upper secondary IVET (% of total)	A	A	'14	27.3 ^b 30.0 ^b _{E7}	'13-'14	▪ 1.2	▪ -
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates			'14	9.3 ^b _{E8}			
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)	60.0	41.5 ^{E9}	'12	48.4 41.6 ^{E9}	'10-'12	▪ -	▪ 0.0
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20- to 34-year-olds)			'15	80.8 ^b 77.2 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 0.5	▪ 0.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates			'15	10.7 ^b 5.3 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 1.9	▪ -

Indicator label	2010		Last available year		Recent trend (per year)			
	BE ^f	EU ^f	Yr	BE ^f	EU ^f	Range	BE	EU
(over general stream)								1.0
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)			'15	28.5 ^b	23.7 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 3.2	▪ 0.1
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)			'15	77.3	83.7			
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	61.2	55.2	'15	61.5	57.3	'10-'15	▪ 0.1	▪ 0.4
Overall transitions and labour market trends								
Early leavers from education and training (%)	11.9	13.9	'15	10.1 ^c	11.0 ^c	'10-'15	↘ 0.5	↘ 0.6
30- to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	44.4	33.8	'15	42.7 ^c	38.7 ^c	'10-'15	↘ 0.2	↗ 1.0
NEET rate for 18- to 24-year-olds (%)		16.6	'15	15.5 ^b	15.8	'11-'15	↗ 0.1	↘ 0.3
Unemployment rate for 20- to 34-year-olds (%)		13.1	'15	12.6 ^b	12.9	'11-'15	↗ 0.5	↘ 0.1
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)		77.4	'15	79.5 ^b	76.9 ^c	'11-'15	↘ 0.4	→ 0.0
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)	29.5	27.3	'15	25.3 ^c	23.5 ^c	'10-'15	↘ 0.8	↘ 0.8
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds (%)		68.6	'15	67.2 ^b	70.0	'11-'15	→ 0.0	↗ 0.4
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)		53.4	'15	45.6 ^{bc}	52.6 ^c	'11-'15	↘ 0.4	↘ 0.1
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2020 (% of total)			'16	85.3 ^d	82.8 ^d			

^(A) UOE (UNESCO OECD Eurostat) back reconstruction of 2010 values based on ISCED (international standard classification of education) 2011 not yet available.

^(B) AES (adult education survey) 2011, used as proxy for 2010 baseline.

^(C) 2014 b flags in Eurostat online tables ignored on the basis of other relevant Eurostat metadata.

^(D) Forecast made in 2016.

^(E1) Based on 28 countries; partial information for NL.

^(E2) Based on 25 countries (missing: ES, PL, RO); partial information for NL.

^(E3) Based on 27 countries (missing: NL); partial information for EL, IT.

^(E4) Based on 19 countries (missing: BE, DK, IE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PT, SK).

^(E5) Based on 21 countries (missing: DK, IE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PT).

^(E6) Partial information for NL.

^(E7) Based on 25 countries (missing: HR, IT, UK).

^(E8) Based on 23 countries (missing: BE, IE, FR, CY, UK).

^(E9) Based on 22 countries (missing: DE, IE, EL, NL, SI, UK).

^(b) Break after 2010, therefore baseline data not included.

^(u) Eurostat: 'low reliability'.

^(z) Eurostat: 'not applicable'.

^(e) Eurostat: 'estimated'.

NB: EU refers to EU-28, unless otherwise specified. Arrows ↗ or ↘ signal a positive or negative trend based on more than two data points and of magnitude 0.1 per year or more. Trends based on more than two data points but of smaller magnitude are indicated by →; trends based on two points only are marked ▪. Trends are estimated by means of regression models.

Source: Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29.

CHAPTER 1.

MTD 1 – All forms of work-based learning with special attention to apprenticeships

Initial VET in Belgium includes school-based training and apprenticeship. Apprenticeship is a pillar of the VET system and takes place in the workplace and in a training institution, based on a jointly agreed training plan. A training contract is signed by the employer and the apprentice, and the apprentice receives remuneration.

There is a tradition of social dialogue in the German-speaking Community, with social partners involved at all VET policy levels. Agreements with sectors for work-based learning are updated regularly and sectoral funds stimulate continuing vocational education and training (CVET) in enterprises. VET providers and the employment service cooperate to match the needs of the apprenticeship market; as an example, organising speed dating between enterprises and young people. The institute for work-linked training in small and medium-sized enterprises (IAWM) also organises and aids finding training places in enterprises for VET learners. A label for recognised enterprises in apprenticeship is in place; it functions as quality assurance and attracts new enterprises to become involved in training. The use of mini-companies ⁽²⁾ in VET is common practice and is continuously updated. Apprenticeship, along with secondary and tertiary VET schools, provides entrepreneurship skills.

1.1. Policy priorities for 2016-20

For 2016-20, the Community's priorities in this area ⁽³⁾, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training (DGVt), are to:

- (a) further promote the European Social Fund (ESF) *Vocational integration* project;
- (b) develop relationships between VET providers (school-based and work-based) within the German-speaking Community.

⁽²⁾ Mini-companies are run by students at school as part of their studies, to learn through direct experience of entrepreneurship.

⁽³⁾ According to a survey by Cedefop among Directors General for VET in early 2016.

1.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17

1.2.1. Attracting learners to apprenticeship

To increase the attractiveness of apprenticeship, especially for certain professions which struggle to find enough candidates, various measures have been taken in the German-speaking Community since 2015:

- (a) an online apprenticeship exchange platform was set up to help learners find apprenticeship places;
- (b) in school year 2016/17, one-day tasters in companies were offered to pupils from secondary general education, to familiarise them with various IVET and apprenticeship programmes in different sectors (such as bank, health, transport and logistics). Different stakeholders are involved in organising these events, including enterprises, the study circle *School and business*, the Ministry of the German-speaking Community's department for pedagogy, and the German chamber of industry and commerce. The objective is to lead general education schools to organise by themselves career search days;
- (c) in 2016 and in 2017, a one-day event was organised to promote professions lacking apprentices. The focus each year has been on a different professional field: chemistry in 2016 and metal professions in 2017. During the event, pupils and their parents receive varied information on the relevant IVET programme, on the further progression paths, and on insights into the job;
- (d) in 2017, a taster week on nutrition professions was organised for the first time;
- (e) in 2016, vocational training centres organised the so-called *Startech days*, which are qualifying rounds for the national vocational competition for auto-mechatronic specialists and carpenters.

1.2.2. Cabinetmaking apprenticeship programme certified by Belgium and Germany

In October 2016, an agreement was signed between the authorities from the German speaking Community (IAWM and the Ministry) and German authorities. This agreement offers cabinetmaking apprentices the opportunity to acquire a journeyman's certificate from both countries, one from Belgium and one from Germany. To receive the certificate from both countries, the apprentice needs first to complete successfully the apprenticeship in one country and then pass an additional exam in the other. This agreement was concluded to counteract future possible skill shortages and might be extended to other professions. This measure is expected to help attract more learners.

CHAPTER 2.

MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to IVET and CVET ⁽⁴⁾

There is limited information on quality assurance arrangements for the German-speaking Community ⁽⁵⁾. There is an external evaluation agency for VET schools and VET competence centres and VET schools follow ISO compatible quality management systems (ISO 9001, ISO 14001). All stakeholders participate in apprenticeship quality assurance.

Monitoring transitions from VET to work is a priority in the government concept of regional development. Public VET providers and employment services must monitor and evaluate their activities and employment service statistics consider labour market integration of young people coming from different streams.

In 2016, the public employment service of the German-speaking Community participated in the *Youth guarantee* monitoring activity. Data show whether young apprentices between 15 and 24 who are registered with the regional public employment services (PES) are still pursuing their training activities after six months. The outcomes have so far been communicated to the steering committee of the employment office (ADG). A meeting of *Youth guarantee*

⁽⁴⁾ Sources:

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop):
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en>

ReferNet: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/refernet>

Priorities reported by Directors General for vocational training for 2016-20;

EQAVET (2016 Secretariat survey, website, newsletters): <http://www.eqavet.eu>

2016 compendium of EQAVET NRP *Erasmus+* funding;

Council recommendations on the 2016 national reform programmes:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/2016/#>

Education and training monitor 2016 country reports:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en

⁽⁵⁾ BE (de) has not participated in the EQAVET surveys and information on its QA system is missing from the EQAVET website.

stakeholders is planned for 2017. Results will be presented as evidence for the success/deficits of different measures in this area.

CHAPTER 3.

MTD 3 – Access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible/permeable systems, guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

3.1. Policy priorities for 2016-20

The Community's priorities in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, are two-fold:

- (a) for young people:
 - (i) further promote the ESF project *Vocational integration*;
 - (ii) sensitise young people to vocational occupations;
 - (iii) release young people from jobseeker duties while following an educational programme;
 - (iv) develop a certification system for social competences;
- (b) for adults:
 - (i) extend the opportunities for double certification in common craftsman masterclasses in cooperation with North Rhine, Westphalia (Germany);
 - (ii) implement a general system for the recognition/validation of non-formal and informal learning in the German-speaking Community;
 - (iii) achieve the ADG training programme targeted at smoothing the transition from an integration programme (preparing for labour market demands) into actual employment.

3.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17

3.2.1. Transparency, recognition, validation

3.2.1.1. ECVET ⁽⁶⁾

A national coordination point is in place in the German-speaking Community. Transfer of learning acquired abroad is possible on a case-by-case basis. Qualifications and training programmes are expressed as learning outcomes

⁽⁶⁾ Source: the ECVET users' group members.

(units, modules). Assessed learning outcomes are transferred at VET system level via an enabling framework. In the reporting period, discussions among experts and regional authorities on ECVET (European credit system for vocational education and training) implementation at VET qualifications level are ongoing. Initiatives for internal use are on hold.

3.2.1.2. *Validation* ⁽⁷⁾

A project addressing the validation challenge had started in 2014. In 2015, a strategy for introducing a validation system was outlined and in October 2016, a public launch event on the recognition of competences took place. Stakeholders of the German-speaking Community were invited to participate in a debate and a steering group was set up to elaborate a concept for further action. The aim is to put concrete arrangements in place by 2018. It is envisaged that this work will be supported by funds from the European Social Fund.

3.2.2. Training, reskilling and upskilling vulnerable groups, jobseekers and employees

3.2.2.1. *Tailored support for jobseekers in finding apprenticeships*

The ADG (the employment office of the Community), the self-employed and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are cooperating in matching jobseekers fulfilling the minimum criteria to the apprenticeship places for young people aged 15 to 29. Jobseekers receive individual letters informing them about the available places and how they can express their interest and get further information. From mid-2016, ADG counsellors have centralised access to weekly updated information on vacant apprenticeships, supporting them in planning measures for jobseekers' integration into the labour market.

3.2.2.2. *Virtual enterprise training for access to employment*

The VET centre in Sankt Vith introduced virtual enterprise as new learning scheme to allow a close-to-reality learning experience in a highly realistic training

⁽⁷⁾ The input is from the European inventory on NQF 2016 (Cedefop, 2017b) and the information provided in the report on future strategies for the German-speaking Community of Eastern Belgium (*Ostbelgien Leben 2025 Regionales Entwicklungskonzept der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*). The information provided builds on the section covering the *Bildungsregion DG* (the German-speaking education and training region).
http://www.ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resources/downloads/rek/REK4-72dpi-KORR_23sept.pdf

environment. From merchandise traffic to business relations, all procedures mirror commercial practice. The programme promotes integrated learning and aims at facilitating (re-)entry into employment.

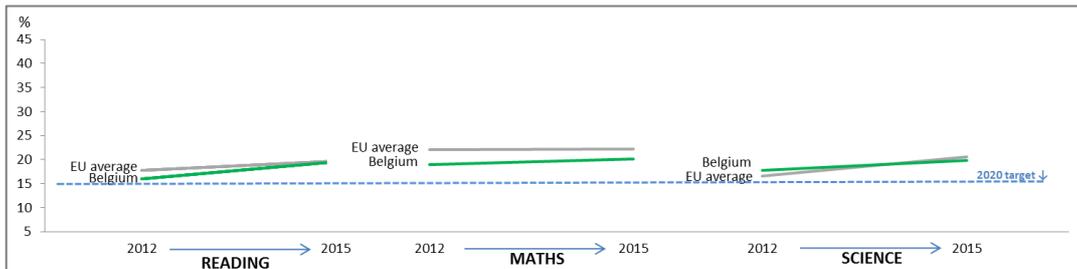
CHAPTER 4.

MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1. Baseline

The context of key competences in 2015 was mainly characterised by an increasing share of young low achievers in reading, maths and science compared with 2012 (Figure 1). However, the share of low achievers in Belgium is lower than in the EU on average, where the trend is similar.

Figure 1. **Share of 15-year-olds with low achievement in reading, maths and science**



NB: Low achievement means failing level 2 on the PISA (programme for international student assessment) scale.

Source: OECD, 2014; OECD, 2016.

VET enrolls 60% of all upper secondary learners in the country ⁽⁸⁾, so this trend is likely to be reflected in the key competences trained for in VET programmes as these competences are central to compulsory education until age 18, including initial VET. This is happening against a background of highly decentralised VET in the three Belgian communities ⁽⁹⁾.

4.2. Key competences in initial VET

The priority of the German-speaking Community in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, is to continue

⁽⁸⁾ Calculated from Eurostat, data for 2015.

⁽⁹⁾ For more information on key competences in VET see Bruxelles Formation, 2016.

updating educational programmes and to improve the educational frameworks for general part of school-based VET. This is to be achieved through determination of key competences for each training year in light of changing labour market and society needs, and in cooperation with teachers/trainers.

A meeting for teachers (including VET) was held in the reporting period on how to work with the new teaching framework for science and the accompanying technology.

Educational frameworks for general courses in initial VET have been improved by determining key competences for each training year in cooperation with education experts and the Ministry of the German-speaking Community in Belgium.

CHAPTER 5.

MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors

For 2016-20, the Community's priority in this area, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, is to focus on sensitising teachers to participate regularly in further training.

To increase regular participation of VET teachers in continuing professional development, the institute for work-linked training in small and medium-sized enterprises bears the costs for a substitute VET teacher for half a day per teacher per school year.

Conclusion

In the reporting period, the German-speaking Community of Belgium has taken measures to increase the attractiveness of apprenticeship and develop a six-month follow-up of apprentices' learning paths. Progress was made in preparing a concept for validation of prior learning and work experience, and determining key competences in initial VET. Measures were put in place to support jobseekers in finding apprenticeships and training for employment. Action for the continuing professional development of VET school teachers is also in place, although it is not specified whether it was set up during or prior to the reporting period.

The actions carried out show that the main lines of the Riga conclusions and the Community's policy priorities for 2016-20 are being addressed. However, information available to Cedefop at the time suggests issues which could benefit from further consideration:

- (a) further developing quality assurance mechanisms and information/feedback loops that can assist in guiding the strategy for developing CVET;
- (b) initiatives supporting guidance;
- (c) resuming the development of the qualifications framework of the Community;
- (d) supporting key competences in CVET;
- (e) ensuring the initial and continuing training of VET school and in-company teachers and trainers.

Cedefop also suggests setting out policy priorities, for the remaining period until 2020, in the areas of:

- (a) information and feedback loops in IVET;
- (b) supporting key competences in CVET;
- (c) initial and continuous training of VET teaching/training staff beyond primary school.

List of abbreviations

ADG	employment office
AES	adult education survey
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DGVT	Director General for vocational education and training
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
ESF	European Social Fund
Eurostat	statistical office of the European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
IAWM	Institute for work-linked training in small and medium-sized enterprises
ISCED	international standard classification of education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NEETs	not in education, employment, or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	public employment services
PISA	programme for international student assessment
PPS	purchasing power standards
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
STEM	science, technology, engineering and math programmes
UOE	UNESCO OECD Eurostat
VET	vocational education and training

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