



Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015–17

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

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Table of contents

Table of contents.....	2
List of tables and figures	3
Aspects of vocational education and training context in 2015.....	4
1. MTD 1 – All forms of work-based learning with special attention to apprenticeships	7
1.1. Policy priorities for 2016-20.....	8
1.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17.....	8
1.2.1. Piloting dual training	8
1.2.2. Learner status in the dual system	8
1.2.3. Website on dual learning	9
1.2.4. Introducing work-based learning in higher education	9
2. MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to IVET and CVET ().....	10
2.1. Situation in 2015	10
2.2. Quality assurance in line with EQAVET.....	11
3. MTD 3 – Access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible/permeable systems, guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning	12
3.1. Policy priorities for 2016-20.....	12
3.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17.....	12
3.2.1. National qualifications framework ().....	12
3.2.2. Validation ()	13
4. MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET.....	14
4.1. Baseline	14
4.2. Key competences in initial VET	14
5. MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors	16
5.1. Initial training for teaching/training staff in VET schools.....	16
5.2. Initial training for trainers and mentors in enterprises	16
5.3. Continuing professional development for teaching/training staff in VET schools	17
Conclusion	18
List of abbreviations	19
References.....	20

List of tables and figures

Tables

1. Framework data: score on VET indicators in Belgium and in the EU:
2010, last available year and recent trend5

Figures

1. Share of 15-year-olds with low achievement in reading, maths and
science14

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 was faced with 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 Flemish Community, steps were being taken to strengthen work-place learning in school-based VET, introduce dual training, and develop incentives for workers to attend retraining courses.

⁽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	▪ 0.5	▪ -
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	▪ 0.3	▪ -
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	▪ 5.8	▪ 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 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 training in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) 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 for apprenticeship 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.

At the beginning of the reporting period, two apprenticeship systems were in place in the Flemish Community:

- (a) the *Leertijd* (organised by the Flemish agency entrepreneurial training, SYNTRA);
- (b) DBSO, the part-time apprenticeship in use in vocational secondary education.

In April 2015, the Flemish government approved the resolution for starting pilot projects on dual learning. In July, a decree unifying the study-and-work contract was approved, ensuring equal rights and responsibilities for all students. The unified contract provided a clear framework for incentives and quality workplaces.

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

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 two-fold:

- (a) regarding apprenticeship:
 - (i) abolish the two existing apprenticeship systems (DBSO and *Leertijd*) and replace them with one system of dual learning;
 - (ii) gradually integrate dual learning (the new apprenticeship model) in full-time vocational-oriented secondary education (TSO, BSO and BuSO);
- (b) regarding work-based learning in school-based VET: stimulate the participation of pupils of full-time vocational-oriented secondary education in work-based learning (traineeships).

1.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17

1.2.1. Piloting dual training

In September 2016, 30 schools started piloting dual training programmes; 60% of the learning takes place in an enterprise. The pilots are planned to last three consecutive school years. A specific regulatory framework was set for the experiment. In November 2016, the Flemish government started preparatory work to extend these pilot projects for the school year 2017/18. Legislation on dual learning for full scale implementation is planned for 2018.

1.2.2. Learner status in the dual system

A Decree on the status of learners in the dual system ⁽⁴⁾ was adopted in June 2016 and implemented in September 2016. A first evaluation is planned for 2017. This Decree states that all learners in the dual system have the same status (such as social security, rights and obligations, remuneration) and the same contract type. The Decree aims to make the dual learning system transparent for all stakeholders involved. It introduces a new body, Flemish Partnership Dual Learning, in charge of providing the government with input in relation to further implementation of dual learning in Flanders. Social partners, as well as government and education stakeholders, are part of this body.

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

⁽⁴⁾ <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14994>

1.2.3. Website on dual learning

In June 2016, a website was launched ⁽⁵⁾ to match supply and demand for dual learning. This website is used for the registration of contracts and learners searching for a work placement can also view company vacancies.

1.2.4. Introducing work-based learning in higher education

In March 2016, the Government of Flanders adopted the concept paper *Extending higher vocational education* aiming to develop higher vocational education into a fully-fledged component of higher education. At least a third of higher vocational programmes will be work-based, which is intended to attract additional students who have not yet found their place in higher education. Full integration of higher vocational training programmes into the university system is planned for the 2019-20 academic year ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽⁵⁾ www.werkplekduaal.be

⁽⁶⁾ Government of Belgium (2016). National reform programme 2016 of Belgium:

CHAPTER 2.

MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to IVET and CVET ⁽⁷⁾

2.1. Situation in 2015

A quality assurance national reference point was set up in 2010. The quality assurance approach comprises internal reviews, which are the responsibility of the provider, and external reviews carried out by the inspectorate. The Decree on quality in education of 8 May 2009 stipulates that primary and secondary schools are responsible for their own quality and it is part of the school's autonomy to decide how to conduct the self-evaluation. Pedagogical support services assist schools in strengthening internal quality assurance and their ability to implement policies.

As with providers of IVET, CVET providers have to monitor their own quality systematically and are free to choose how this is done.

The Flemish public employment and vocational training service (VDAB) carries out studies to identify training needs. It monitors graduates and analyses job vacancies to produce annual reports and identify bottleneck occupations. The government uses these reports to approve new training programmes. Concrete training needs in specific sectors are identified through cooperation with industry.

⁽⁷⁾ 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

Due to privacy legislation, it was not easy in 2015 to cross-reference data on learning pathways with information on labour market participation.

2.2. Quality assurance in line with EQAVET

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

- (a) use professional qualifications (described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence) that are formally linked to the Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) as the reference point for quality assurance in VET;
- (b) ensure the value of professional qualifications delivered inside and outside education;
- (c) enhance permeability between vocational training offered by the Flemish public employment services (PES), SYNTRA *Vlaanderen*, recognised private training providers and education.

During the reporting period a quality assurance approach is being developed which is expected to be in place by 2019. The aim is to have a common system of external quality control for all programmes leading to professional qualifications (both IVET and CVET, levels 1 to 4 of the FQF/ European qualifications framework (EQF)), including work-based learning.

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

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

- (a) for young people: to combat early school leaving by making IVET more attractive to young people;
- (b) for adults: to ensure that recognition/validation of non-formal and informal learning (*erkenning van competenties*, EVC) is in place in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

3.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17

3.2.1. National qualifications framework ⁽⁸⁾

With the Act on the qualification structure ⁽⁹⁾, the Flemish parliament and government adopted in 2009 a comprehensive qualifications framework based on learning outcomes and covering all types and levels of qualifications from formal education and training and from the professional qualifications system. In 2011, the Flemish qualifications framework was referenced to the EQF and has been populated with qualifications since then. The FQF has been operational since December 2016. It covers a total of 240 professional (*Beroeps*) and 220 educational qualifications. Vocational qualifications have been levelled individually (as opposed to being placed as a block) in a process involving the main social partners.

⁽⁸⁾ Cedefop, 2017b.

⁽⁹⁾ Act on the qualification structure (*Decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur*): <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14111>

3.2.2. Validation ⁽¹⁰⁾

In Flanders, the term EVC (*erkennen van competenties*: recognition of competences) is used to refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Several types of secondary school certificate (general, vocational/technical, artistic) can be acquired through validation by an exam committee. Occupational qualifications can be acquired through non-formal or informal learning. Developments at policy level in the reporting period aim at an integrated approach to validation, bringing existing separate validation measures together in a single comprehensive strategy. There is increased cooperation between different validation providers (inside as well as outside education) and the willingness to create a single framework linking validation processes to the FQF. In July 2015, the concept for an integrated framework for validation in Flanders was approved by the Flemish government; a task force has been set up to develop the integrated policy framework and to draft a decree on validation. A cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken to determine the financial implications of VNFIL in Flanders, though a single and comprehensive set of quality assurance mechanisms is still to be developed.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cedefop, 2017b; Cedefop et al., 2017.

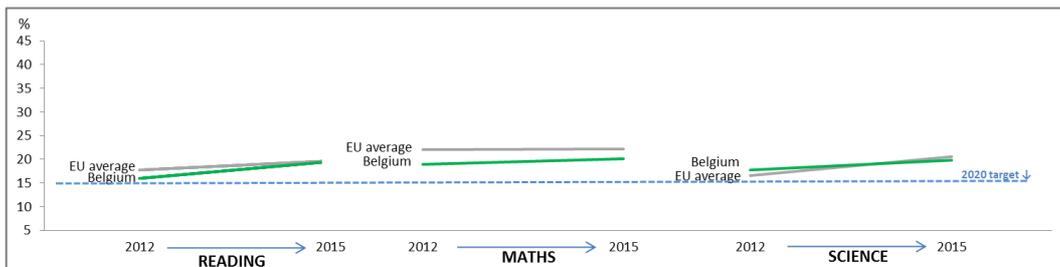
CHAPTER 4.

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 ⁽¹¹⁾, 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 ⁽¹²⁾.

4.2. Key competences in initial VET

The priority of the Flemish Community in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, is revision of the

⁽¹¹⁾ Calculated from Eurostat; data for 2015.

⁽¹²⁾ For more information on key competences in VET see Bruxelles Formation, 2016.

attainment targets (learning outcomes) for secondary education including VET, in light of 21st century needs in the labour market and society at large.

The public debate on the attainment targets/learning outcomes for secondary education including vocational-oriented secondary education (initial VET) took place between February and June 2016. It involved around 40 000 participants, including half of young learners. The 2006 EU-key-competences framework served as one of the reference documents. As a result, delegates provided to the parliament their recommendations on improving key competences. These included self-knowledge; personal development, social and human skills; self-reliance; knowledge and use of languages; critical thinking and problem solving; knowledge and handling of political and social challenges; skills in ICT, new media, arts and culture; learning-to-learn; scientific and research competences. Two scientific reports were produced for the Department of Education, underlining the importance of joint ownership of the curriculum and a shared meaning attributed to it ⁽¹³⁾. The Flemish parliament is currently preparing its decision on the new attainment goals.

⁽¹³⁾ Rouw, R. et al. (2016). United in diversity: a complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders. *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 139. Paris: OECD Publishing;

Simons, M. et al. (2016). *De actuele werking en doeltreffendheid van de eindtermen als beleidsinstrument in Vlaanderen* [The use and effectiveness of attainment goals as a policy instrument in Flanders]. Leuven: KU Leuven.

CHAPTER 5.

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

5.1. Initial training for teaching/training staff in VET schools

For 2016-20, the priorities of the Flemish Community in this area, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, are to:

- (a) attract more and better qualified students to initial teacher education;
- (b) improve the quality of initial teacher education (both for general education and IVET).

On 25 March 2016, the Flemish government adopted a concept note on the reform of initial teacher education. This document sets the framework for the reorganisation of all initial teacher education programmes, including for VET teachers. The aim is to improve the quality of initial teacher education, both for general education and IVET. Seven working groups were launched, given the task to develop the concept note further and work towards its implementation. Each group consists of representatives of teacher education institutions, teacher unions and school organisations. In January 2017, they reported to the minister.

5.2. Initial training for trainers and mentors in enterprises

In the reporting period, *Syntra Vlaanderen*, the Flemish agency for entrepreneurship, started a project with several partners on mentor training. These partners receive funding for the development of a mentor training programme, which can be used and implemented in several sectors and/or companies. There is no legislative obligation for using these programmes, but they will be offered to strengthen the quality of dual training.

5.3. Continuing professional development for teaching/training staff in VET schools

The Flemish government sets one or more priority annual themes for teacher continuing professional development (CPD). In 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17, the implementation of the Decree on pupils with specific learning needs (the so-called *M-decree*) was a priority. The training courses attended are free of charge for the institutions and for the teachers.

Conclusion

Since 2015, the Flemish Community of Belgium has taken steps to pilot dual learning in IVET. VET programmes of adult education (the so-called HBO5 programmes) are being transformed into short-cycle programmes in higher education. A quality assurance approach for VET (up to level 4 of the Flemish QF/EQF) is being developed. An important milestone has been reached in developing the Flemish qualifications framework. Progress was made towards an integrated approach for validation of non-formal and informal learning. A public debate on revising the learning outcomes – including key competences – in secondary general and vocational education was held. Finally, actions were undertaken on reforming and developing the initial training of VET school teachers and in-company trainers and mentors.

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) using the European quality assurance in vocational education and training (EQAVET) indicators to monitor the development of VET;
- (b) supporting key competences in CVET.

Cedefop also suggests, for the remaining period until 2020, setting out policy priorities on:

- (a) continuous information and feedback loops in CVET;
- (b) supporting key competences in CVET;
- (c) continuing training of VET school teaching/training staff;
- (d) initial and continuing training of in-company trainers and mentors.

List of abbreviations

AES	adult education survey
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DBSO	part-time apprenticeship in vocational secondary education
DGVT	Director General for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
Eurostat	statistical office of the European Union
EVC	<i>erkennen van competenties</i> recognition of competences
FQF	Flemish qualifications framework
GDP	gross domestic product
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
SYNTRA	Flemish agency for entrepreneurial training
UOE	UNESCO OECD Eurostat
VDAB	Flemish public employment and vocational training service
VET	vocational education and training

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