



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

European VET for the 21st century

The balancing of excellence and
inclusion

ReferNet deliverable 3a

ReferNet Plenary, 22 October 2025

50
YEARS
SHAPING LEARNING AND
SKILLS IN EUROPE

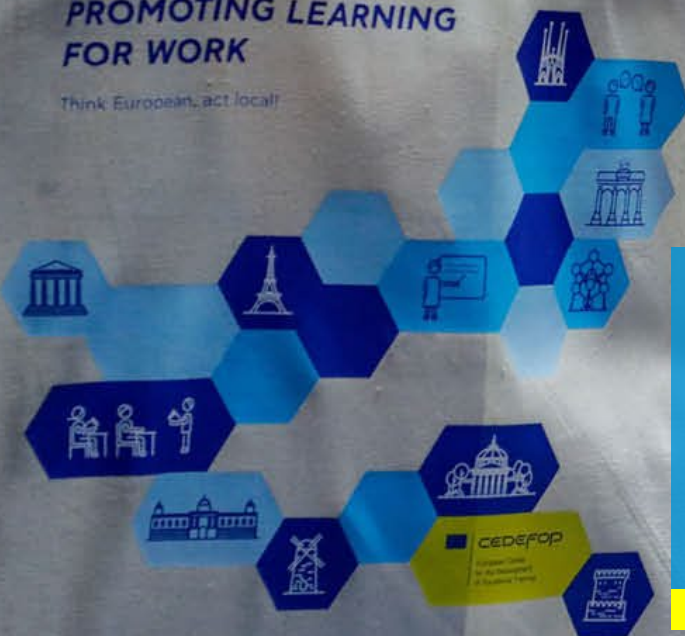


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**PROMOTING LEARNING
FOR WORK**

Think European, act local!



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

3 Main thematic areas

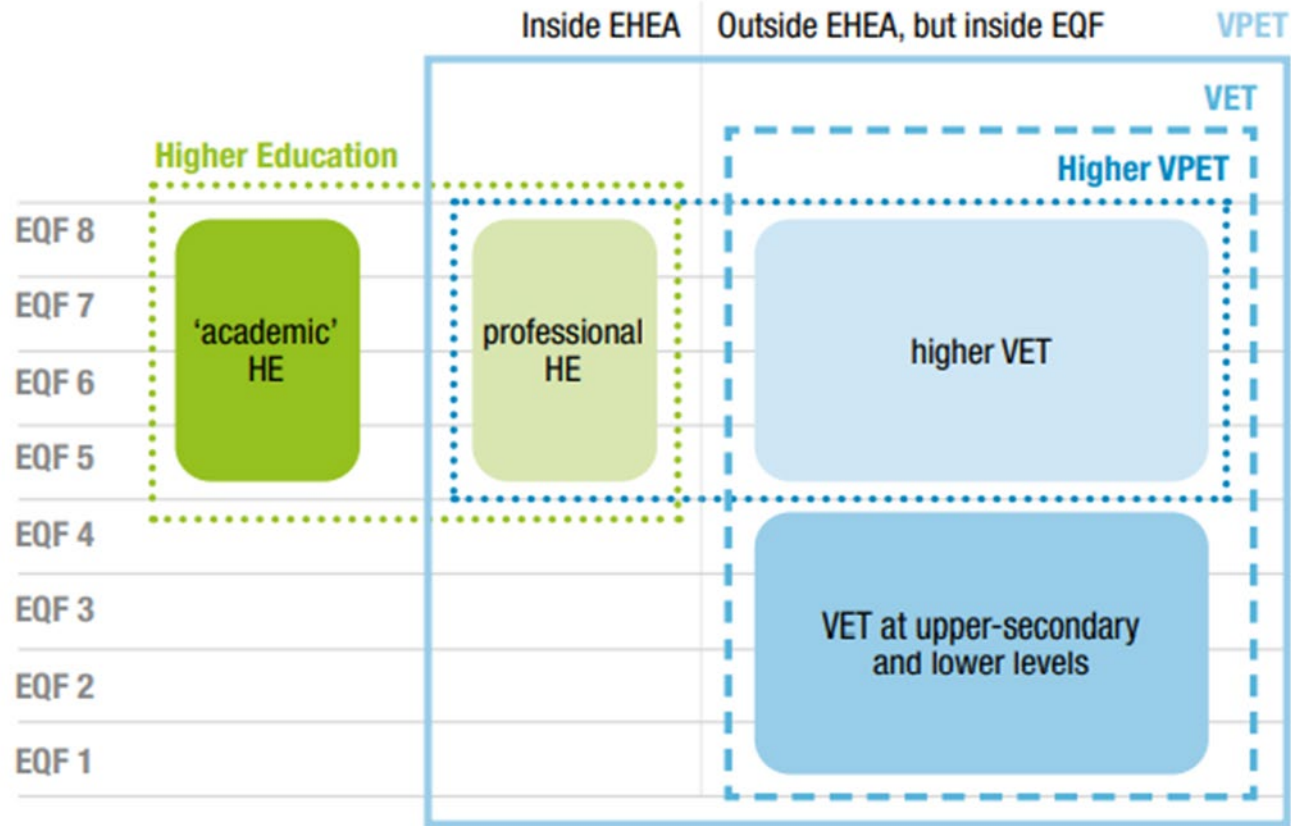
Map how national VET systems have addressed the objectives of excellence and inclusion.

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

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

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

Higher vocational education and training – exemplifying change



NB: Width of levels roughly illustrates distribution of VET student.
 Source: Cedefop. See also Cedefop (2019a).



Methodology

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

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

Expert survey:

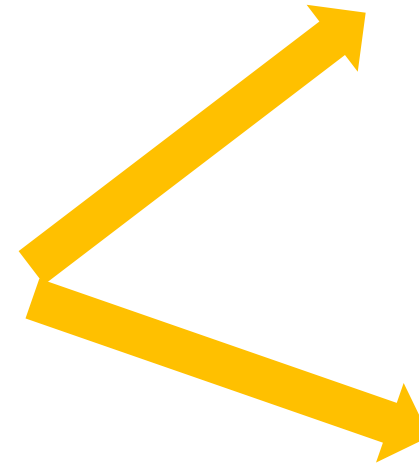
- Selection and analysis of 5 key policy documents/country
- General assessment of situation in the country



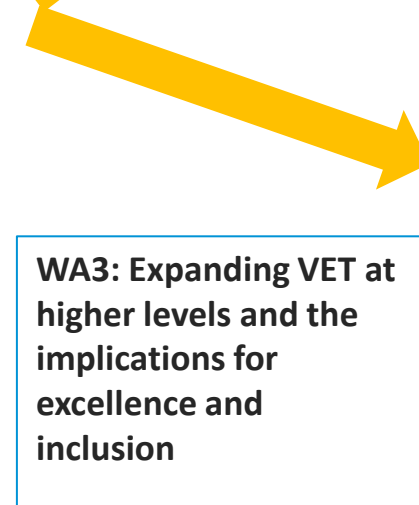
Case study countries



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



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



Case studies

- Desk research
- Expert interviews

Scenario development

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

Case studies

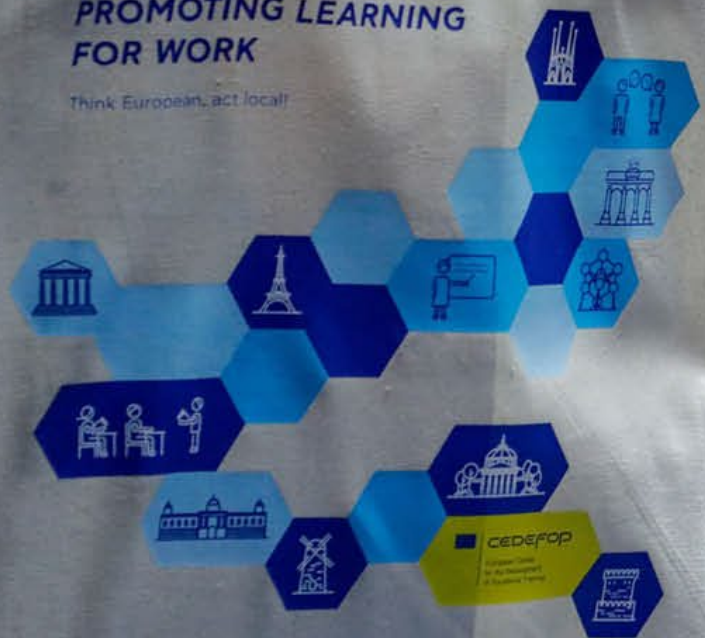
- Desk research
- Expert interviews

Overview all EU countries

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

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2025 ReferNet Workplan (deliverable 3a)

ReferNet deliverable 3a

The **aim** of this exercise was:

- ✓ To examine the emerging role and characteristics of expansion of VET at higher levels and how this influences the objectives of excellence and inclusion.
 - ✓ to help establish a first overview of relevant documents and further sources at country level that can inform the discussion and research on these topics;
 - ✓ to contribute to a first demarcation of the key terms used in the study framework (glossary).
- **Structure** of the questionnaire:
 - ❖ 5 sections  an overarching question followed by 2/3 sub questions
 - ❖ Length: 5 to 10 pages maximum (excluding Annexes) for each section

ReferNet will provide a starting point for in-depth country research  this will feed into the current research

ReferNet deliverable 3a – 5 sections

1. How is the HVPET area **conceptualized** in your country?
2. **Role** of Higher VPET in supporting **vocational excellence and inclusion**.
3. What are the **institutional** and **pedagogical** factors influencing excellence and inclusion at higher levels?
4. Which **stakeholders** are brought together and what is their **role** in supporting excellence and inclusion in HVPET?

And finally (e), based on the above, which are your overall **observations** and **recommendations**?

22nd ReferNet
annual plenary
meeting

20 and 21
November 2024
Thessaloniki
#ReferNet



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THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EXPERTISE ON VET

A. HVPET in the country

1. How is the HVPET area **conceptualized** in your country?

1.1 Can it be considered a **'system'** and/or one or **more separate levels in a system** or does it include qualifications/programmes related to **different sub-systems** and or levels?

1.2 What **types of qualifications/programmes** are considered as HVPET? Which **institutions** are offering HVPET qualifications/programmes? What is **their balance of academic and vocational** components? In what **format** are they offered and for which target group(s)?

1.3 Are HVPET qualifications **included in the NQF** and if so, at which NQF/EQF level?



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B. Role of Higher VPET in supporting vocational excellence and inclusion

2. To what extent and how are policies related to HVPET in your country **underpinned by the objectives of excellence and inclusion?**

2.1. Can any **changes** in this regard be observed, during the last 25 years?

2.2. Are there any **indications of differences between policy (as expressed e.g. in strategies, action plans or regulations/legislations) and actual practice in the field?**



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C. Influencing factors

3. What are the **institutional and pedagogical factors** influencing excellence and inclusion at higher levels?

3.1. **Institutional factors** might include: *degree of autonomy, strategy, resource allocation, quality assurance arrangements (including review and update of programmes/qualifications), design of programmes/qualifications, support structures*

3.2. **Pedagogical factors** might include: *pedagogical approach, learning formats and contexts (including skills competitions), roles of teachers/trainers*



D. Stakeholder involvement

4. Which **stakeholders** are brought together and what is their **role** in supporting excellence and inclusion in HVPET?

- 4.1. **Stakeholders** could be e.g. providers of vocational education and training (IVET, CVET), universities of applied sciences, employers, research centres, development/employment agencies, companies, social partners
- 4.2. Their **roles** could be e.g. the provision of training, guidance, support, staff, financial resources, steering, insights into (future) training needs.





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E. Outlook and recommendations

5.1 Any **political discussions** already under way?

5.2 Any other **relevant information**?

5.3 Are you aware of any **particular national definitions or understandings** of the concepts used which could help us to improve our own working definitions?

5.4 Can you recommend **any experts** in your country (e.g. *researcher or VET stakeholders*) who are particularly knowledgeable about the above subjects?



Initial analysis – ReferNet deliverable 3a



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Responses: 26 EU countries + NO, IS (1 country missing)

Aims and outcomes

- ✓ **Examine HVET/PHE's emerging role** and their characteristics of expansion and how this influences the objectives of excellence and inclusion.

Partly achieved - data quality varies:

- Some questionnaires provide a complete picture of the available HVET and PHE programmes, **while others do not include all relevant programmes/qualifications (based on other Cedefop reports)**
- The description of the objectives of excellence and inclusion is sometimes limited to legal definitions.
- Changes (in these objectives) over the **past** 25 years are not addressed **in all questionnaires**.
- The discussion of institutional and pedagogical factors is sometimes very general.

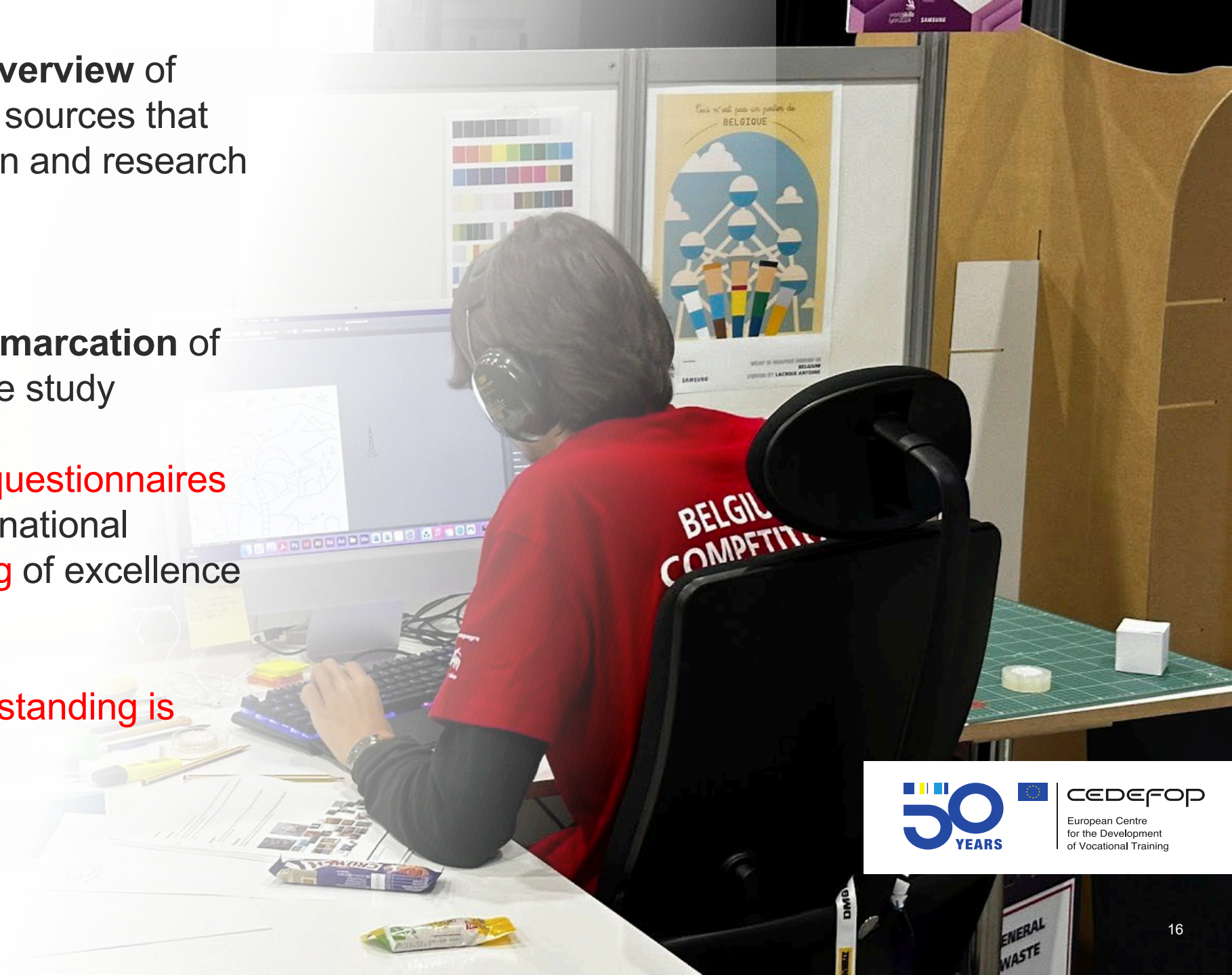
- ✓ **Help establish a first overview** of national documents and sources that can inform the discussion and research on these topics

Fully achieved

Contribute to a first demarcation of the key terms used in the study framework (glossary).

Partly achieved: not all **questionnaires** provided information on national **definitions/understanding** of excellence and inclusion.

In most cases the understanding is implicit.



Role of HVET / PHE in supporting vocational excellence and inclusion

Key differences in the objectives of excellence

❖ Labour market relevance and employer engagement

- **HVET:** the primary objective is to maintain **strong labour market relevance**, with curricula designed to meet current workforce needs. *High emphasis on employer involvement, practical/work-based learning, and direct preparation for skilled employment.* Quality assurance mechanisms are often linked to occupational **competences** and specific examinations, such as master craftsman **examinations**.
- **PHE:** while labour market relevance is also important, the focus is **broader**, *incorporating strategic partnerships and engagement with employers but not always tied directly to immediate job roles.* PHE strives **even more strongly** for a balance between professional and academic goals.



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❖ Research, innovation, and academic quality

- **HVET**: applied research is increasingly present, especially in advanced programmes. However, the dominant excellence **signal** remains practical job readiness rather than research capacity
- **PHE**: a much stronger focus on applied and academic research, innovation, and knowledge creation. Institutional quality assurance in PHE is often **comparable/similar to 'traditional'** higher education, including institutional accreditation and international evaluation.



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Role of HVET / PHE in supporting vocational excellence and inclusion

Key differences in the objectives of inclusion

❖ Target groups

- **HVET**: focuses on improving access for specific groups **at risk of exclusion**. These are commonly addressed through flexible modalities, modular programmes, and direct funding support.
- **PHE**: while also concerned with **disadvantaged learners**, its scope is typically broader, focusing on non-traditional students, mature learners, and underrepresented groups in a more **general** sense.



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❖ Alignment with labour market objectives

- **HVET**: inclusion is closely linked to **labor market integration and transition**. Access is seen as a route to rapid employment, often through dual-learning pathways, directly targeting groups at risk of unemployment or social exclusion.
- **PHE**: while also aligned with employability, PHE inclusion **merges social and academic dimensions**, incorporating objectives such as internationalisation, research excellence, and lifelong learning, sometimes with less direct labour market focus.



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Overall reflections – need for clarification

- **A first overview** of national documents and sources that can inform the discussion and research on these topics was achieved.
- More **clarity** is needed on national definition / understanding of the objectives of excellence and inclusion.
- Not all questionnaires provided information regarding changes over the **past** 25 years.
- In some questionnaires the focus of the answers is **more strongly on one area**, PHE or HVET.
- Cedefop still in the process of analysing the questionnaires and getting a better overview.
- Can we come back to you at a later stage for clarifications??

Thank you

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Project page

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/vet-excellence-and-inclusion-21st-century

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