

## VET in Bulgaria



The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates national policy on vocational education and training (VET). Sports and culture ministries are in charge of VET schools in the respective study fields. The VET Act defines two target groups: school-age learners and adults (16+ not in formal education and training). Young people usually enrol in VET from age 14.

Amendments to the VET Act from 2018 and 2020 defined new requirements related to VET quality assurance, work-based learning included.

VET programmes for school-age learners have a vocational and a general part; graduates acquire qualifications for both. VET programmes provided by training centres and colleges for adults do not include a general education part and lead to a VET qualification only. VET qualifications can also be acquired through validation of prior learning by passing an exam, as with regular VET learners.

The main VET providers are the State, municipal or private schools, vocational gymnasiums, art and sports schools, VET colleges, and licensed vocational training centres. State education standards specify the content of VET qualifications. Four national VET qualification levels are referenced to the European qualifications framework. The legal framework distinguishes six types of initial and continuing VET (IVET and CVET) programme types (called 'framework programmes'), that define EQF/NQF levels, age and entry requirements, and regulate education form, content and duration.

- A (A): 'second chance' IVET programmes lead to EQF level 2 qualifications at schools and training centres. The duration is one or three years for school-age learners and up to six months for adults;
- B (B): IVET and CVET programmes leading to qualifications at EQF levels 3 (one or four years) and 3 and 4 in adult learning (up to one and a half years) at schools and training centres;
- C (B): mainstream IVET and CVET programmes leading to EQF level 3 and 4 qualifications at VET schools. Duration is one to five years, giving access to higher education, provided learners have passed final matriculation exams;
- D (Г): IVET and CVET programmes for adults only leading to qualifications at EQF level 5 at VET schools and colleges with a maximum duration of two years;
- E (Д): up to one-year IVET and CVET programmes leading to partial qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 4 at schools and training centres;
- F (E): CVET programmes for adults (16+) leading to qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 4: full or partial, updating already acquired qualifications. The programmes are provided by schools and training centres and duration is defined by training providers.

Work-based learning (WBL) forms a substantial part (50% to 70% or more) of all VET programmes. Most is offered by schools, with the WBL share decreasing with programme level. The current legal framework for dual VET is well defined and was upgraded in 2019. Practical training in a company

alternates with periods of theory in a school or another VET provider. School-age learners are trained by companies at least two to three days per week in the final grades (11 and 12). Both school-age learners and adults receive remuneration from the employer.

Social partners have decision-making and advisory roles in shaping VET through their participation in regional and national councils and their involvement in the development of State education standards and in updating the List of professions for vocational education and training (LPVET) and the Lists of State protected specialties. They are also members of examination boards set up by VET providers.

### Distinctive features of VET

VET is provided at secondary and post-secondary (non-tertiary) levels. There are more learners in VET compared with general education: 50.4 % of the total secondary education population in 2019. Secondary general education schools may also open VET classes by a special order of the education minister, a popular option in small towns and rural areas.

Since 2016/17, secondary education has been offered in two stages; this improves access to VET, as learners may choose their education path twice, after completing grades 7 and 10.

State education standards play a major role in shaping qualifications and curricula. They are developed in units of learning outcomes for all VET qualifications (EQF levels 2 to 5).

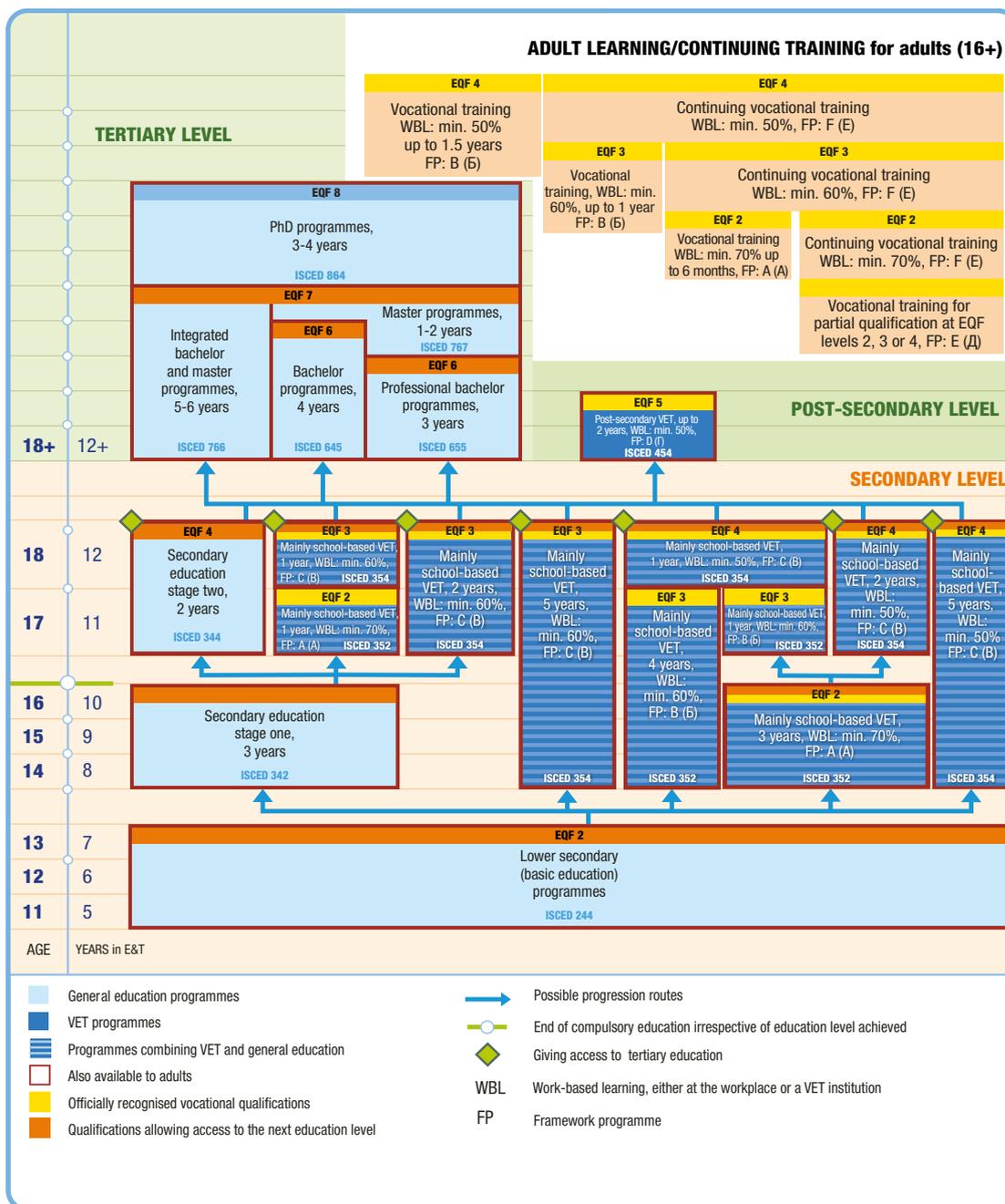
Quality assurance criteria and procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been developed since the development of the relevant legal framework in 2015. Validation procedures may be organised by all VET providers on the condition that the process concerns qualifications from LPVET.

### Challenges and policy responses

The 2015-20 National strategy has focused on main challenges: wider use of a modular approach in VET, improved VET implementation flexibility, improved quality and more easily accessible career guidance services. According to industrial enterprises there is still a high level of skills mismatch: in 2019, 37% pointed out labour shortages as a factor limiting their activity.

To increase VET labour market relevance, the pre-school and education Act (2015) increased the responsibilities of local and regional authorities in planning VET provision and defining occupations, funding staff salaries, organising VET for the unemployed and equipping VET schools. Employer organisations are also becoming more actively involved in implementing VET; since 2016 they have been able to propose changes to the list of VET qualifications.

Dual VET was introduced in 2016, with the number of apprentices almost doubling since. Participation in dual VET is also encouraged by fiscal policy interventions, with financial support for learners in grades 8-10 who receive monthly loans.



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Bulgaria, 2020.

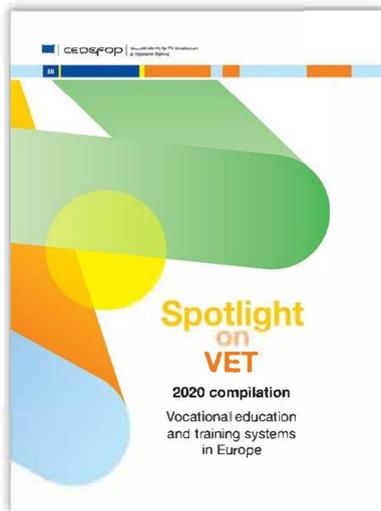
Learners in 11th and 12th grade receive wages due to their contractual relationship with their employer. Measures such as specialised forums and media campaigns help attract learners and motivate employers to participate in dual VET.

The 2015 quality assurance regulation mandates VET providers of adult training to organise self-assessment based on a set of indicators.

The education ministry has a national programme to ensure professional development of teachers and trainers and to attract more young people to the profession.

The Covid-19 virus highlighted the need for increasing digital readiness of VET institutions.

The VET development Strategy 2030 is under development.



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