



VET in Portugal

The current VET system in Portugal is the result of a 2007 large-scale reform, which reorganised VET into a single system (*Sistema Nacional de Qualificações*, SNQ). This was done under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and in connection with the Ministry of State, Economy and Digital Transition. The main objectives of the SNQ are to ensure that VET qualifications better match labour market needs, promoting the competitiveness of enterprises, and to reinforce the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). It also aims to guarantee scholarly and professional progression of citizens in 43 sectoral areas of education and training. Permeability between general and VET programmes is possible.

Approximately 40% of upper secondary education learners attend VET programmes which grant double certification: education (nationally referred to as school) and professional certification. They comprise four components: general, scientific, technological training and work-based learning (WBL).

The main VET programme types are:

- at lower secondary level, education and training programmes for young people (CEF, ISCED 254; EQF 2) are school-based and include practical training. They target those aged 15+ who completed the first cycle of basic education (four years) and who are at risk of early leaving from education and training. Progression to upper secondary education is possible;
- at upper secondary level, the VET programmes (ISCED 354, EQF 4) are:
 - three-year professional programmes; approximately 33% of learners at upper secondary education attend such programmes. WBL is provided in the form of a traineeship carried out in an enterprise or a public organisation;
 - three-year specialised artistic programmes including visual arts and audiovisual, and dance programmes;
 - specific curriculum programmes granting autonomy to schools to diversify their education and training provision: designing a curriculum that combines elements of general and VET programmes. WBL takes place as traineeship in companies or other host entities, in periods of variable duration;
 - apprenticeship programmes are for young people up to age 25. A training contract between the apprentice, the training provider and the enterprise must be signed;
- at post-secondary level, technological specialisation programmes (CET, ISCED 454; EQF 5) last from one to one-and-a-half years, leading to a technological specialisation diploma. Through agreements with higher tertiary institutions, CET graduates are credited up to 90 ECTS points;
- at tertiary level, two-year short-cycle high professional technical programmes (CTeSP, ISCED 554) are offered by polytechnics. Graduates are credited 120 ECTS points and receive a higher professional technician diploma (not a tertiary education degree).

Adult learning includes the following programmes:

- education and training programmes for adults (EFA, ISCED 100, 254 and 354); these target learners who want to complete lower or upper secondary education and/or obtain a professional qualification at EQF 1 to 4;
- certified modular training (ISCED 100, 254 and 354), based on short-term training units (UFCD) of 25 or 50 hours, allowing learners to select an individual learning path offering them greater flexibility in obtaining a qualification. These learning paths can lead to a certification at EQF 1 to 4;
- RVCC (ISCED 100, 244, 344) is a process, leading to the certification of formal, non-formal and informal competences developed through life, including at least 50 training hours. The two RVCC paths (education and professional) can lead to a basic, upper secondary education, professional or double certification (EQF 1 to 4). Adults lacking competences required for a qualification are guided to relevant training programmes to acquire them.

Distinctive features of VET

Key principles of VET provision are the wide range of programmes accessible to young people and adults, the link between VET provision and labour market needs, and flexibility in type and duration of programmes for adults.

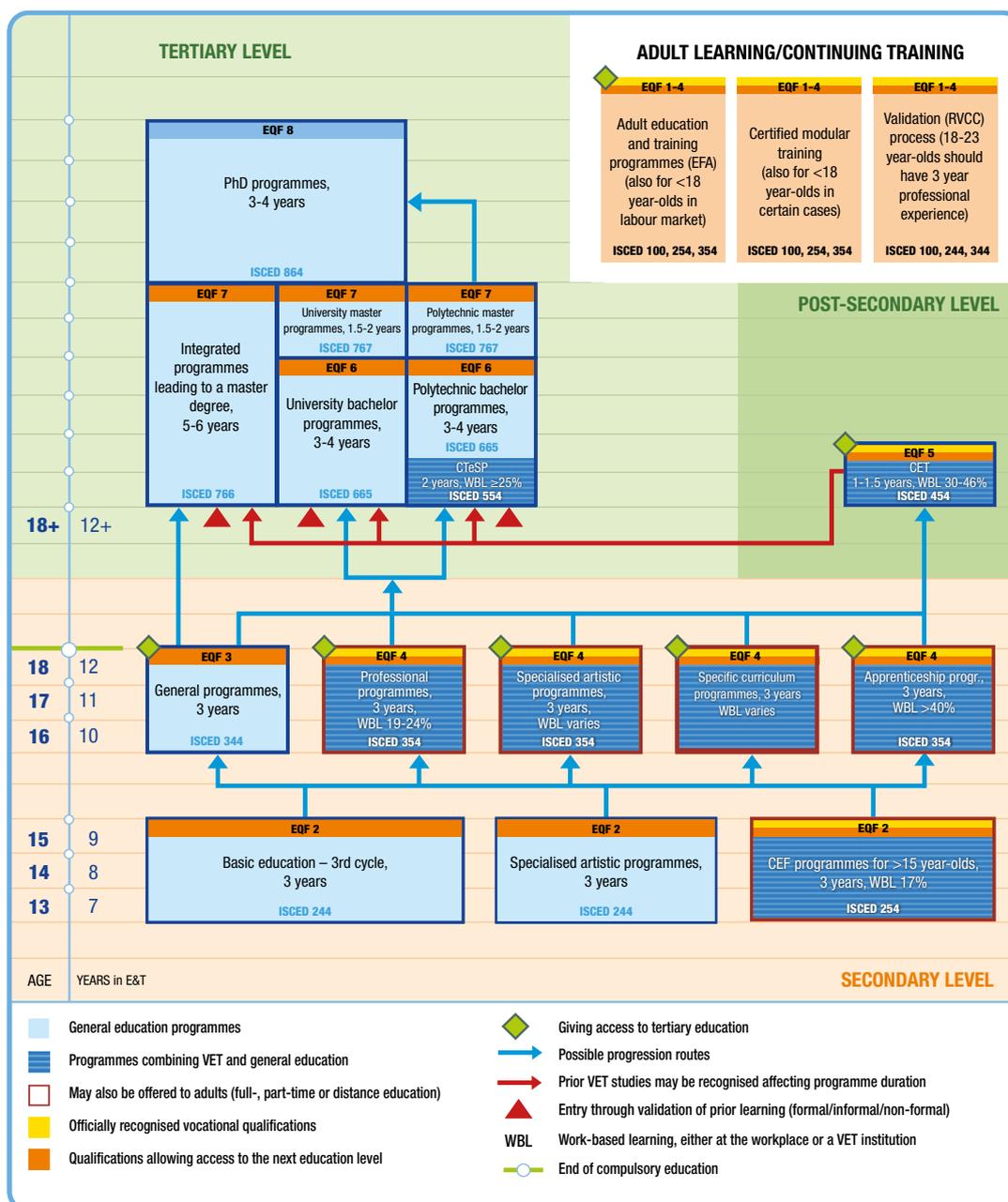
Accrediting publicly funded VET providers and trainers, along with external evaluation, ensures VET quality.

The SNQ promotes upper secondary education as the minimum level of attainment. It adopted a governance model based on the involvement of the different VET providers, sector councils, and social partners, establishing common objectives and tools. SNQ support tools are:

- the eight-level national qualifications framework (QNQ), designed in line with the EQF;
- the national catalogue of qualifications (CNQ), which helps manage and regulate non-tertiary VET qualifications. This aims to develop competence-based qualifications, regulate double certification, aid designing learning programmes, provide a reference framework for the RVCC process, promote the transparency and efficiency of public funding, and modularise the training offer;
- the *Qualifica* passport, an instrument for guidance and individual record of qualifications and competences;
- the System for anticipating qualification needs (SANQ), evaluates the relevance of qualifications to the labour market and monitors trends in qualified human resources supply;
- the National credit system for VET, which allocates credit points to VET qualifications.

Challenges and policy responses

Several issues are high on the policy agenda: increasing participation in LLL (in 2019 this was 10.5%, slightly below the EU average); modernising VET provision by introducing new training methods and diversified VET programmes; strengthening



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

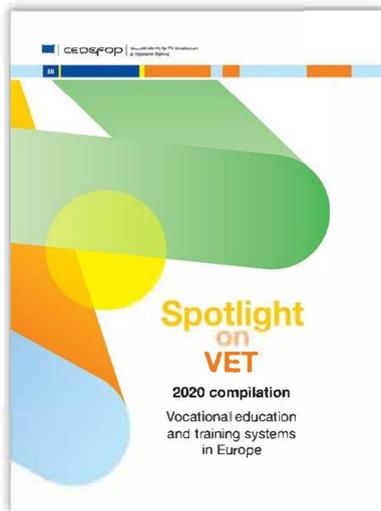
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Portugal, 2020.

the alignment of VET with labour market needs; and upskilling and reskilling vulnerable groups. Although early leaving is significantly reduced (10.6% in 2019), it remains a priority. Further, VET should respond to the profound transformations caused by digitalisation.

The Government, through the preliminary version of the Recovery and resilience plan (2020), has identified areas that future policy interventions will focus on. It draws attention to the share of active population with a low-level qualification (approximately 50%). It sets objectives for the education and training system to modernise VET: promote quality VET; support the transition towards a digital and greener economy by offering learners the necessary skills and competences; develop skills for innovation and industrial renewal in liaison with the

world of business; and attract more learners to higher education, particularly from VET. The plan also aims to expand the network of adult education and training providers in cooperation with the *Qualifica* centres to attract more adult learners to VET programmes. The recently launched (2020) *Ativar.pt* initiative aims to address the challenge of increasing unemployment by promoting up- and reskilling of the unemployed, focusing on young adults, for instance in areas related to digital, green and social economy.

In the current economic context, where the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic crisis are apparent, VET should be a crucial tool in fostering employability, social inclusion and the development of the economy.



Publication:

Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation:
vocational education and training systems in Europe.

Access the full publication at:

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4189>

Please cite this chapter as:

Cedefop (2021). VET in Portugal. In: Cedefop (2021). *Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. pp. 60-61.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4189>

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