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European VET for the 21st century: the balancing of excellence and inclusion

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Towards inclusive excellence in TVET, 22-24 April 2024



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Decline or Expansion?

Where is European VET heading?

The negative story

VET is declining and losing out to general and academic education

Digitalization and job polarization renders VET skills less relevant

The positive story

VET is expanding to higher levels and forms the backbone of lifelong learning

The skills provided by VET are Essential for growth and welfare

**PROMOTING LEARNING
FOR WORK**

Think European, act local!



The Changing Nature and Role of VET (2016 - 2019) The Future of VET in Europe (2020 - 2022) Balancing of Excellence and Inclusion (2023-2026)

EU-27 + IS, NO, UK

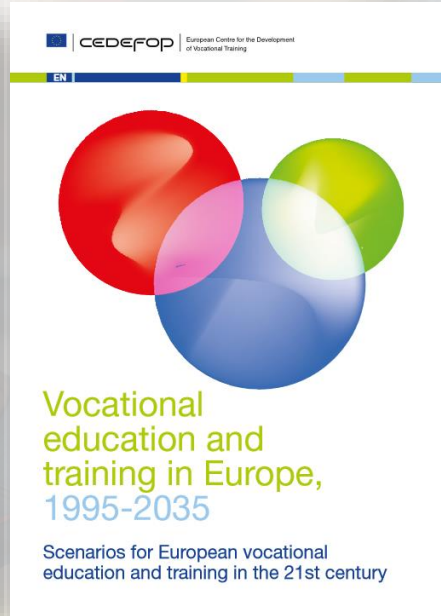
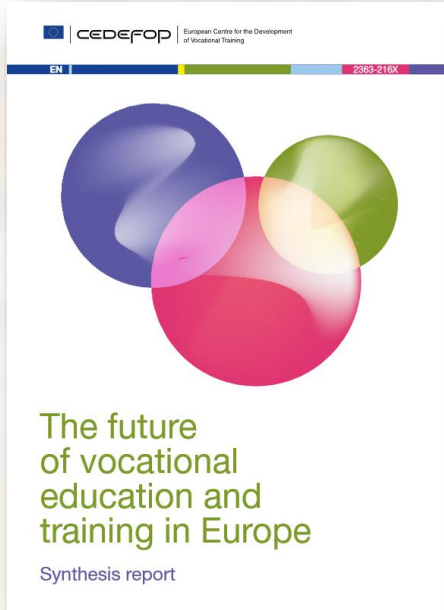
Conceptual background: The balancing of excellence and inclusion

Context of the study

- **In EU:** need for specialised VET skills at the **highest possible levels of performance** – focus on **excellence**
- VET is viewed as a tool to include and **integrate learners at risk of exclusion** from the labour market and society – focus on **inclusion**



The study seeks to deepen Cedefop's understanding of the challenges facing VET systems in the coming decade..



Can excellence and inclusion be two sides of the same coin?

- Excellence and inclusion have been a key part of the European policy context for VET and **different layers** to address them can be discerned:
- Focus on **national level priorities**;
- Focus on national VET **objectives**;
- Focus on **policy documents, national curricula**.

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.

Research questions (WA1)

1. How have the objectives on excellence and inclusion been addressed in **national policy documents** over the last 25 years?
2. To what extent have priorities and objectives linked to excellence and inclusion **triggered and influenced reforms and practical policies**?
 - 2.1. Have they influenced **learning outcome expectations** (in standards and curricula)?
 - 2.2. Have they affected **resource allocation and distribution**?
 - 2.3. Have they influenced **individual learning opportunities**?
 - 2.4. Have they influenced **sectoral policies**?
3. To what extent do policies on excellence and inclusion **contradict** or **complement** each other?

Research questions (WA2)

1. How are the concepts of excellence and inclusion **understood at national level**?
2. Which **instruments** are used to promote excellence and inclusion at national level:
 - 2.1 **Institutional initiatives** and reform;
 - 2.2 **Pedagogical and content** (curricular) reform;
 - 2.3 **Stakeholder involvement** and coordination (inside and outside the VET system).
3. How do the **conceptualisation** and comprehension of these concepts **vary across Europe**?
4. Which **future scenarios** for the **promotion** and **balancing** of excellence and inclusion could be developed?

Research questions (WA3)

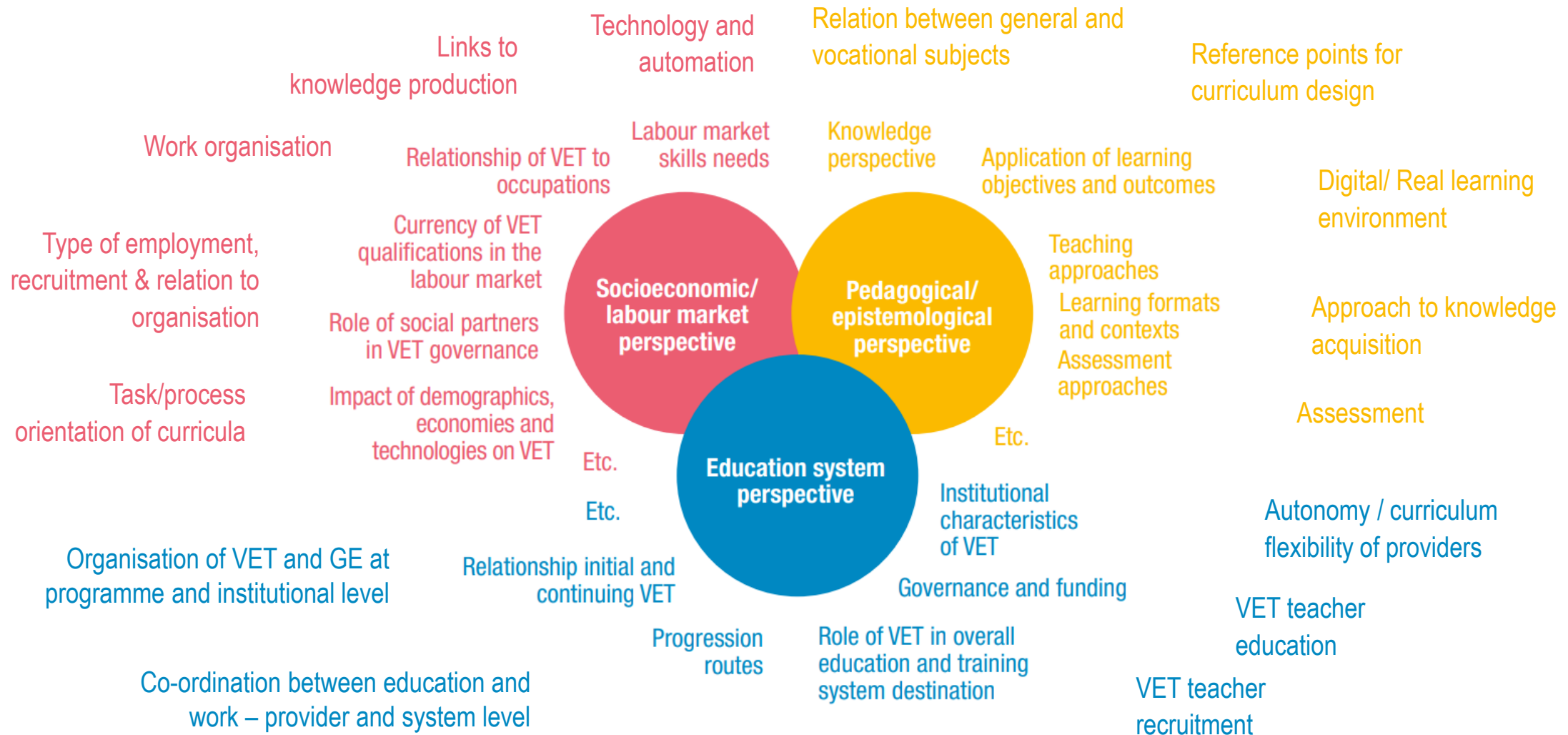
1. To what extent are **HVET institutions and systems** addressing the objectives and priorities of E and I?
2. How are the concepts of excellence and inclusion understood and **operationalised in HVET**?
 - 2.1. Which types of learners are targeted?
 - 2.2. Which pedagogies are used?
3. How do HVET systems, in relation to excellence and inclusion **differ** across Europe?
4. What are **the institutional and pedagogical factors** influencing excellence and inclusion at higher levels?
5. What type of **stakeholders** are brought together?



A summative, but **holistic** approach to excellence and inclusion

- ❖ Excellence found at all levels of education and training - 'inclusion' at a **specific educational level**, the provision is open, accessible and valuable for all potential learners.
- ❖ 'Excellence: finding the **unique quality within a specific education and training provision** - 'inclusion' means that **all potential learners can benefit from this unique quality** in the same way.
- ❖ 'Excellence' refers to the **positioning of an education and training sector in the whole skills formation system** - 'inclusion' refers to the specific sector of education and training so that **all learners can find their way through the systems and that pathways** are open to all.

The three-perspective analytical model – defining ‘signals’ to track excellence and inclusion



Focussing on the the role of VET in society

VET operates in and serves a **wider context of work and society**

- ✓ The relationship to **occupations**
- ✓ How does VET **supply** meet labour market **demand**?
- ✓ The role of **social partners**
- ✓ The **status** of VET and the **currency** of VET qualifications
- ✓ The impact of **demographics and technology**
- ✓ The impact of **society shocks** – the fall of the Berlin wall, the 2008 Economic Crisis, Refugees, Covid.....



Socioeconomic
and
labour market
perspective

Focussing on content, teaching and learning

VET is rooted in a **distinct mode of knowledge production and use** and is associated with a particular way of teaching and learning

- ✓ Emphasize **practical knowledge** (know how – skills)
- ✓ Often **implicit** and **situational** knowledge
- ✓ Vocational knowledge is acquired through **participation and socialization**
- ✓ Do not exclude **combinations with other forms of knowledge** (theoretical, academic)
- ✓ Learning takes place through **practical** experience
- ✓ Implies **active** and **problem-oriented** learning

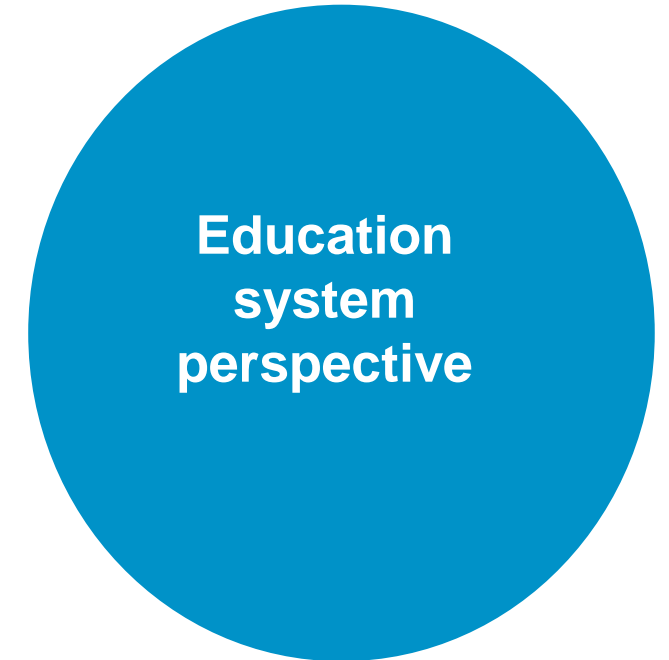


**Epistemological
and pedagogical
perspective**

Focussing on the delivery of VET – the institutions and systems

VET is delivered in **institutions and systems which have evolved over time** reflecting political choice but also embedded in traditions

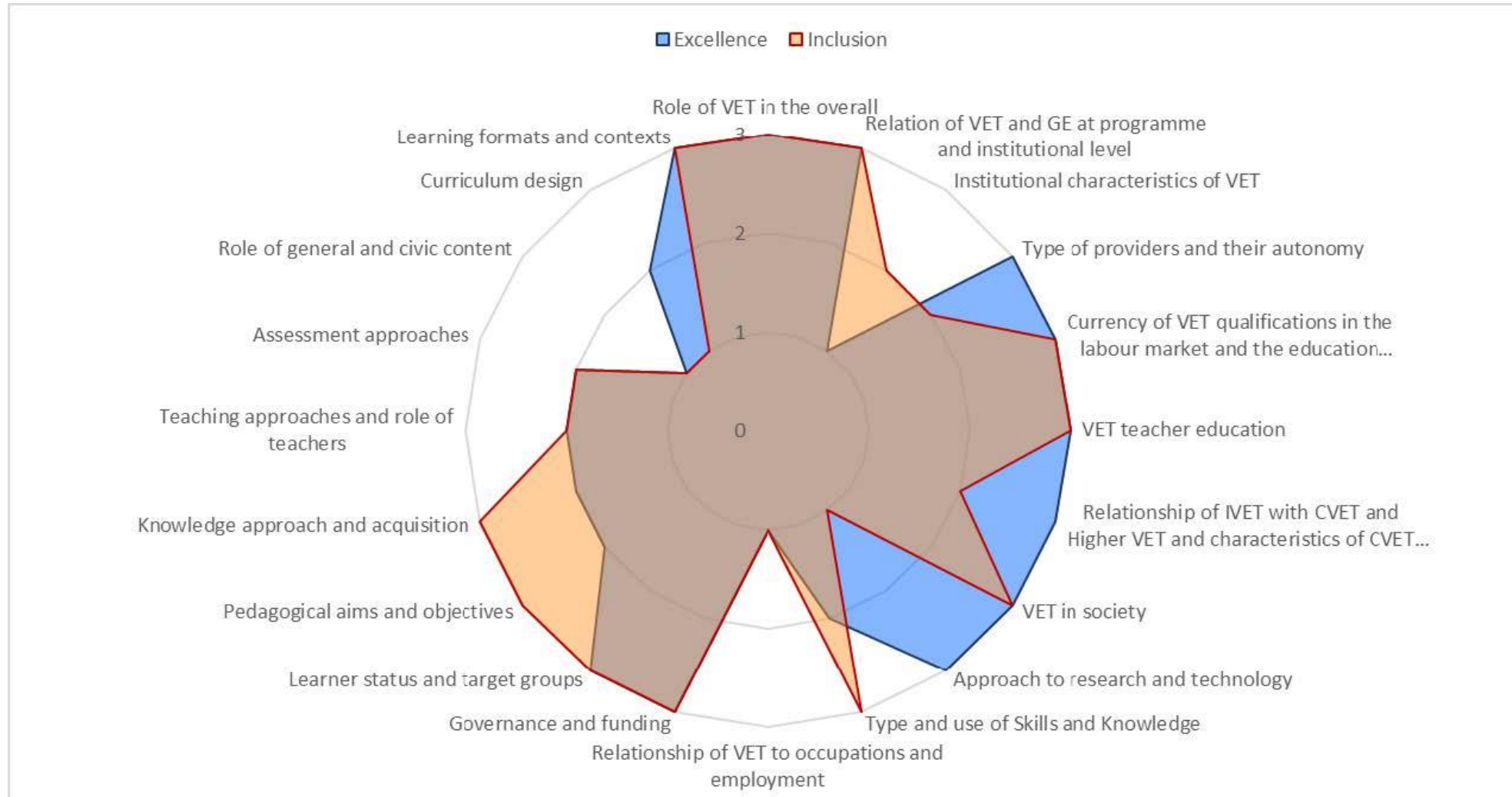
- ✓ **Institutional** characteristics and design – school or work-place
- ✓ **Governance** - centralized or decentralized
- ✓ **Funding** – public and/or private
- ✓ **Links to overall education and training system** – distinct or pluralistic
- ✓ **Permeability of systems** – dead ends or open pathways
- ✓ Interaction between **initial and continuing training** – of youngsters or **lifelong learning at all ages**



Applying the three-perspective model for zooming in on excellence and inclusion

Perspectives (P), dimensions (D), characteristics (C)	Relation excellence	Relation inclusion	WA relevance
P: Education system perspective			
D: Role of VET in the overall education and training system: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education system aims 2. Quality criteria and values 3. Parity of esteem / VET status <i>Assessment of relevance (* - ***) and 'signals'</i>	As indicated, excellence refers to finding the unique added value vis-a vis other E&T sectors. This can be described in terms of the criteria listed. There are no preferred options for the criteria. For instance, on 'aims', all three options can be related to excellence in VET. It more depends on how the VET aims are developed and phrased. *** Phrasing of VET aims related to a unique profile Quality criteria cover a wide range of issues (holistic approach) VET status is at least equal to other E&T systems	Inclusion means that the VET sector is well aligned to other sectors so that it offers opportunities and pathways for all learners. This objective is captured in the aims, quality criteria and status. *** VET aims refer to being accessible for all learners for which VET might be relevant Quality criteria cover inclusivity VET status is at least equal to other E&T systems Inclusion related to systematic challenges and hence inclusiveness in VET cannot be seen isolated from GE and work.	WA1 WA2 WA3
D: Relation of VET and GE at programme and institutional level <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Organisation of VET / GE at programme level 5. Organisation of VET /GE at institutional level 6. Coordination education & work at provider level 7. Coordination education & work at system level <i>Assessment of relevance (* - ***) and 'signals'</i>	Excellence requires seeing the VET provision as part of the overall skills development system. The relation to GE and the labour market are key components of working on excellence. *** The position of VET vis a vis GE is well defined (at all levels) VET is well coordinated with the world of work (at all levels)	*** VET is accessible for all and there is good coordination between VET and GE at all levels. VET supports inclusiveness in work at all levels Inclusiveness can relate to opening-up to more levels of education or more age-groups, but this is not necessarily the case if there are alternative solutions available. Inclusiveness is more related to whether all learners at a certain level or in a certain age group have equal opportunities to access and succeed.	WA2
D: Institutional characteristics of VET C: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Level of education 9. Age <i>Assessment of relevance (* - ***) and 'signals'</i>	Excellence is less related to levels or age of the learners, but more to how <i>within</i> a level the education is provided. Hence, these institutional characteristics of VET are less relevant. * -	*** Do all learners (at a certain level and age) have equal chances to access and succeed in VET?	WA3 (to look at expansion of VET to higher levels)

Excellence and inclusion covered by the dimensions of the three-perspective model



Source: Cedefop

Cedefop **Future of VET** study – National workshop in Slovenia(2022) - Inclusive excellence scenario

Understanding of VET:

VET is understood as a highly diversified form of education and training with a strong element of work-based learning provided at all levels, and serving learners at all ages and with different backgrounds realizing the idea of lifelong learning.

Role of VET:

The principle of inclusive education has become an integrative element of a broader concept of quality assurance and therefore VET plays an important socio-integrative role. VET has become also further professionalised in terms of quality of qualifications and teachers, their education and cooperation with the environment and business. The lack of workers allowed trade unions to fight for higher pay leading to better services/conditions resulting in mores professionalism and a higher reputation of VET. The transfer of knowledge between the spheres of education and work is an important dimension of education. In practice, it is expressed by the exchange of staff between industry/businesses and schools (VET programme providers). It is for the learners to choose whether to study in school or in the company. Open qualifications are managed by the social partners. The link between different chambers and entrepreneurs is highlighted, which contributes to the contribution of VET and time-appropriate green and fair products. It all contributes to the acquisition of a quality brand.

Target groups:

VET addresses diverse target groups across all levels and serves learners at all age groups, including the disadvantaged. VET accounts for the highest share of learners compared to general education.

Learning provision:

Most VET takes place in large school centres, which are specialised in content and provide educational programmes at ISCED 3-5 levels, as well as various forms and types of non-formal education. They combine technical/professional gymnasiums where schooling culminates in a general baccalaureate and it is possible to enter higher education and vocational/professional schools where students can pass a final exam or a vocational bachelor's degree.

Learning approach:

Key focus and the starting point is the individual career development of young people based on their talents. Talent & Career centres are intended for wider population and represent a public interest. Support and funds are coming from different sources (public & private). Furthermore, they bring together various counsellors covering all aspects of education (general, VET, adults). Cooperation between different stakeholders, in particular the labour market (entrepreneurs) and chambers is effective.



VET in Europe 1995-2035

A vision of VET spanning 40 years, looking into the past and the future



Volume 1: Definitions and conceptions of VET

Volume 2: VET developments 1995-2015

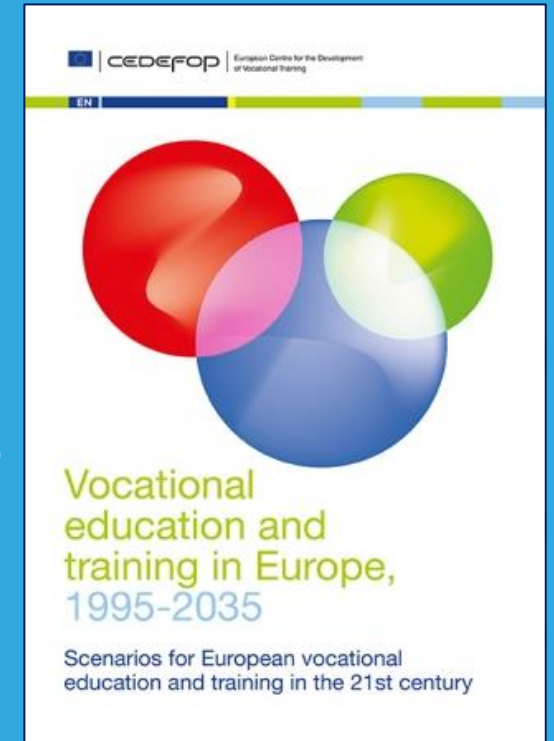
Volume 3: External factors influencing VET

Volume 4: Enrolment patterns in IVET

Volume 5: Education and labour market outcomes of VET

Volume 6: VET at higher education levels

Volume 7: VET from a lifelong learning perspective



Vocational education and training in Europe, 1995-2035: scenarios for European vocational education and training in the 21st century.
Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 114. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/794471>

The future of VET in Europe

Publications



<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/future-vet/publications>

How to unlock the potential of VET as key enabler for inclusion?

Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning

Three key objectives

Mapping microcredentials in European LM-related education, training and learning
Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems

New research on microcredentials (mid 2024)

Microcredentials and the added value for end-users

Novelty or old wine with new label?

- MCs are a **growing phenomenon** - address limitations of formal Qs to **timely respond to labour market needs**
- Microcredentials are promising, **but getting things right is a balancing act**
- Emerging mostly in areas such as **ICT, engineering, manufacturing, and construction**, but also in sectors such as **hospitality, human health, and social work**

Challenges:

(a) Lack of adequate and transparent QA standards (b) How learning outcomes are assessed and documented

(c) More empirical data from LM sectors are needed (d) Comprehensive information and guidance is missing


Microcredentials in Europe Publications

CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

BRIEFING NOTE

MICROCREDENTIALS

STRIVING TO COMBINE CREDIBILITY AND AGILITY



Sweeping changes in economies and jobs require education and training to offer more flexible learning pathways and valid credentials

Microcredentials hold promise for connecting people's skillsets with labour market demand in a rapidly changing world of work. They have proliferated in recent years across economic sectors and education levels, reinforcing European and national efforts to understand and develop them better (1). They can increase the provision of labour-market-relevant vocational education and training (VET), supporting national, regional and sectoral upskilling and reskilling strategies, offering learners targeted training for better employment prospects, and helping employers improve employee retention and productivity. They support the modularisation of qualifications and the validation of prior learning, enabling the inclusion of the most vulnerable and lifelong learning at all levels. However, significant policy progress and research is needed to ensure that microcredentials offer end-users real value. Cedefop has investigated the evolving purposes, roles and effects of microcredentials in relation to European qualifications systems, the preconditions for users to have trust in them, and the support users need to engage with and benefit from them (2).

(1) Cedefop research on microcredentials. See also Cedefop's 2022 briefing note *Are microcredentials becoming a big deal?*

(2) See Cedefop's first, second and third report on this most recent strand of work.

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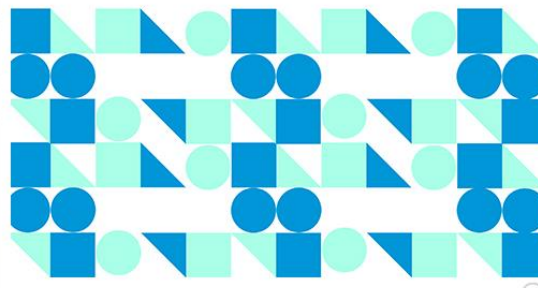
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Research paper

Microcredentials for labour market education and training

First look at mapping microcredentials in European labour-market-related education, training and learning: take-up, characteristics and functions



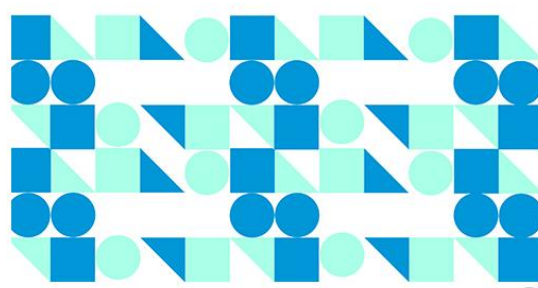
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Research paper

Microcredentials for labour market education and training

Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems



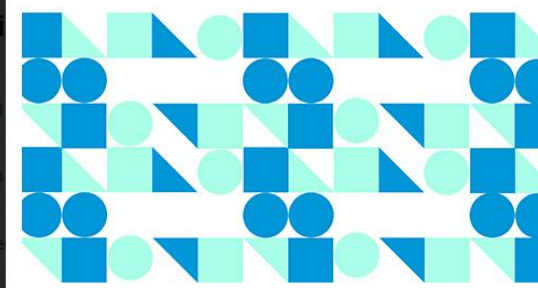
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Research paper

Microcredentials for labour market education and training

The added value for end users



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Project pages

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

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/themes/future-trends-vet>

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training