



spotlight on VET UNITED KINGDOM

VET in the United Kingdom

Vocational education and training (VET) is available at secondary and higher education levels in the form of broad introductory courses and specialised advanced training. VET qualifications are available in a wide variety of sectors and prepare learners for work. They are mostly taken at secondary level within the further education sector. Education or training is compulsory up to age 16 (18 in England), but most young people continue learning after this point. For learners up to 18, VET is funded by government agencies, while adult learners are eligible for grants and loans.

Learners can start from age 15 to access one of the following VET programmes:

- school-based programmes that combine general academic study with VET elements exist alongside broad VET programmes and specialist occupational programmes that may take place both in a school setting and the workplace. VET is offered full- and part-time; students may attend training on a block-release or day-release basis from employers or attend evening or weekend learning. Programme duration varies by subject area, level of study and type of learning and is generally between one and four years;
- apprenticeships always include a work contract and, in most cases, a technical and occupational qualification and core, transferable skills such as numeracy, literacy and ICT. Demand for apprenticeships is rising and competition for the best apprenticeship places is increasing. More apprenticeships are also being developed at higher education level in response to current labour market needs.

There is a well-established system for VET learners in the UK to progress to higher education. Candidates holding vocational qualifications at upper secondary level (EQF level 4), may access selected first-cycle university programmes at institutional discretion. However, there is no automatic right to progression from one qualifications framework level to the next as education providers and awarding organisations can set entry requirements for individual qualifications.

The curriculum for excellence in Scotland and the Welsh baccalaureate qualification

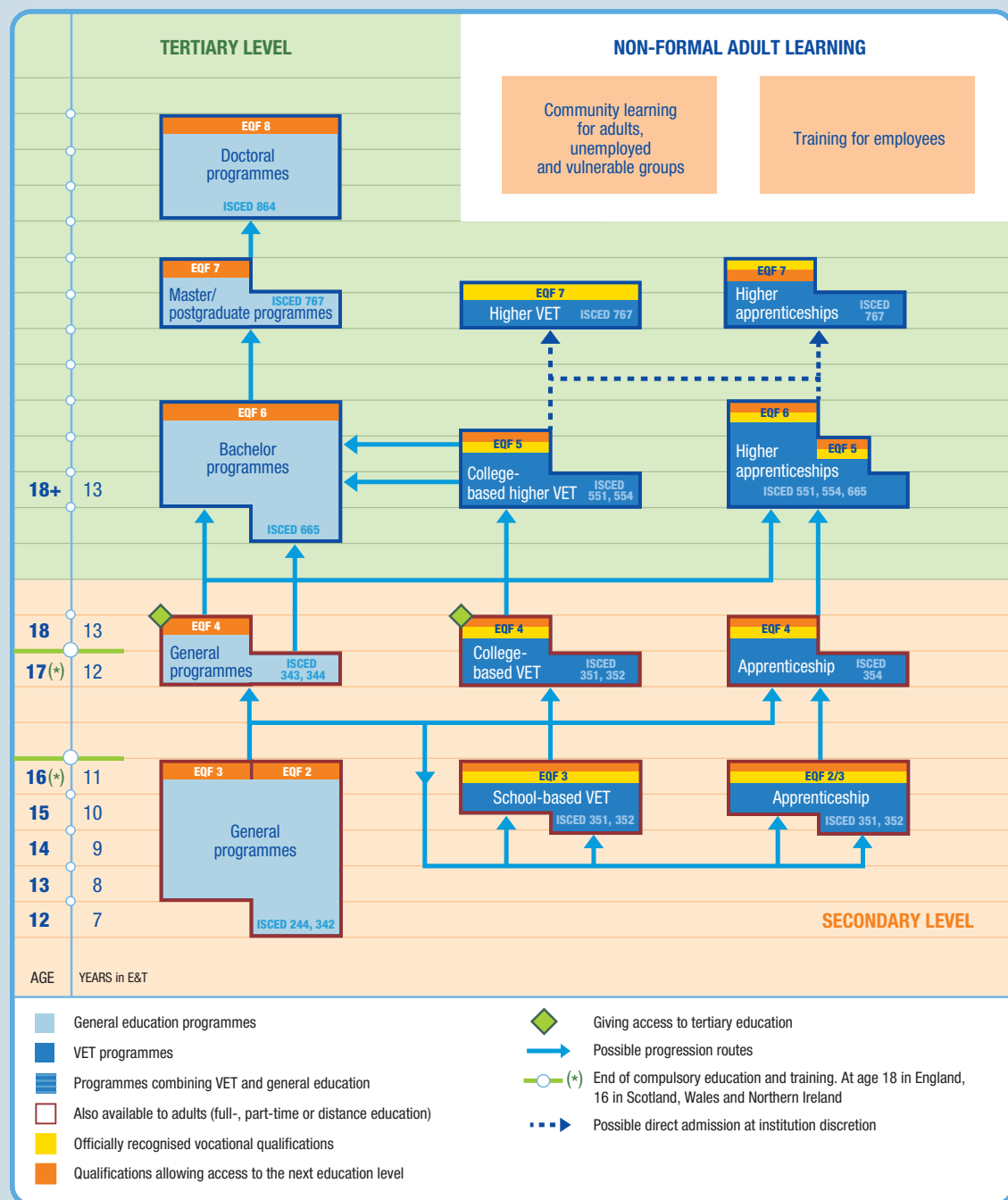
create opportunities for students to combine qualifications and subjects, which means that a larger variety of secondary qualifications may be used to apply for tertiary education. Across the UK there are also good articulation options for progression from higher VET programmes (EQF level 5), such as foundation degrees and higher national certificates and diplomas, to the second or third year of a bachelor degree in a related field. However, admission and transfer arrangements are made at the discretion of the admitting institution. Outcome agreements, in some cases, lead to guaranteed progression from one qualification type and study level to another qualification type at the next study level in Scotland.

The unit-based structure of qualifications, and their alignment to qualifications and credit frameworks, opens up the possibility of credit transfer between qualifications in line with recognition of prior learning guidelines. The UK qualifications systems also have in place the main building blocks to support the European credit system for VET (ECVET) and are now working towards its implementation for international student mobility.

Qualifications are designed by independent awarding organisations that also issue the certificates. Some offer a large variety of qualifications, often both general academic and vocational; smaller ones often specialise in a specific professional area. VET providers include secondary schools, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education colleges, higher education institutions, private training providers, and employers.

Many VET learners are adults. Adult and continuing education is part of the formal education system, but is also offered as non-formal training by employers and training providers. Trade unions, employer organisations, sector skill councils and other social partnerships are involved in providing adult education, developing learning resources and anticipating labour market needs. Employers are becoming more directly involved in skill and qualifications development.

VET in the United Kingdom's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet UK.

Distinctive features of VET

The UK government has devolved decision-making powers in several areas of policy responsibility, including governance of VET, to the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. While there are similarities between the systems in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, reforms are creating greater divergence and the Scottish system has always been different in many ways from those of the rest of the UK.

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different governance, regulation and quality assurance bodies. There is a complex institutional framework in the UK VET sector, with the policy-making authority for VET in England being the Department for Education, while the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy are responsible in Northern Ireland, and the Scottish and Welsh governments in Scotland and Wales respectively. The qualifications market in the UK is jointly driven by government policies and private interests. This has led to a large choice of qualifications and awarding organisations.

Challenges and policy responses

Matching qualifications with employer needs and increasing employer engagement with education and training are high priorities in the UK. The government's July 2016 Post-16 skills plan proposes to simplify college-based VET in England by creating clear routes to occupations through qualifications developed with input from employers by 2019. The new regulated qualifications framework introduced in 2015 gives awarding organisations increased freedom and flexibility to develop qualifications that meet specific labour market needs. Qualifications are now expected to be validated and supported directly by employers rather than follow prescriptive rules and structures imposed by government agencies.

The Scottish credit and qualifications framework retains its credit and unit-based structure. Colleges in Scotland align their provision to the needs of employers and the Scottish economy through outcome agreements and a broad range of qualifications through their new regional governance structure. The Scottish Funding Council works with colleges to ensure outcome agreements address priority needs within their regions and contribute to improving young people's life chances. The Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce also encourages colleges to develop more productive partnerships with local employers, schools and authorities.

The credit and qualifications framework for Wales continues to add clarity on the qualifications system and recognises all forms of learning across all levels and abilities. Vocational qualifications have also been classified as either IVET or CVET to clarify their purpose and whether they are introductory or lead to occupational competence. In 2015, Qualifications Wales was established as an independent agency tasked with ensuring that the Welsh qualifications system and qualifications meet the needs of learners, and promoting public confidence in the qualification system. The 2016 framework for post-compulsory education in Wales proposes to develop stronger links between education policy, providers and provision, and social and economic goals to ensure the future needs of Wales are met.

Youth training, further education, and apprenticeship reforms in Northern Ireland aim to raise skill levels of young people and will provide clear pathways from introductory VET to apprenticeships – which will start at upper secondary technician level – and higher education. Employers will be connected to education and training providers through a strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnerships to ensure curriculum design and training structure meet their needs. Further, the entitlement framework now encourages collaboration between post-14 school provision and vocational further education college provision. Centres of specialism and expertise will be set up in colleges that will develop networks of experts who will share the latest developments in curriculum and skills training.



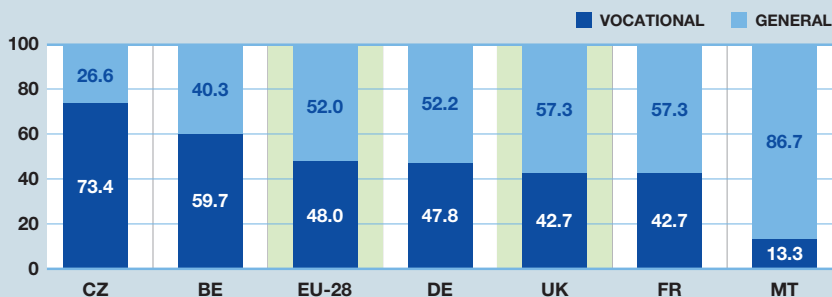
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Education and training in figures

Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes

% of all students in upper secondary education, 2014

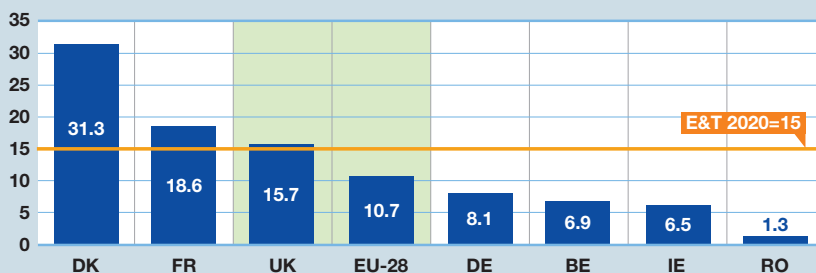


NB: 48% is the provisional weighted EU average for 2014 based on available country data (27 countries).

Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 22.3.2017.

Lifelong learning

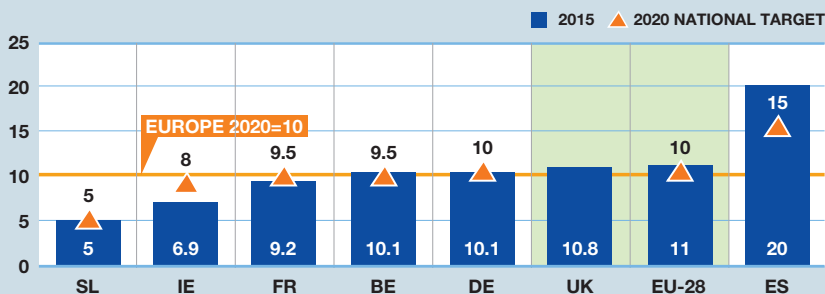
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2015



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 22.3.2017.

Early leavers from education and training

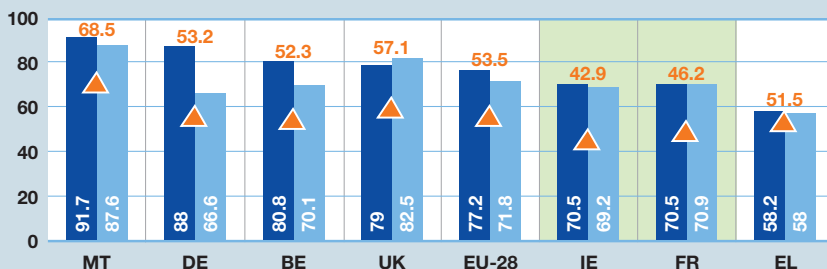
% of early leavers from education and training, 2015



NB: UK did not set any national targets for early-school leaving.

Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 22.3.2017.

Employment rates of young graduates (20 to 34 years old) no longer in education and training, 2015



■ Upper vocational secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)

■ Upper general secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)

▲ Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 22.3.2017.



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Further information

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qualificationswales.org	Qualifications Wales
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www.scqf.org.uk	Scottish credit and qualifications framework
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www.naric.org.uk	UK NARIC
www.ukces.org.uk	UKCES
gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en	Welsh Government

This Spotlight is based on input from ReferNet UK 2016.



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Publications Office

ISBN 978-92-896-2432-9



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