



Cedefop: building on the past, looking to the future

Overview

Vocational education and training (VET) is central to European strategies for lifelong learning, employment, long-term competitiveness and social cohesion. The EU, its Member States and social partners are devising policies to modernise education and training systems to make them the best in the world by 2010. Cedefop, as the EU's agency supporting VET policy development, is playing a key role. The added value of Cedefop's activities is to provide:

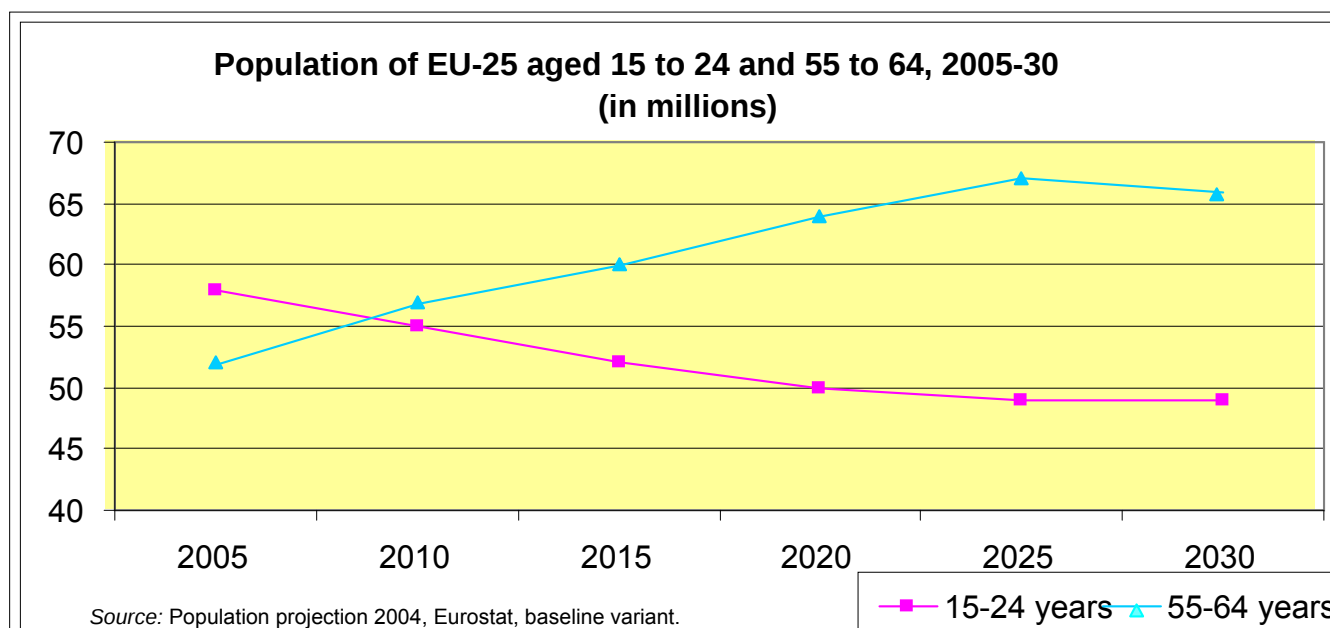
- (a) an independent scientific European perspective through research and comparative analyses of developments to raise awareness of VET issues and support VET policies across the EU;
- (b) insights into complex issues to identify common European approaches and principles to improve VET and achieve common aims;
- (c) a unique forum that brings together diverse VET interests of policy-makers, social partners, researchers and practitioners to debate proposals for policy and research;
- (d) increased awareness of the image and importance of VET, ensuring VET issues are considered in other policies, including general education, employment and social policy.

Work on EU VET policy priorities continued briskly in 2007. Cedefop supports implementation of EU VET policies and the creation of new ones by using its expertise gathered through research, analysis and networking. Cedefop provides scientific advice to the European Commission and Member States and helps develop European tools to support policy implementation. By disseminating information through its websites, publications, networks, study visits, conferences and seminars, Cedefop stimulates debate on VET in Europe.



In 2007, Cedefop focused on four key objectives:

- (a) providing evidence from research, statistical data and policy analysis to support VET policy-making;
- (b) increasing knowledge and mutual learning on VET policy and practice in Member States by analysing, monitoring and reporting on developments and policy options;
- (c) strengthening European cooperation in VET policy development by providing expertise to help design and support common European VET initiatives and tools;
- (d) increasing the visibility and understanding of VET issues through effective communication.



For 2008, Cedefop has set the same objectives as the EU aims to build on progress made to date to reach the Lisbon objectives. However, Cedefop will also look to the future as EU VET policy starts to think beyond 2010, the Lisbon deadline.

Increasing knowledge and learning on VET policy and practice in Member States

In some areas work to improve VET in Europe is going well. Good progress has been made in developing European VET instruments to make comparison of qualifications easier to support lifelong learning and mobility. For example, work on the European qualifications framework (EQF) has advanced and encouraged many Member States to devise their own national qualifications frameworks to link to it. Europass, which provides a common format for people to show their skills and experience, remains very popular among citizens. A common quality assurance framework for VET has also been agreed. Validating non-formal and informal learning, providing lifelong guidance and supporting professional development of VET teachers and trainers also score high on the European agenda. However, much remains to be done. EU Investment in VET continues to lag behind Japan and the US. Some 30 % of the European working-age population, around 80 million people, have only basic qualifications. And by 2009 there will be more people in the European workforce aged 54 to 64 than young people aged 15 to 24 – a worrying trend given that the pace of technological change requires new

skills, but older workers are far less likely to participate in continuing training and lifelong learning.

These were the overall conclusions of Cedefop's detailed **policy analysis and report** on Member States' progress in implementing EU VET policy priorities. The report followed up the Helsinki communiqué of December 2006, in which education ministers welcomed Cedefop's initial findings. Senior policy-makers, including Commissioner Figel', the Greek Education Minister and MEPs debated the outcomes and implications of the report in April 2007 at a conference on 'Building a European VET area'. Organised by Cedefop and the German Presidency, the conference was part of the preparation for Cedefop's next report for a ministerial conference under the French Presidency at the end of 2008.

In Helsinki, Cedefop's role to report on progress of EU VET policy priorities was strengthened and its 2008 report will do three things. First, review what Member States are doing to achieve the shared policy aims. Second, assess progress in implementing European VET instruments. Third, relate the report's findings to social and economic challenges and what this means for VET policy beyond 2010. To prepare the report Cedefop will use its networks, work on skill needs and other research (see below), including on how effective training funds, tax incentives, individual learning accounts and vouchers are in helping those who could not otherwise afford to participate in education and training.

Research evidence to support VET policy-making

The EU ⁽¹⁾ is expected to see a net increase of more than 13 million jobs between 2006 and 2015. However, this figure masks major structural changes that show the EU's appetite for skills growing at a rate that may pose real challenges for VET policy-makers. Initial results of Cedefop's forecast of skill needs for 2006-15 point to an increase of 12.5 million jobs at the highest qualification level (roughly graduate and post-graduate qualifications) and 9.5 million more at the medium level (upper-secondary, particularly vocational qualifications). Jobs for those with no or few formal qualifications are expected to fall by 8.5 million. Even though employment is expected to fall in the primary and manufacturing sectors, they will remain crucial to the economy and a major source of jobs demanding new skills to cope with technological changes. Labour market trends are being reinforced by changes in how jobs are done and work organised. Technological and other changes may tend to polarise jobs, creating many jobs at the higher and lower ends of the job spectrum, the latter with low pay and poor conditions. Potential shortages for high-skilled jobs as well as over-qualification for simple jobs also require a suitable policy response.

In February 2008, a Cedefop conference will debate the implications of the study's findings and how to improve them to get a clearer picture and implement the Council Resolution on 'New skills for new jobs', agreed in November 2007. For example, the study does not yet forecast the supply of skilled people compared to demand. To help address this Cedefop is working on a European skill supply forecast to help warn of possible imbalances between skill supply and demand in coming years. This will be complemented by in-depth analyses of skill needs in selected key sectors and preparation of a European survey on skill and competence needs in enterprises.

Skill needs are changing because of increased competitiveness and globalisation. However, to support policy-making beyond 2010, Cedefop's research evidence shows that these are not the only factors that need to be considered for VET policy to be effective in meeting new demands. Issues such as an ageing workforce and many people lacking the right skills require fundamental changes in VET systems and policies. Further, policy expectations that see VET not just as an economic tool, but also an instrument for

greater social cohesion, for example in the integration of immigrants into the labour market, add more pressure for change. Cedefop's research has identified how VET systems are responding to these pressures. There are moves to increase the image and attractiveness of VET, which is seen by some as inferior to general education, by improving the opportunities VET offers to help find work or go on to higher education. New qualifications frameworks are being introduced making it easier to compare qualifications and acquire them outside the formal education system. By publishing these and other findings in 2008, Cedefop will stimulate discussion about the nature and extent of changes to VET systems for the longer-term beyond 2010. Research is supported by ongoing work to improve VET statistics and indicators. In 2008, information from the continuing vocational training survey (CVTS3) which Cedefop will help Eurostat to analyse, should give new insights into VET provided by enterprises, including how much is spent, who gets trained, on what people learn and how.



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⁽¹⁾ For the EU-25 (excluding Bulgaria and Romania for which data is not available) plus Norway and Switzerland.



Seminar in the Europa room at Cedefop

Strengthening European cooperation by supporting common European VET initiatives and tools

Cedefop provides high level scientific and technical support to the clusters, networks and ad hoc groups set up by the European Commission and Member States to implement the Education and training 2010 agenda. In 2007, Cedefop advised the European Commission in preparing three Recommendations. One on the **European qualifications framework (EQF)** and a second on the **European credit system for VET (ECVET)**. Both will make it easier to compare and transfer qualifications and experience and so support mobility and lifelong learning. The third was on the **European quality assurance reference framework** to consolidate and encourage use of the common quality assurance framework (CQAF), a set of principles on which to build systems of quality assurance for VET. Assuring quality in VET is important to increase understanding of VET systems and generate trust.

In 2008, the challenge is to implement the EQF and success depends on trust. Each country must have confidence in the national qualifications frameworks of other countries (not all Member States

have them) that are linked to the EQF. To boost confidence in the EQF, Cedefop will explore ways to establish common European quality principles for certification and study quality assurance approaches for economic sectors.

EQF and ECVET are based on **learning outcomes**. Traditionally, learning inputs, the questions of when, where and how learning takes place, have decided the nature, significance and level of qualifications. However, emphasis is now moving towards learning outcomes, namely what a learner knows, understands or can do, at the end of any type of learning sequence. This shift recognises that valuable learning takes place in different settings, in schools, at work and during leisure time. Cedefop's 2007 study confirmed that learning outcomes are increasingly influencing European and national policies and practices. How big a change this is for national qualification systems is not fully known. In 2008, Cedefop will look at how qualifications systems may be affected by learning outcome approaches like **validation of non-formal and informal learning**. In 2007, Cedefop helped develop European validation guidelines and updated the European inventory on validation methods which now covers 32 countries.

To make informed choices about lifelong learning and their careers, people need **lifelong guidance**.

Cedefop's conference on guidance for employed adults in June 2007 acted as a catalyst for proposals to support initiatives and policy reforms in guidance and counselling for adults in working life. In 2008, Cedefop will report on Member States' progress in reforming guidance provision and in implementing the 2004 Council Resolution on lifelong guidance.

Europass can help people move around Europe for education, training or a job. Statistics show its popularity with European citizens. Use of the Europass portal (www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu) is constantly rising. Since its launch in February 2005, over nine million visits have been recorded, more than two million CVs completed online and over 11 million documents downloaded. Cedefop and the European Commission will continue to promote Europass, and ensure it can be used with other tools, such as the EQF and ECVET.

VET teachers and trainers need better training opportunities to update their skills and cope with changing roles and demands. In 2007, Cedefop studied the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning for VET teachers and trainers looking at how learning outside formal education and training institutions can be made more visible. Cedefop also analysed key VET professions and a common competence framework that describes their fundamental roles, skills and competences. Cedefop's VET teachers and trainers network (TTnet) will test the framework throughout 2008.

Study visits strengthen European cooperation by supporting exchanges of ideas and experience to stimulate innovation. In 2007, Cedefop worked with the European Commission and national agencies to manage the transition to the new consolidated study visits programme which Cedefop will coordinate from 2008 to 2013 and which are part of the Lifelong learning programme. New study visits in 2008 will cover education as well as VET and will have many more participants. Cedefop will ensure European VET priorities are among the visits' themes and encourage participation by social partners. While managing the transition, existing study visits for VET specialists continued. Cedefop helped organise about 55 study visits for some 750 participants from 30 countries VET institutions and experts from the three **candidate countries**, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey will participate in the new study visits programme in 2008 as part of a plan to support their integration into the EU VET policy framework.

Effective communication is essential to get this message across. Cedefop has diverse target groups with different information needs. It aims to serve them with relevant, timely, objective, reliable, and where possible, comparable information. In 2007, almost 500 news and events items were posted on Cedefop's online news service on the home page of the Electronic training village (ETV) (www.trainingvillage.gr) and the monthly ETV newsletter, which has 3 500 subscribers. Cedefop info, published in German, English and French and available online and in print, also provides updates of VET policy developments in Europe. Providing senior policy-makers with timely and brief information is a priority in 2008. Cedefop will examine ways to meet their needs better through regular briefing notes on policy developments and by improving news services. Cedefop's ETV also provides online tools to support scientific analysis and research. VET-Bib with over 60 000 references is the most complete VET bibliographical database in Europe and the European training thesaurus the most advanced multilingual tool for indexing VET-related publications. In 2007, there were an estimated 16 million visitors to Cedefop's websites (including Europass).

Towards 2010 – a new phase for Cedefop

Cedefop has just emerged from a rigorous external evaluation process with a very positive report. The evaluation noted that Cedefop is not only responding to the emerging EU VET policy agenda, but is helping influence its development, becoming a pro-active promoter of EU VET policy at the highest levels. Cedefop has been effective in producing a wide range of information for the diverse needs of a very wide constituency, performing a critical role as an open source of information for the VET community at large, acquiring a strong brand reputation and visibility in European VET. Overall, the evaluation says that Cedefop is 'an organisation with a very distinct added value. There is a strong argument that if Cedefop did not exist an organisation that looks something like it would probably have to be invented'. The evaluation charts a clear change in Cedefop's strategy towards serving its partners better in developing policy. This shift began in 2002 and accelerated from 2005. The evaluation welcomes this move, but proposes a realignment of Cedefop's priorities to avoid its resources being spread too thinly. In 2008, Cedefop and its partners will debate its strategic alignment as they prepare Cedefop's new medium-term priorities for 2009-11.

Increasing visibility and understanding of VET through communication

VET plays a crucial role in Europe's effort to reposition itself in the global economy and address the problems of an ageing workforce with low skills relative to its main competitors and increased international competition. Yet its importance is not fully understood.



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