

VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration

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Sound analysis, inspiring ideas, effective delivery



Purpose of the study

2 priorities set out at Maastricht in December 2004:

- Opening up pathways and linking VET and higher education
- The role of VET in supporting labour market and social integration of groups at risk



The Demand-side Context - 1

- Broad structural shift out of manufacturing into services
- Growth concentrated in high skill sectors and occupations
- But lower skills remain in demand
- Elementary occupations will continue to expand
- And within this occupational group the need for higher level qualifications, especially upper secondary qualifications will rise
- Therefore serious potential issues for the low skilled



The Demand-side Context - 2

- Increasing demand for qualifications after upper secondary level
- Increasing demand for general competences in contrast to technical skills and for broader vocational skill sets
- But picture is dynamic and complex, and varies by sector, occupation and country



The Demand-side Context - 3

- Needs can be for courses to develop specialisms after upper secondary level (post-secondary non-tertiary level - ISCED 4?)
- Or for courses that need tertiary level underpinning knowledge but not the same breadth (short tertiary courses – ISCED 5?)
- Or higher level practical/technical skills without the full underpinning theory provided by tertiary education (post-secondary non-tertiary level - ISCED 4?)
- Either way there is a need for greater flexibility in post-secondary VET pathways

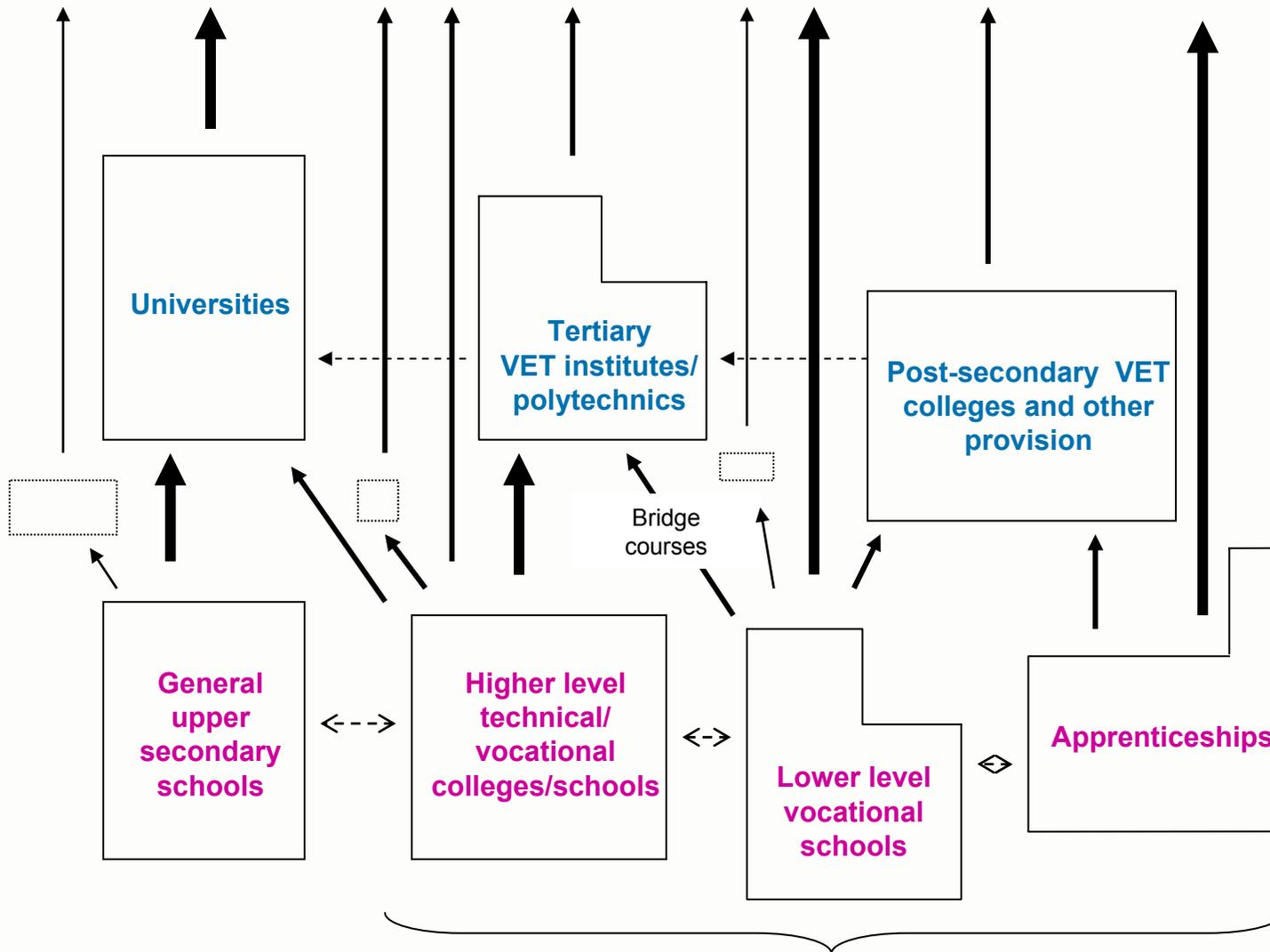


L A B O U R M A R K E T

Tertiary
(ISCED 5&6)

Post-secondary
non-tertiary
(ISCED 4)

Upper
secondary
(ISCED 3)



General education

Vocational education and training



General Developments

- Distinction between vocational and general tracks is blurring
- Share of vocational programmes devoted to generic competence development is increasing
- Vocational programmes are being broadened to avoid over-specialisation



Upper secondary level - 1

- Participation in upper secondary education is the norm
- Over half of participants are in vocational tracks but huge variation across EU – apparent fall in VET's share in new Member States
- Upper secondary still used mainly for labour market entry - except in a small minority of countries?
- Small proportion of students who do progress is slowly growing



Upper secondary level - 2

- Higher level (technical) routes being developed as a vehicle for further competence development
- Lower level school-based VET appears to be being squeezed by other options...

but also sometimes being repositioned as pre-vocational option with greater general curriculum content

- Apprenticeships undergoing resurgence (especially new Member States?):
 - being pushed out of their traditional 'home' (up and down the system)
 - better integration into education and training systems
 - increasingly seen as a better option for the less academically able



Upper secondary level - 3

- Pathways from upper secondary VET into general provision remain a minority choice
- Many people who do transfer do not necessarily go on to higher education
- In systems where tracking is not strong there are risks in reforming upper secondary provision to confer a general right to enter university for all students

- In strongly tracked systems, additional provision is required:
 - bridge courses for lower level VET
 - double qualifying pathways for technical routes

- Bridge courses mean more time spent in education. Failure rate can be high.

- Double qualifying pathways can be challenging for students. The barrier of university entrance exams can remain high. Failure on traditional academic courses at tertiary level can be high.



Upper secondary level - 4

- There is a need for a variety of transparent and viable vocational routes to higher levels that are distinctive from general provision
- Examine potential for lower level school-based VET to act as pre-vocational route (especially for disadvantaged)
- Realise full potential of apprenticeships
- Examine potential for integrated (modularised) approaches and accreditation *en route* that provides 'stepping stones' (through NQFs)
- Enhance guidance and support for students from vocational backgrounds so they can successfully progress to higher levels



Post-secondary non-tertiary provision

- Probably accounts for at most 10% of attainment and is highly variable
- Little evidence of enrolment increases at ISCED 4 despite rising demand

- A definition of PSNT needs to be agreed amongst Member States
- EQF is the obvious tool to use

- PSNT performs three main functions:
 - enables students to obtain further vocational qualifications which may also open up progression to higher levels
 - facilitates specialisation by those already on vocational tracks
 - provides a route into employment or tertiary VET for general upper secondary graduates who do not or cannot progress further in the general education system



Post-secondary non-tertiary provision

- Fills gaps in less developed VET systems where VET routes are not well established or where tertiary VET is judged deficient
- Gets round the issue of university resistance to ‘vocationalisation’
- Integration and credit transfer needs to be improved



Tertiary provision - 1

- Tertiary enrolments rising across OECD but % of population going onto vocational courses has been static
- Approximately 13% of EU tertiary students are on vocational programmes
- Old Member States have >2x the % of people enrolled in VET as New Member States
- NMS show no evidence of decline in popularity of VET at tertiary level



Tertiary provision - 2

- Distinction between vocational and general education is becoming increasingly blurred
- Whether this over-generalises VET or 'downgrades' tertiary academic education is not clear
- But there is a significant risk that it will lead to a loss of clarity in the labour market

- Pathways are generally available across Europe
- But there is extensive variation in ease of transfer
- Credit transfer and student support are institution-specific and would benefit from government intervention to ensure wider application
- ECVET offers a potential solution
- Short tertiary VET programmes need full integration through credit transfer systems



Messages

- Decline in popularity of lower level school-based VET and in some cases repositioning as a pre-vocational option
- Development of apprenticeships
- Development of higher level (technical) vocational provision and post-secondary provision as a tool for further competence development
- Expansion of tertiary provision often with little attention to VET's role

- Very few structural 'dead ends' now exist within initial VET systems

- VET students can face particular problems in accessing tertiary provision, especially general programmes

- Member States therefore need to focus on:
 - encouraging the use of existing pathways
 - ensuring that they are genuinely open by dealing with problems of failure to progress and offering effective guidance services

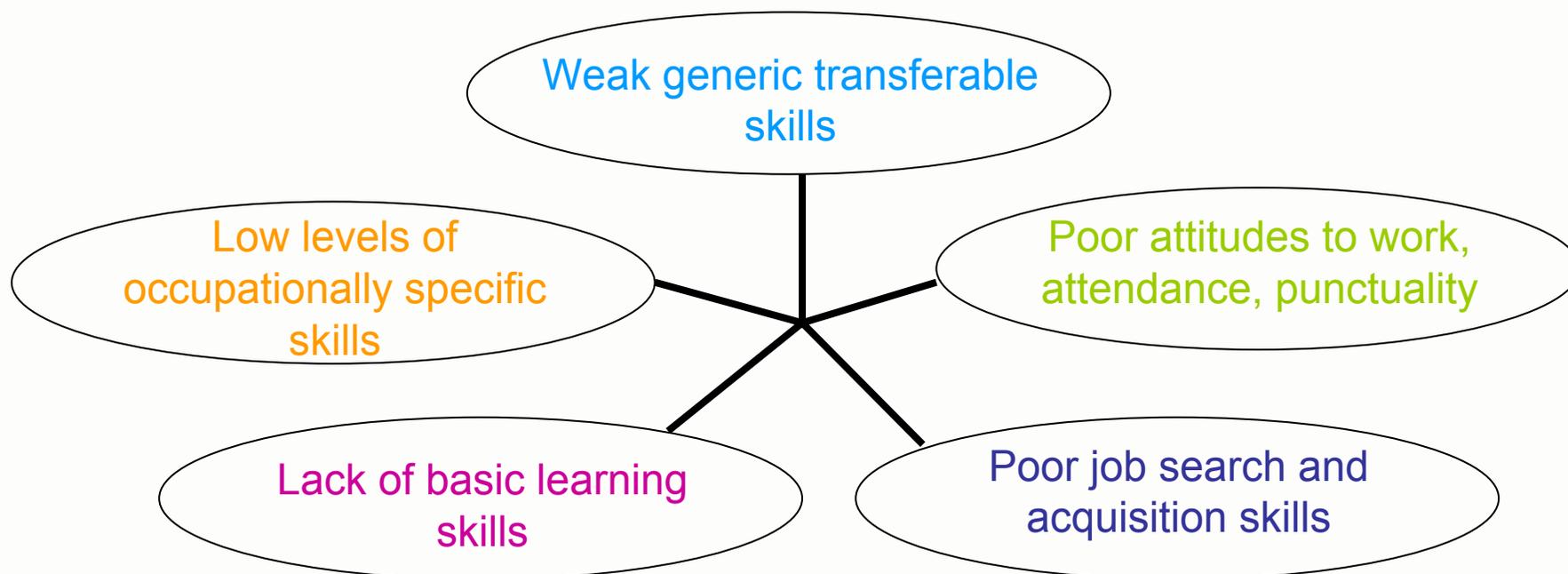


VET and labour market integration

- Disadvantage and exclusion are complex and multi-faceted phenomena
- Low skills plays a key role
- Forms of exclusion vary in their severity and this places people at different 'distances' from education and training systems
- VET is central to addressing problems of low skills although it is not *the* panacea



Competence needs of 'at risk' groups



- Weak non-occupationally specific skills are often most important
- An important feature of effective practice is the ability to integrate non-occupationally specific skills seamlessly with VET



Main features of VET to tackle social integration

- Need for a variety of VET routes to suit all aptitudes
- Broad types of VET response:
 - slimmed down provision with the possibility of part-qualification
 - modularised curricula that allow individuals to construct their own pathways
 - alternative forms of provision after the compulsory phase to re-engage students or to encourage staying-on (remedial aspect)
- These measures are likely to have most impact on ‘marginal non-learners’ unless accompanied by other (non-VET) measures, e.g. guidance and counselling



VET's varied role

- VET performs different roles ...
 - in preventing school leaving it can play a central role in tackling poor motivation and alienation but needs to be accompanied by supporting measures
 - to encourage low qualified young people and adults to take up learning again it is an essential component of more comprehensive policy packages
 - in relation to specific 'at risk' groups VET does not necessarily have a role which is distinctive from the general one it plays in relation to the low skilled: what varies are the packages of measures



Reducing early school leaving

- VET is not necessarily a universal panacea – its role is highly context specific
- Changes are likely also to need changes in social welfare regimes to ensure a shift in the relative costs and benefits of VET versus early exit
- Does early tracking entrench social division?

Not necessarily – there are many options to move tracks and the distance between general and vocational curricula is narrowing

- Is there a ‘hard core’ of early leavers who leave school regardless?

In some countries the rate of early school leaving appears to be intractable. Intensive effort is required to tackle it.



Tackling low skills amongst young people and adults - 1

- Training plays a major role in active labour market policies
- Most policy is directed at people without work and on the task of getting them back to work as quickly as possible
- VET tends to take the form therefore of short job-related provision:
 - often not accredited
 - equips people only with the immediate skills they need for a particular job

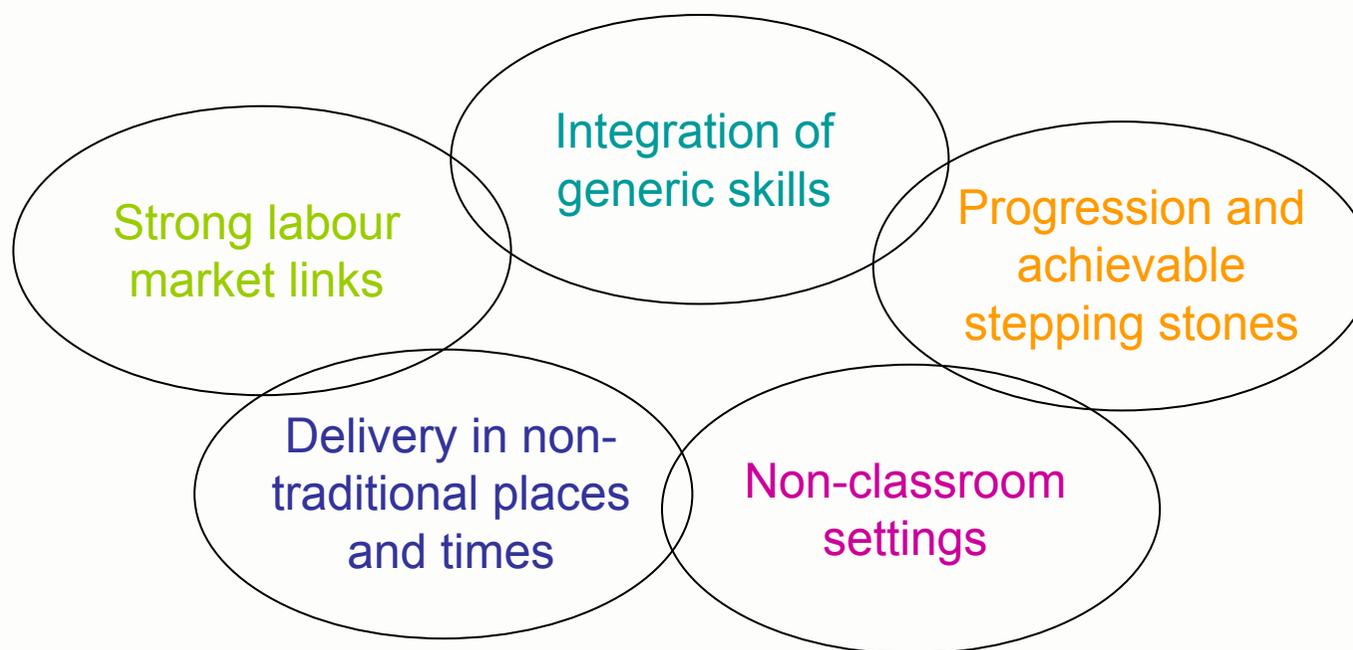


Tackling low skills amongst young people and adults - 2

- The problem of people cycling between low skilled work and unemployment is generally ignored
- Very few schemes follow up people once they find work to provide follow-up training that might keep them in work or help progression
- Meeting the needs of specific groups such as migrants and disabled people involves:
 - coupling general measures with specific ones, e.g. language training
 - measures to combat stereotyping and discrimination
- An individual's chances of being able to access provision that is well-developed and individually tailored depends on where they live



Chief cross-cutting characteristics of effective provision



➤ Holistic approaches



Features of effective holistic approaches

- Early tracking of 'at risk' individuals
- Securing people's 'buy-in', e.g. through action plans
- Flexible VET delivery
- Curriculum enhancements to enrich learning experiences

- Personalised guidance and pastoral support
- Counselling and mentoring

- Community involvement in VET design
- Mediation between communities and VET institutions

- Complementarity with social welfare and labour market regimes
- Close cooperation between agencies
- Involvement of employers and civil society organisations



Messages

- Ensure enough flexibility within national VET frameworks to allow local discretion without undermining the value of qualifications in the labour market
- Establish effective coordination or partnerships between agencies with different priorities and cultures across different levels of government
- Find the resources for packages that can be expensive
- Establish new roles like counselling and mentoring
- Involve employers more
- Involve civil society organisations more





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