



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



International Centre
for Technical and Vocational
Education and Training



Virtual conference report on

Improving the image of TVET

UNESCO-UNEVOC TVeT Forum, 16 to 24 July 2018
Moderated by Stephen Billett

Published

in 2018 by the UNESCO-UNEVOC
International Centre, Platz der Vereinten
Nationen 1, 53113 Bonn, Germany



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The virtual conference on 'Improving the image of TVET' was organized on the occasion of the 2018 World Youth Skills Day. UNESCO-UNEVOC follows the United Nations' stride in celebrating World Youth Skills Day every year on 15 July, which raises awareness about the importance of youth skills development.

As part of UNEVOC's activities, a yearly SkillsinAction photo competition is organized and the photos in this report are all entries from the 2018 competition.

Foreword

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has a key role to play in the international education agenda, as outlined under Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Three of the seven targets under the goal are specifically related to TVET, indicating that Member States realize the importance of ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality TVET for all. Other goals also have TVET-related targets, proving that skills and education are central to realizing all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, while the importance of TVET is increasingly recognized in international discourse and policies, the image of TVET can be quite challenging when compared with other educational pathways such as higher, academic education. Even in countries where there is a high-quality TVET system, initial enrolment in TVET is declining and many students continue to prefer to go to follow the academic education track as their first choice. The low image of TVET is therefore a universal concern.

There are multi-dimensional reasons influencing the image of TVET: poor quality, weak linkages with stakeholders particularly the industries, social stigma, cultural barriers, and a lack of qualified and competent teachers all contribute to the image of TVET. In order to understand these multi-dimensional factors in a deeper way, UNESCO-UNEVOC organized a virtual conference on 'Improving the image of TVET'. Participants explored the varying and similar reasons behind the image of TVET in their countries, whilst emphasizing the responsibilities of all stakeholders, from the government to the community, to address this universal concern.

The virtual conference was organized from the 16 to 24 July 2018 on the UNEVOC TVeT Forum as part of UNEVOC's activities on World Youth Skills Day 2018. Moderated by Stephen Billett, this virtual conference discussed the factors influencing the image of TVET, the consequences of this image, and the perspectives of young people. The virtual conference also looked at policies and practices that have helped improve the image of TVET.

The virtual conference was attended by 346 participants from 82 countries. The high level of participant engagement highlighted the importance of the topic to the international TVET community, as well as the benefits of bringing together actors from across the world.

This virtual conference was the twenty-first in a series of moderator-driven discussions introduced by UNESCO-UNEVOC in 2011. Conducted on the UNEVOC TVeT Forum – a global online community of over 5,500 members – and guided by an expert, these discussions provide a platform for sharing of experiences, expertise and feedback. We would like to thank Stephen Billett for sharing his expertise with the wider TVET community, which we hope will drive the discussion forward and will contribute to the development of TVET at the local, national, regional and international level. We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to all participants who took the time to share their experiences, knowledge and insights and contributed to the development of this report.

Shyamal Majumdar
Head of UNESCO-UNEVOC

Introduction

The image of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is often quite low in many countries. This includes those with advanced industrial economies as well those with developing economies.

The outcomes of having such a low image include a reluctance of young people and their parents to consider TVET as a viable educational option, viewing participation in it as a second option at best. In addition, low image can lead to reduced government, industry and enterprise sponsorship and support of TVET, thereby adding to its lack of attractiveness for young people. Yet, there is often a mismatch between the worth and benefits of TVET and decision-making about it.

As a consequence, it is necessary to identify what factors shape the image of TVET and what initiatives can be enacted so that this important educational sector is considered on its own merits, and supported more by the community, government and employers. In this way, it more likely to achieve its educational goals for young people, their communities, workplaces and nations. The virtual conference focused on these important issues.

Organized on the occasion of World Youth Skills Day 2018, this virtual conference aimed to engage with this issue by initiating, guiding and synthesising a range of perspectives, evidence and advice about the factors influencing the image of TVET and the occupations it serves and, importantly how these can be addressed to make TVET attractive to youth. The virtual conference was hosted by UNESCO-UNEVOC from 16 to 24 July 2018 on the TVeT Forum. Professor Stephen Billett, Griffith University, Australia, moderated the online activities over the nine-day period.

The virtual conference attracted 346 participants from 82 countries. Many participated directly in the online discussions. The conference provided opportunities for participants to share perspectives and information about the image of TVET and to offer suggestions on how that image could be enhanced in their countries, and elsewhere, to make TVET more attractive to young people.

The discussions were informed by earlier studies and discussions (TVeT Forum threads and other workshops) and by resources provided throughout the conference. The contributions to and outcomes of the discussion on each topic were made available to participants prior to and during the virtual conference. Additionally, other resources and links to initiatives undertaken globally associated with this important topic were shared.



346

participants from 82 countries
attended the virtual conference

The importance of TVET's image

Compared with other education sectors, in many countries the image of TVET is often quite low. This is the case in countries with advanced industrial economies as well those that might be described as having developing economies.

The consequences of TVET having a low image can be profound. They include how governments, industry, enterprises and communities view, support, fund and engage with TVET programmes. A key and growing concern is that in an era of growing aspiration, this image has negative impacts on young people's and their parents' interest and participation in TVET.

Yet, concurrently, in many countries there is a growing shortage of skilled workers to meet the requirements of enterprises and to serve communities' needs. For instance, the UK is experiencing declining levels of participation in courses for the advanced technical skills required for its economic activities (Wolf, 2016). German enterprises are experiencing difficulties securing adequate numbers of quality candidates for apprenticeships. This has led to competition amongst companies to secure such apprentices. South Korea has long struggled to attract young people to the manufacturing sector that sustains its economy (Cho & Apple, 1998). In country studies from a current UNESCO project (Work-based learning for young people in the Arab region; UNESCO, 2018), the following unsolicited statements were made about the image of TVET:

... there is a vicious cycle of negative image, low quality and low self-esteem related to TVET, its students and even its teachers in the Egyptian society and culture. This phenomena, is well documented and acknowledged, however, very little is being done to create awareness to change this. (El-Ashmawi, 2017, p. 5)

Social perspective towards vocational training in general is negative which led to minimal participation in VET in Jordan. (Rawashdeh, 2017, p. 14)

... TVET in Lebanon is socially looked as low image, and the choice of those who have no choice. (Ghneim, 2017, p. 16)

In general, it is socially looked at the TVET sector as low image, and the choice of those who have no choice: it remains a second option for youngsters... The image of the apprenticeship training and WBL schemes is looked at in a lower social view. (Palestine) (Jweiles, 2017, p. 6)

As is reported below, these comments are similar to those expressed by participants in the virtual conference. Yet, it is important to note that the reports from countries in the same study that have well-developed TVET systems (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) were more positive about its image.

Nevertheless, and as amplified through the virtual conference, there is a growing concern across countries with both developing and advanced industrial economies that young people and their parents increasingly prefer higher education over TVET as an educational pathway. This preference extends even to those university programmes that have no direct employment outcomes and, potentially, quite limited prospects of employment upon graduation. Yet, these programmes are preferred to participation in TVET, which is often viewed as a second choice or last resort, as mentioned by the virtual conference participants.



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Because of this image, when TVET is enacted in upper secondary school, it competes with pathways to university education, and when it is a post-school educational provision, it competes unequally with higher education.

Therefore, the image of TVET is important and shapes how young people select their occupations and how parents, teachers and familiars (e.g. friends and peers) advise young people about pathways into further study or working life. Consequently, beyond narrowing the range of educational, occupational and work options for young people, the low image of much of TVET and its resultant unattractiveness for young people is inhibiting the provision of a range of viable education options for young people, hindering countries from achieving their social and economic goals, and preventing enterprises from securing the skilled workers required for maintaining their viability. As a consequence, it is important to know how TVET's image might be enhanced. This enhancement is to provide the opportunity for TVET to be considered more fairly as a viable educational pathway, and to inform young people, parents, employers and educators about its potential.



Objectives and scope of the virtual conference

The intended outcomes of the conference were for participants to:

- Understand the factors influencing the image of TVET, and the impact this image has on individuals, business and society;
- Appreciate some of the factors and challenges impacting the decisions of young people when choosing their career/education path;
- Identify suitable measures that can help improve the image of TVET in their context; and
- Explore ways to assess the impact of measures to improve the image of TVET.

The structure and sequencing of the virtual conference's events are founded on the following five topics that comprised the focus for the activities across the nine-day event. It is these topics that generated the discussions reported in this report.

Topics and questions discussed

Topic 1 – The image of TVET and its consequences

This topic was used to discuss what is understood by the image of TVET and why it is important to address it. Specifically, the topic asked participants:

- What constitutes the standing and image of TVET, as defined above, in your country?
- In what ways does that standing differ across occupational sectors, communities or societal groups?
- What are the personal, social and economic consequences of TVET having this standing or image?

Topic 2 – Factors shaping the image of TVET

This topic was used to identify some of the factors influencing the image of TVET, and demonstrate that understanding the image of TVET necessitates accounting for perceptions and societal factors, but also the quality and market value of the TVET system. Specifically, the thread had participants reflect on:

- What are the origins of the low image or standing of TVET in your country?
- What actions can bring about change in the origins of that image or the messages arising from those sources of this image?

Topic 3 – Perspectives of young people, their parents and familiars

Personal factors are important in terms of how young people make decisions about their participation in TVET based upon its image and its alignment with their own personal goals, including those of their parents. It was noted that the American philosopher John Dewey stated that the first goal when educating for occupations is to assist young people identify to what occupation they are suited. Therefore, this topic focused on perspectives of young people, their parents and associates, about the image of TVET, as these are central to the effectiveness of



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this education provision, through addressing the following questions:

- What is the array of factors that influence young people's decision-making about TVET?
- What can we do as educators or advisors to realise Dewey's first goal of assisting young people identify to what occupation they are suited?

Topic 4 – Policies and practices that might enhance the image of TVET

This topic focused on the kinds of policies and practice that might be enacted by national governments, local interest groups or communities, enterprises and educational systems as well as global agencies such as UNESCO to enhance the image of TVET. As evident in the views presented in earlier posts, while there were common issues associated with the image of TVET, across the participants' countries, there are different institutional practices (i.e. the form of TVET), provisions of TVET (i.e. quality, scope, level), and societal sentiments (i.e. parental or young people's aspirations) that have led to particular perceptions about TVET that are associated with its image. The following question then lead to suggestions about what stakeholders might do to enhance this image:

- What are the three things governments, communities, educators, employers and global agencies should be doing to enhance the image of TVET in your country?

Topic 5 – Evaluating the impact of those policies and practices

This topic focused on how the impact of these policies and practices might be evaluated. This focus is helpful because it supports and augments considerations of the nature and enactment of efforts to enhance the image of these occupations that have been discussed in previous topics. It is also acknowledged that these actions are likely to be quite different across countries, industry sectors and communities. The participants were asked to identify:

- What three actions, their process and kind of outcomes should be evaluated?

Summary of the discussion

Topic 1

Consequences of the image of TVET

The contributions of participants from across a range of continents and countries suggest that the image of TVET is consistently low and its consequences are widely manifested. Overall, with a few exceptions, the participants reported that the current image of TVET limits its attractiveness to young people, their parents, and even employers. The exceptions are the few instances where TVET is associated with more prestigious occupations or institutions and is given terminology that is attractive to young people and their parents. Some of the contributions illustrating these sentiments are:

'[...] as we all may know TVET is, at best, viewed as a second or non-preferred choice.' (Ghana)

'The overall perception of TVET in Nigeria is generally seen to be poor. This is characterized by low enrolment of students, apparent lack of interest in the field by students and parents, slim chances of career progression from technical colleges to universities [...].'

'Most Nigerian parents view Vocational courses as the last resort for their wards.'

'In Romania, despite the programmatic drive to reshape the image of initial VET, it has a discrediting societal bias.'

'TVET is still mostly seen as being suited for learners who are "academically challenged" and whose only option is to "work with their hands".' (Barbados)

'To many people, the vocational trades are viewed as "hands dirty" types of skills.' (Ethiopia)

In particular, the virtual conference participants reported that TVET is seen in many of their countries as a 'second best' option for young people. It is for those who are less educated and competent, for those who failed at school or with a profile associated with migrant communities (i.e. the Netherlands), or for 'lower castes' (i.e. India) as expressed by participants from those countries. These perceptions have resulted in a negative media image, in low self-esteem among TVET students, and in young people or their parents preferring other options in upper secondary or post-secondary schooling.

Some participants from African countries also reported that employers have high (i.e. unrealistic) demands and want employees with degrees, so young people prefer pathways to higher education. Consequently, TVET is sometimes viewed as a dead-end and there is a lack of clarity of the worth of TVET

"There are very few youth who want to take up Vocational and Technical Training because they do not want to be viewed as failures"

A participant from Kenya



"In China, the image of TVET is low or poor, compared with the corresponding levels of education [...]"

by students, parents and employers. In addition, in some countries (i.e. Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands) higher education institutions are now offering degrees referred to as 'applied learning', making it more difficult to attract students to TVET programmes that are perceived to be lower level.

Specific consequences

There are a series of consequences, because of this image, that have been acknowledged elsewhere (Billett, 2014; Clement, 2014; Wolf, 2016) including support from

government, industry and employers and attractiveness to young people and their parents. What was advanced and discussed by the respondents in the virtual conference was of a similar kind. All of this inhibits TVET's role in addressing the global problem of youth unemployment, let alone the task of engaging young people in developing skillful knowledge of the kind required for occupational practice.

The participants provided a range of consequences of this low image which, when collated, forms the list that is presented in the box below.

- lack of clarity about the worth of TVET by students, parents and employers
- only for underperforming young people – no pathways to higher education
- employers have high demands and want employees with degrees
- young people prefer pathways to higher education
- higher education is offering degrees referred to as applied learning making it more difficult to attract students to TVET
- last resort for school failures and dropouts
- TVET provisions not meeting labour market requirements
- discrepancies in the quality of TVET provisions
- TVET institutions lack the resources to provide adequate preparation for work
- parents are disengaged
- few options to engage internationally
- low self-esteem of TVET students
- negative media image
- TVET graduates get caught up in a cycle of unemployment/low-status work
- low student enrolment
- low expectations of TVET teachers in terms of work experience
- easy entry and potentially lower expectations often lead to limited outcomes from TVET programmes
- not able to assist the large numbers of young people who are unemployed
- underdeveloped policy for TVET
- emphasis on immediate employment not occupational career development
- lack of acceptance by employers
- lack of fulfilment by TVET students

Instances of the vicious cycle of low standing and consequent focus and quality of the TVET educational provision were also reported, particularly by contributors from African countries. Here it was proposed that: (a) TVET provisions are not always meeting labour market requirements; (b) discrepancies and inconsistencies exist in the quality of TVET provisions; (c) TVET institutions lack the resources to provide adequate preparation for employment/work; and (d) students have few options to engage internationally through TVET. It was also claimed that many teachers in TVET have limited work experience in the field in which they educate young people. In addition, easy entry into TVET programmes and low

expectations by teachers often lead to poor outcomes from these programmes that perpetuate its relatively low image.

For these reasons, on the one hand, TVET is sometimes unable to assist young unemployed people; on the other hand, where the educational emphasis is on immediate employment, it is not perceived to be offering occupational career development. So, either way, TVET is seen as not securing the kinds of fulfilment desired by young people. All of these issues serve to undermine the image of TVET.

Topic 2

Factors shaping TVET's image

The contributions from participants representing countries with diverse economic and social circumstances and from ensuing discussions suggest that the image of TVET is shaped by historical (e.g. colonial, class-based, caste-based), cultural (e.g. preference for 'clean', high-status occupations) and institutional (e.g. level of education, remuneration) factors and the particular complex of factors that shape how that is manifested in each country. These factors, moreover, are often sustained and even exacerbated by current arrangements in education, particularly when TVET in upper secondary schooling is seen as competing against 'academic' streams, and in post-school provisions competing with university education. The virtual conference's respondents suggested a range of sources of the low image of TVET and made a range of specific suggestions.

Historical factors

A participant from Norway suggested that the legacy of vocational education, as it was used in colonial times as an educational tool to both pacify and capitalise on the available labour by colonial authorities, is still strong and causes disaffection with TVET. This informant continued that the recent use of educational models such as competency-based training emphasize utility and organizing the 'easy' forms of knowledge perceived to be required for the occupations that TVET serves.

A participant from the British Virgin Islands also referred to historical legacies that have formed strong cultural sentiments about occupations, what constitutes worthwhile work, and educational pathways. They also referred to how particular forms of work (service) have a low image even though these are central to the economy. This again emphasizes links between TVET and the occupations it serves. This participant also pointed to the essential nature of these skills in times of natural catastrophes, and the reliance upon these workers to rebuild the infrastructure upon which society is sustained.

Institutional factors

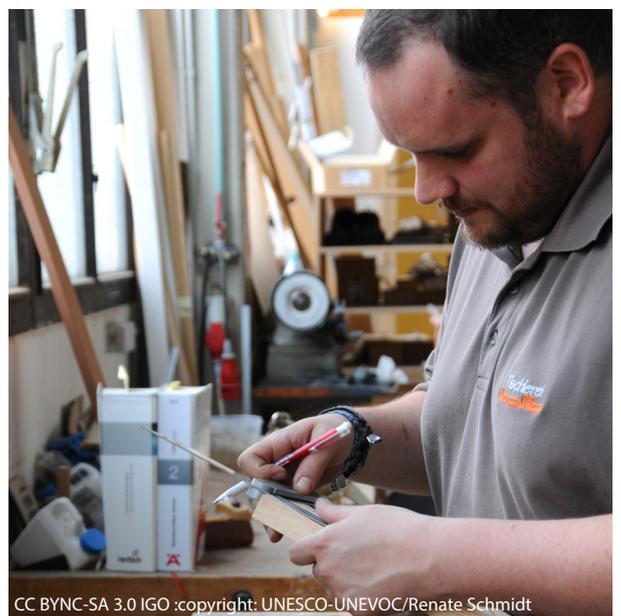
A participant from the Netherlands suggested that institutional siloing within education was shaping its image, noting that TVET graduates became more marketable when: (a) they had UG level qualifications; and (b) the content and experiences in their courses made them marketable. From the United Arab Emirates (UAE), it was suggested that the separation of vocational education from general education is a source of the former's low status. However, the same set of characteristics draws complaints when applied to other forms of work that are seen to be less prestigious for a participant from Barbados. This indicates that issues associated with the attractiveness of occupations are likely to be central to enhancing the image of TVET. The informant from the UAE proposed that appropriate and attractive institutional and qualification measures, when applied to TVET, might assist enhancing its image.



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A participant from Nigeria offered a comprehensive set of contributions comprising institutional factors. They stated that the image of TVET is constrained by: (a) the educational institutions' ability to offer attractive and worthwhile educational revision; (b) the lack of understanding within the community, particularly one that has had no direct interaction with TVET; (c) the lack of specialist teachers; and (d) the weak initial and ongoing development of teachers that restricts their ability to offer relevant or worthwhile experiences. They also suggested remedies in the form of: (a) educational institutions being left alone to focus on the provision of education free of external interference; (b) TVET workforce members placing their professional obligations ahead of personal ones; (c) TVET institutions being adequately funded and resourced; (d) having compulsory post-school pathways for students not moving directly into work or higher education; (e) TVET programmes including entrepreneurialism and business practices; and (f) having measures of performance pertinent to the particular country.

An informant from Barbados also referred to institutional arrangements. They critiqued education provisions that are ineffective in providing for the needs of learners who struggle to meet the performance requirements of those institutions. This, they proposed, is becoming accentuated with TVET provisions now having entry requirements that make course entry more difficult. This institutional preference is then directing parents and young people's choice. They outlined a series of measures to have TVET provisions at all levels of education, yet also to include 'general' education provisions within these levels of education. This, they noted, includes having nationally coherent qualification frameworks, career advice and curriculum formation.

Two informants from Tanzania also referred to institutional problems associated with: (a) the alignment of TVET programmes with employment opportunities; (b) lack of secure funding and unwillingness of social partners, such as employers, to engage productively; and (c) those employers that do are fewer in number than the demand requires. They also referred to concerns about: (a) the quality of the educational provision; (b) teachers'

experience and their occupational and pedagogic skills; (c) students' ability to access TVET provisions; and, perhaps not surprisingly, (d) these provisions being held in low regard by young people and their parents. They emphasized that for the image to be enhanced, issues of the overall quality and relevance of TVET provisions need to be addressed, as do the qualification frameworks and engagement with social partners.

One participant advanced a list of institutional factors that have led to the particular provision of TVET and its perceptions within the Nigerian community. They offered a remedy that mirrors the progression of general schooling and higher education, that is, of articulated stages of TVET, and from basic to more specialised occupational preparation. Those remedies extend to requiring a more systematic approach to TVET that encompasses the advice and engagement of social partners, and for this to be accompanied by processes that enhance standing and engagement with all streams of Nigerian society.

Another participant from Nigeria summarised much of what other contributors have proposed by offering a typology of institutional, parental, and societal factors that shapes the image of TVET in Nigeria, but likely elsewhere. They proposed remedies for the low image of TVET through: (a) more effectively systematising the provision of TVET; (b) making its facilities and provisions relevant and contemporary; (c) having public education about TVET; and (d) securing governmental support for pathways to employment after graduation. These together, they proposed, would assist enhancing the image of TVET for young people and their parents.

In these ways, the common factors across these contributions are institutional factors such as poorly resourced TVET institutions, teachers lacking appropriate occupational knowledge and experience, and limited pedagogic capacities. These factors likely have to be redressed within each country and in particularly ways. There is also societal action required to inform about and elevate the standing of occupations.





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Cultural factors

There were also a series of cultural factors identified: the product of societal sentiments comprising the preference of young people, their parents and employers that shape not only the image of TVET, but also how they participate with it. It is suggested that young people's decision-making about educational and work pathways is a product of negotiating between personal preferences and rational factors (Clement, 2014). These processes require public education about the educational options and pathways for young people and processes in schools and other places to inform and assist in making decisions about those pathways.

So, these contributions refer to a complex of historical, institutional and cultural factors that initiate and sustain a cycle of low standing for TVET. Moreover, currently, the aspirations of young people and their parents reinforce and sustain these factors. These aspirations are often misaligned with the standing of the occupations that TVET serves, thereby linking the image or valuing of these occupations and the education system that prepares young people for them. Hence, when occupations that TVET prepares young people for have a low image, then correspondingly this is transferred to this provision of education.

This concern about the views and decision-making of young people leads well to the following topic that focuses directly on their views.

Topic 3

Views of young people about the image of TVET

As the ultimate consumers of TVET, young people's perspectives on the image of TVET are particularly important. Contributors consistently stated that how young people come to view TVET is shaped by, amongst others, parents, familiars, teachers and social media. So, it is these influencing factors that are likely to be the focus for efforts to enhance the image of TVET.

Participants proposed that young people's preferences are not surprising when academic pathways and universities are highly privileged and prized as are many of the occupations that they serve (the Netherlands, India, Nigeria and Singapore), and seen as leading to desirable forms of work (i.e. 'clean', well-paid and secure) (Nigeria). A participant from China proposed that when the courses are attractive and responding to economic need, they attract the kinds of students who could secure university admission. From Nigeria, it was suggested that students should be able to identify and select their preferred occupation and then be supported in achieving that preference. This process needs to be informed and mediated so that young people are realistic and targeted in their choice of educational and work pathways, according to a participant from the UAE.

A helpful contribution was provided by a participant from Nigeria who proposed a framework (see below) to

understand this issue from students' perspectives; added here are analogous contributions from others. It comprises the following elements:

Kinds of students in TVET

Students who are viewed as being not academically strong (Nigeria).

Purposes of TVET

Young people view the purposes of TVET as:

- a fall-back, if university education does not provide employment (Nigeria, UAE);
- securing their preferred occupation (Nigeria); and
- preparing them for the world of work.

Re-privileging TVET

Periods of unemployment prompt fresh consideration of the development of employable skills of the kind that can be provided through TVET. Participants from Nigeria and Barbados referred to the Clement (2014) study indicating that the key influencers in young people's decision-making are parents, teachers, work experience and school guidance officers. The first two (i.e. parents and teachers) are particularly important as participants from a number of countries indicated (e.g. Kenya, Nigeria). However, whilst

influential, parents may have limited and narrow understandings about and perspectives on work life and educational options. Consequently, public education about TVET may need to be directed towards parents.

As already noted, many young people's preferences are not surprising. This is because academic pathways and universities are highly privileged and prized, as are many of the occupations that university education serves. These pathways are seen as leading to desirable forms of work (i.e. 'clean', well-paid and secure). So, if TVET is viewed as leading to occupations that are viewed (rightly or wrong) as 'dirty', physical, and highly subordinated labour, it is not surprising that young people are not attracted to them and view as lowly the image of the educational system that leads to them.

Of course, there is some counter evidence to suggest that when young people are able to participate effectively within TVET and enjoy positive outcomes from it, these perceptions change and TVET is then seen as being highly positive and worthwhile. Moreover, as noted, when the provision of TVET is seen to be enacted in prestigious institutions leading to high levels of certification, its image is far higher.

All this sets out the need to identify policies and practices that can enhance the image of TVET and make it more attractive to young people.



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Topic 4

Recommendations for policy and practice

It is evident from the contributions to the virtual conference that there are a complex of factors that shape the image of TVET, and these factors are doing much to make that image low for young people, their parents, communities and sometimes employers. Those factors include the kind and quality of TVET provisions, the standing of the occupations it serves, the height and aspirations of young people and parents, and the lack of support, funding and engagement by government and industry.

The recommendations about ways forward, therefore, cannot be solely about changes to and reforms in TVET, its institutions and workforce. However, each of these factors, as noted above, requires attention. In addition, it is necessary for decision-making by young people, parents and others in the community to be more informed

and balanced. Also, there is an important role played by industry and employers to engage with and support TVET provisions and to champion the occupations they represent and the kind of work that they are seeking to attract young people to learn about and engage in.

The participants were asked to identify policies and practices that would, in their countries, likely assist in enhancing the image of TVET. A significant number of responses were submitted by participants from a range of countries. The following sections are a collation and synthesised set of broad suggestions that essentially comprise a set of policy and practice recommendations for what government, communities, employers, TVET institutions and global agencies such as UNESCO need to be doing.

Government

Government should promote the image of TVET by: (a) championing the standing of TVET and the occupations it serves; (b) legislating and mandating institutional arrangements (e.g. facilities for teaching and learning, training and certification of teachers) for TVET to be a viable and worthwhile educational sector; (c) engaging with a wide array of stakeholders to inform, enact, participate in and evaluate TVET policies and provisions; and (d) resourcing TVET adequately so it is able to achieve the goals governments want and, in doing so, attract greater interest from young people, their parents and employers.

For example, participants noted that in the UAE they are emphasizing educational programmes with an applied learning focus, and also a 'professional' stream in schools, thereby emphasizing the importance of practical and applicable learning outcomes. In Nigeria, the government is funding a specific institution to train technical teachers. In the Caribbean, the government has organized a specific qualification to ensure that every school student engages in TVET.

Communities

Communities should promote the image of TVET by: (a) embracing TVET provisions and acting to ensure they are worthwhile and worthy of the communities' young people; (b) advocating for TVET, its programmes, institutions, provisions, policies and outcomes; and (c) supporting TVET in ways that will deliver solid and worthwhile outcomes for communities, young people and local workplaces.

For example, participants reported that in Nigeria, communities celebrated Youth Skills Day and promoted the importance of skill development. In countries in Europe, community needs are often expressed through Chambers of Commerce that develop effective working relationships with local TVET institutions; these arrangements are also evident in Algeria, Jordan and Morocco.



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Employers

Employers should promote the processes and image of TVET by: (a) providing students with work experiences that support the development of their occupational skills to make them effective and employable; (b) engaging with TVET institutions, local communities and other partners to promote the worthiness of occupations and importance of skills; and (c) advocating for the importance of the work they undertake to attract young people to that work and emphasize the value of the skills development provided by TVET.

For example, where TVET is viewed as effective and as having a strong image is often in countries where employers engage as social partners with TVET. It is possible to look beyond Germany and Switzerland for where these partnerships work and are effective. Countries such as Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Palestine also have arrangements in which employers become social partners. This is often promoted and made possible by local Chambers of Commerce.

Educators

Educators should work to enhance the processes and image of TVET by: (a) being competent in their occupational and teaching capacities in ways that heighten the importance of TVET and the occupations they teach and prepare students for; (b) being open to others' contributions, including those of students, community and workplaces and be willing to update their knowledge; and (c) engaging in teaching activities in ways that demonstrate their professional commitment and promote its importance to their communities, workplaces, students and their parents.

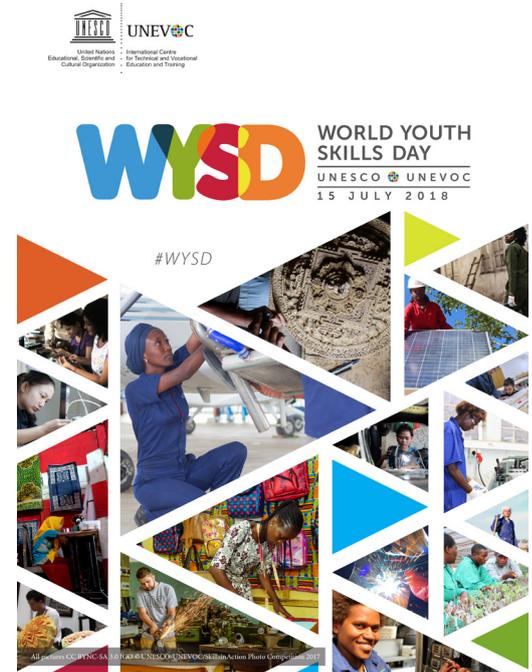
For example, contributors noted that in the Caribbean the University of West Indies has established a program for TVET instructors. Also, it is suggested that in China the TVET provisions are increasingly focusing on the needs of the society and enterprises and thereby are becoming more relevant and attractive to young people.

Global agencies

Global agencies such as UNESCO should promote the image and processes of TVET by: (a) advocating for and showcasing, sharing and distributing instances of effective practice to enhance the image of TVET; and (b) supporting countries, TVET systems, teachers and communities and engaging effectively and positively with TVET provisions.

For example, it was noted by participants that UNESCO is organizing the World Youth Skills Day and using this as global event to encourage consideration of skill development for young people. The International Labour Office is supporting models of apprenticeship that meet the needs of students and are aligned with the resources and needs of countries' educational systems and workplaces.

Hopefully, these suggested actions in the form of policies and practices to be undertaken by government, community, employers, educators and global agencies will be helpful to guide actions, albeit in different ways across the range of countries represented in this virtual conference.



Topic 5

Evaluating the impact of those policies and practices

After such a detailed set of contributions about factors shaping the image of TVET, and what needs to happen to enhance its image, it is perhaps not surprising that the responses about how to evaluate the impact of these policies and practices were largely those endorsing the previous contributions. That is, the comprehensive nature of the sets of responsibilities and posited outcomes were such that not a lot further was added in terms of new content. However, from a participant from Kenya came some practical measures by which the impact of these policies and practices might be evaluated. These are as follows:

- Increased enrolment in TVET institutions;
- Higher employability index;
- Reduced skills gap;
- High absorption rates (i.e. employment);
- Reduced unemployment;
- International/regional workshops/conferences;
- Financial support; and
- Regional (digital) forums/networks.

These kinds of measures are, ultimately, the basis upon which the success of these policies and practices would be assessable in terms of government action, community engagement and perceptions of employers and young people about the worth of TVET.

Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, there was wide interest and a lot of engagement in this topic of this virtual conference, and many helpful contributions were posted by participants from a wide range of countries. Clearly, this is an issue that attracts much attention and has motivated this wide engagement.

We commenced with Topic 1 that generated responses from a range of perspectives and also considerations about what constitutes the image of TVET and the consequences arising from it in terms of how people might be attracted to it, participate in it and then be accepted as a result of completing TVET programmes. Through this process it was identified that there were many similar issues raised across the whole range of countries and across continents from which contributions were provided. There was also a range of country-specific or relevant issues that provided instances of these consequences that were posted by participants.

Then, in Topic 2, the source of the image of TVET was discussed. Identified here was a range of factors associated with historically derived esteem in which occupations and TVET are held, as well cultural factors and institutional factors associated with the way that TVET is positioned, resourced and supported. Factors were associated with aspirational young people and parents eager to seek the highest levels of education for their children. It became clear that when TVET is undertaken in upper secondary schools, it competes with the stream associated with university entrance. Yet, when TVET is a post-school educational option, it competes directly with university education. In both of these situations, unless a careful and reasoned approach is taken, TVET then becomes a secondary option against the preferred default of higher education.

We then, in Topic 3, considered young people's perspectives. Issues here are associated with the negotiations between aspirational options and the realities of study options, employment and parental pressure. What emerged were instances of how TVET might be portrayed with a positive and productive image and much of this has to occur in the circumstances in which young people make decisions about their educational pathways.

A range of policy decisions and enactments were discussed and evaluated in Topic 4 in terms of what

might be successful in particular country contexts and this provided categories of initiatives to be conducted by government, workplaces, community, and also educators. Here, because of the comprehensive list of responses provided, it was possible to aggregate and suggest the way a range of initiatives might be enacted to bring about a stronger and more informed image of TVET.

Finally, these actions permitted a set of strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives which were discussed in Topic 5 to identify ways in which we could evaluate the outcomes of enhancing the image of TVET, through a consideration of actions, strategies and means of evaluation.

The outcomes of the deliberations across the virtual conference are evident in the sections above, and emphasize a range of common factors that transcend national boundaries and even continental divides, not to mention the relative economic development of those countries. It becomes clear from the listings here that on their own, single interventions such as those taking place within TVET institutions will be unsuccessful without accounting for broader engagement with the community, including employers. This includes seeking to inform, and changing the perspectives of, young people and their parents. Committed and long-term government action is also likely to be required here. So, just as the problem of the relatively low image of TVET is a product of a complex of factors, it can only be addressed by a similar range of initiatives seeking to redress those problems.

Given that there are clearly differences in the image of TVET across countries, there are real possibilities for enhancing that image, but there are also risks about further weakening it. Consequently, carefully organised and evidence-based approaches are required for elevating the image of TVET across all countries, but in specific ways that are most suited to the historical, institutional and cultural requirements of those countries.

About the moderator

Dr Stephen Billett is Professor of Adult and Vocational Education in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia and a National Teaching Fellow and Australian Research Council Future Fellow. After a career in garment manufacturing, he worked as a vocational educator, educational administrator, teacher educator, professional development practitioner and policy developer in the Australian vocational education system and as a teacher and researcher at Griffith University.

Since 1992, he has researched learning through and for work and has published widely in fields of learning of occupations, workplace learning, work and conceptual accounts of learning for vocational purposes. He is a Fulbright Scholar (1999), National Teaching Fellow (2008-2010), and Australian Research Council Future Fellowship (2011-2015). In 2013, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Jyväskylä University (Finland) and elected Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia in 2015. He currently leads research projects in Australia, Singapore and the Middle East.



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