



Understanding and analysing vocational education and training systems – An introduction

Current version as of 25.4.2019
Draft to be further refined and developed

About this introduction

Who commissioned this?

Commissioned by SDC, focal point employment and income. The text expresses the view of the main authors and does not necessarily reflect SDC positions or the opinion of the persons and institutions who provided feedback.

For whom is it?

This introduction is made for VET practitioners in development cooperation who want to better understand and analyse how VET systems function and how their different elements interrelate.

Why was this introduction into understanding and analysing VET systems produced?

- To provide an introduction to understanding and analysing VET systems for those working in VET contexts;
- To improve the quality of SDC's VET interventions based on a better understanding of VET systems;
- To provide input for SDC's position in the discussion about systemic approaches to development.

Who produced this?

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Note: The views expressed in this introduction are those of the main authors and do not necessarily represent the position of SDC or any other person or organisation mentioned above providing feedback to it.

Where can I leave feedback?

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Part I

1 VET demand and access

VET – vocational education and training – serves a **double** purpose, and meets two sorts of demand:

- First, it has to provide the economy with the skilled labour it needs to produce wealth. In this sense it meets an **economic** demand;
- Secondly, it has to equip citizens, and in particular young people, with the skills they need if they are to find and keep a job, or to start their own business. This is the most important way they can integrate themselves into society and the labour market, and develop personally. In this sense it meets a **social** demand.

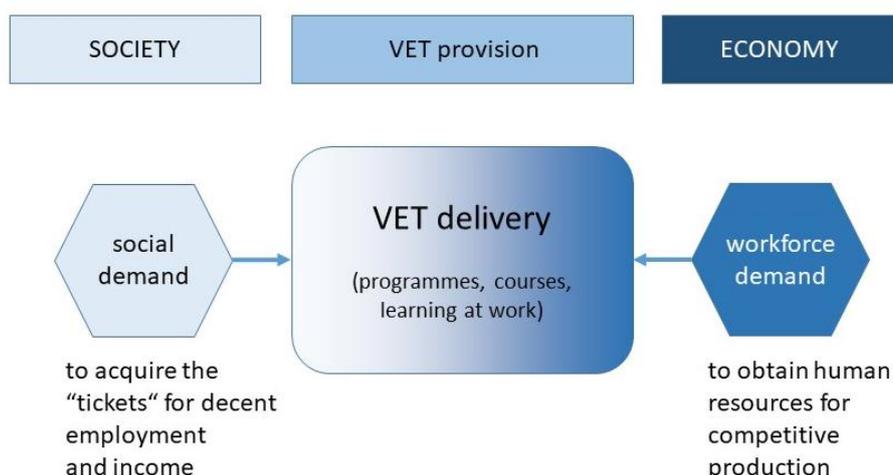


Illustration 1

Both the social and the economic demand, however, are heterogeneous and subject to frequent changes. They consist of many different components, which vary and interrelate in complex ways.

1.1 Social demand

Let us have a look at the **social demand** first. Here we can distinguish at least the following main groups of clients for VET:

1. school-leavers at different educational levels who opt for VET
2. school drop-outs (out of school youth)
3. special needs groups, such as people with no formal schooling, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees and demobilised soldiers
4. unemployed people (adults), and

- under-employed and employed people who need or want to update their skills in order to keep their job or to get promoted.

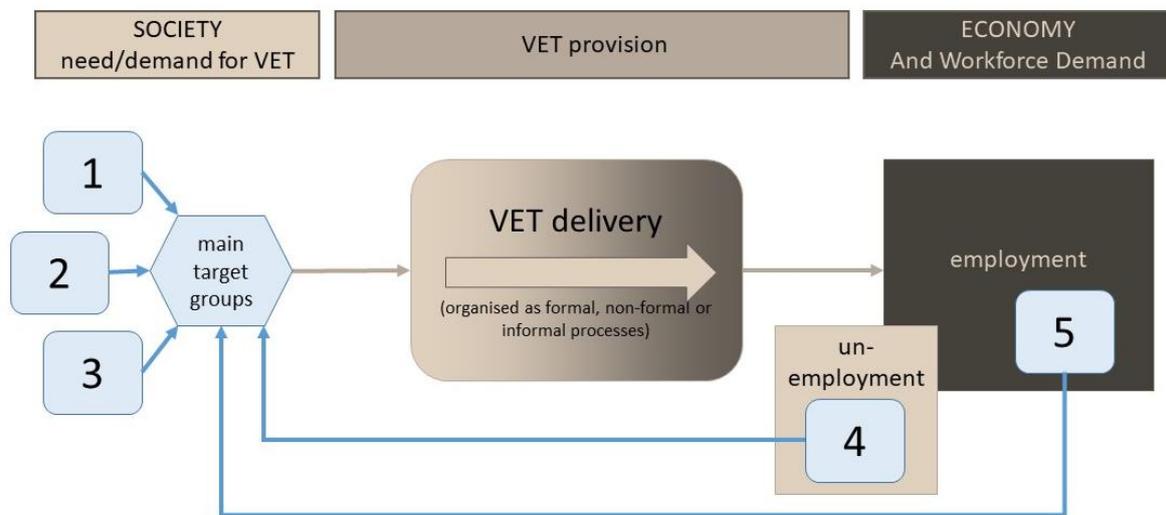


Illustration 2

It is obvious that these different groups have diverse expectations, aspirations, and specific needs – and VET systems have to respond to these as much as possible. When thinking about reforming or intervening in a VET system, it is therefore decisive to clearly identify the specific groups you intend to serve, and to analyse their demands.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding social demand:

- What are the main target groups to be addressed by the VET system (or a VET reform or intervention)?
- What are their aspirations, expectations, and specific needs?
- What are their prerequisites and constraints – for instance in terms of educational level, work experience, mobility, time horizon or financial contributions?

1.2 Admission to VET

It is important to highlight that not all VET programmes are necessarily open to all. On the contrary: in all our partner countries in development cooperation the capacity of the VET systems is significantly lower than the number of young people who need some kind of training in order to get a decent job or gainful self-employment. Therefore, formal and informal mechanisms exist that regulate and limit access to VET – and often exclude the majority of those in need of training.

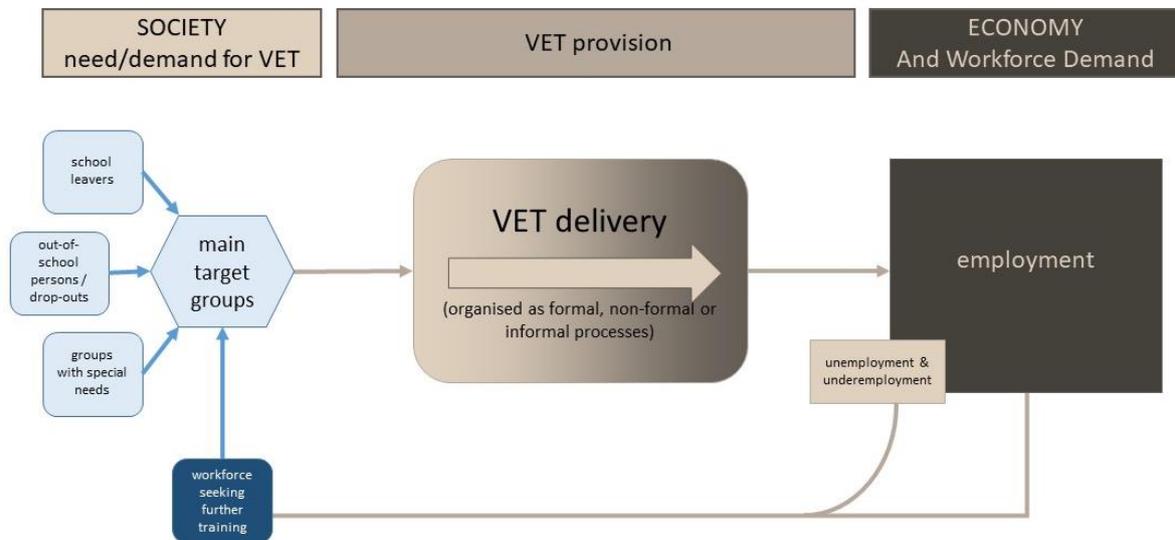


Illustration 3

There are many types of access barriers. These may take the form of educational levels and/or student fees that are often requested, in particular for high-quality training. They also include issues such as the regional distribution of training centres or their timetables and course durations, which are not affordable for many disadvantaged people who have to earn their living as well as undertaking training. Moreover, gender or ethnic discrimination may play a role.

The following illustration depicts a typical exclusion scenario and suggests mitigation measures.

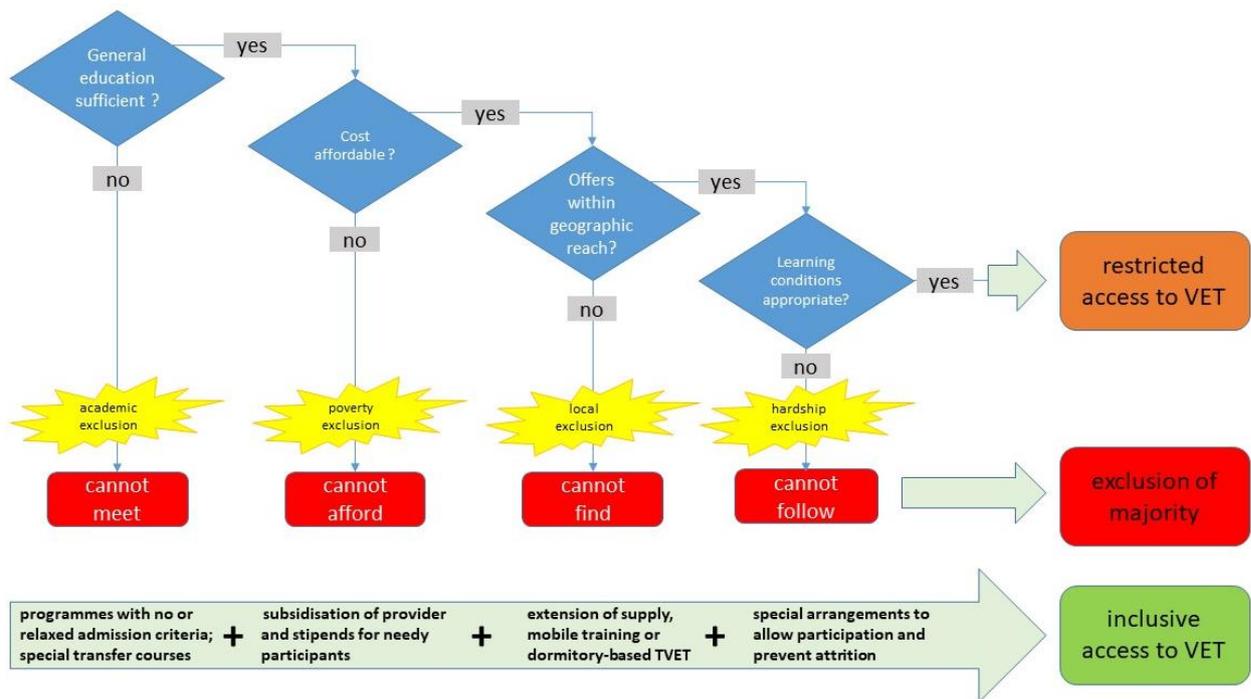


Illustration 4

A careful analysis of such access barriers is therefore another important step in planning the reform of a VET system.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding admission:

- What is the capacity of the existing VET system as compared to the social demand?
- Who has access to what kind of training – and who is excluded? What are the reasons for exclusion?
- What are the criteria and mechanisms that govern admission?
- Which mitigation measures can be introduced in order to improve access for specific target groups?

1.3 Economic demand

Making VET systems responsive to the demands of the economy requires a careful and systematically repeated analysis of employment opportunities, labour markets and training needs. Here, we have to distinguish between:

- the modern sectors of the economy;
- informal employment opportunities;
- the subsistence economy and helping family members; and
- domestic labour markets and regional and international labour markets

Although the situation differs from country to country, it is a common feature of economies in developing countries that the number of job-seekers far exceeds the number of available jobs. That is why self-employment is an important segment of the economies in most of our

partner countries, which implies that VET systems have to consider entrepreneurship training as an important element of their service provision. Labour migration is another phenomenon that is gaining in importance in many partner countries. Some countries follow a strategy of labour export. This is why VET systems and interventions by donor agencies may include preparation measures for organised migration.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding economic demand:

- To what extent can the economy be expected to absorb current and future generations of VET graduates?
- Which sectors are the most dynamic and promising ones with regard to the provision of employment opportunities for skilled labour?
- What are the priority occupations for which the economy is prepared to recruit skilled labour?
- To what extent is entrepreneurship training delivered by the current VET system?
- How supportive is the business environment with regard to self-employment? For instance are funding schemes and microcredits available? Is the regulatory framework conducive to doing business? Is the rule of law guaranteed?

2 VET systems and their expected outcomes and impact for the economy and society

2.1 VET systems and their expected outcomes

VET is often associated with imparting only technical skills. This is an appropriate approach if one wants to upgrade the skills of people who are already employed and need to acquire some specific knowledge and skills, for instance in order to cope with new technologies. From a holistic point of view, however, this approach falls short. VET as a **system** has a much broader range of outcomes, which can be summarised mainly under three main headings:

- personal development;
- occupational competence; and
- educational mobility

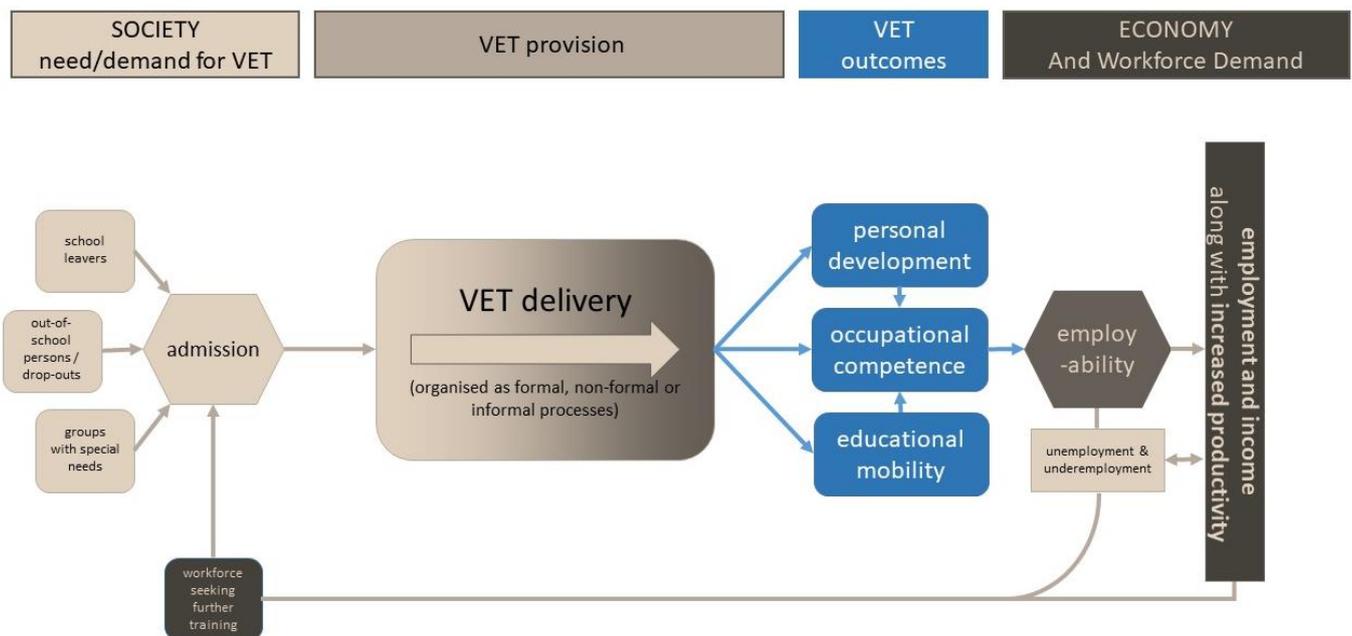


Illustration 5

To take these areas one by one, firstly **personal development** refers to the fact that VET primarily addresses young people between 15 and 25 years of age who are not only in a transition process from school to work but also in a difficult transition period from childhood to adulthood. They need orientation and have to develop values and self-esteem in order to build up their individual identity. This is also true for many unemployed people and in particular for special needs groups. Society expects them to become good technicians, craftspeople, salespeople or clerks, but also to develop into good citizens and responsible fathers or mothers. That is why VET, at least for young people and special needs groups, has to impart **personal** skills, **social** skills, and **life** skills as well as occupational competencies.

Secondly, **occupational competence** starts with having the technical skills and knowledge that are needed to perform a job well. But it is not limited to this dimension. It also comprises elements of what was mentioned before – personal and social skills – as well as certain more general or “meta-skills” that are becoming more and more important, like teamwork, customer orientation, and the ability to learn and organise by oneself. Moreover, entrepreneurial skills are gaining importance in our partner countries where self-employment is often the most realistic option for many VET graduates.

Finally, the concept of **educational mobility** refers to the recognition of VET certificates within the overall education system in a country or internationally. In order to make VET more attractive, and to stimulate lifelong learning, VET graduates receive credits that provide or facilitate access to higher levels of VET, or to higher education in the general education system. This means that VET has to give adequate consideration to general education subjects and international standards and regulations, in order to open up such pathways.

Each VET system, and each specific training programme, has to find its own appropriate and balanced mix of these three areas – personal development, occupational competence and educational mobility – according to its objectives and priorities, and to the target groups it addresses.

In our partner countries the adequate consideration of these three dimensions of VET is of specific importance for two reasons:

- First, the general education systems are often weak, and therefore VET addresses target groups who need complementary general education in order to cope with the requirements of the training programmes. That is why the combination of basic education with VET is a common feature in many donor programmes;
- Secondly, many VET participants live in deprived urban or remote rural areas and grow up in fragile economic, social and family contexts. They lack self-esteem and are vulnerable to risky forms of deviant behaviour, such as dropping out, drug consumption, gangs, violence, crime and teenage pregnancy.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding VET outcomes:

- How does a given VET system cover the three main outcomes – personal development, occupational competence and educational mobility? Which outcomes are underdeveloped or neglected?
- What is the appropriate mix of these outcomes for specific target groups who are being addressed by a VET reform or donor intervention in VET?
- How can alliances with external partners – general education schools, NGOs, civil society – be used to assure an appropriate mix?

2.2 Impact for the economy and society

The main goal of any VET system is twofold, with a societal and an economic dimension: first, it aims to contribute to the competitiveness and sustained growth of the economy, and secondly it aims to make a relevant contribution to livelihoods, social inclusion and thus

poverty reduction.

Therefore, any VET system aims to provide a qualified labour force in the sense of competent, confident and compassionate people and workers. If the system is performing adequately, VET graduates are supposed to be found employable, be it in wage- or self-employment. Under favourable economic conditions, these people will find employment and income, and they will contribute to an increase in productivity based on their occupational competence, and due to newly created jobs in self-employment.

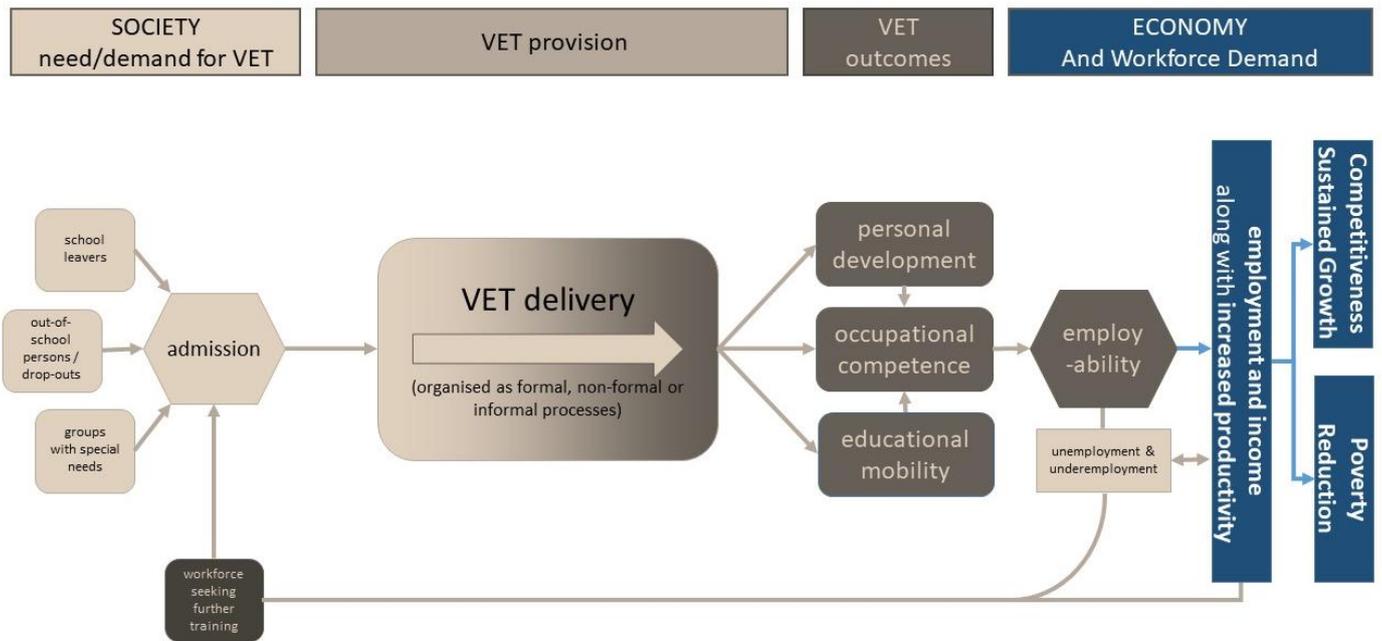


Illustration 6

3 Institutional, financial and legal framework for VET delivery

We have looked at the different demands VET systems have to respond to, and we have learned about the outcomes they are expected to generate for their target groups and the impacts these may have for society and the economy. Let us now look a little more closely into VET delivery itself, starting with its institutional, financial and legal framework.

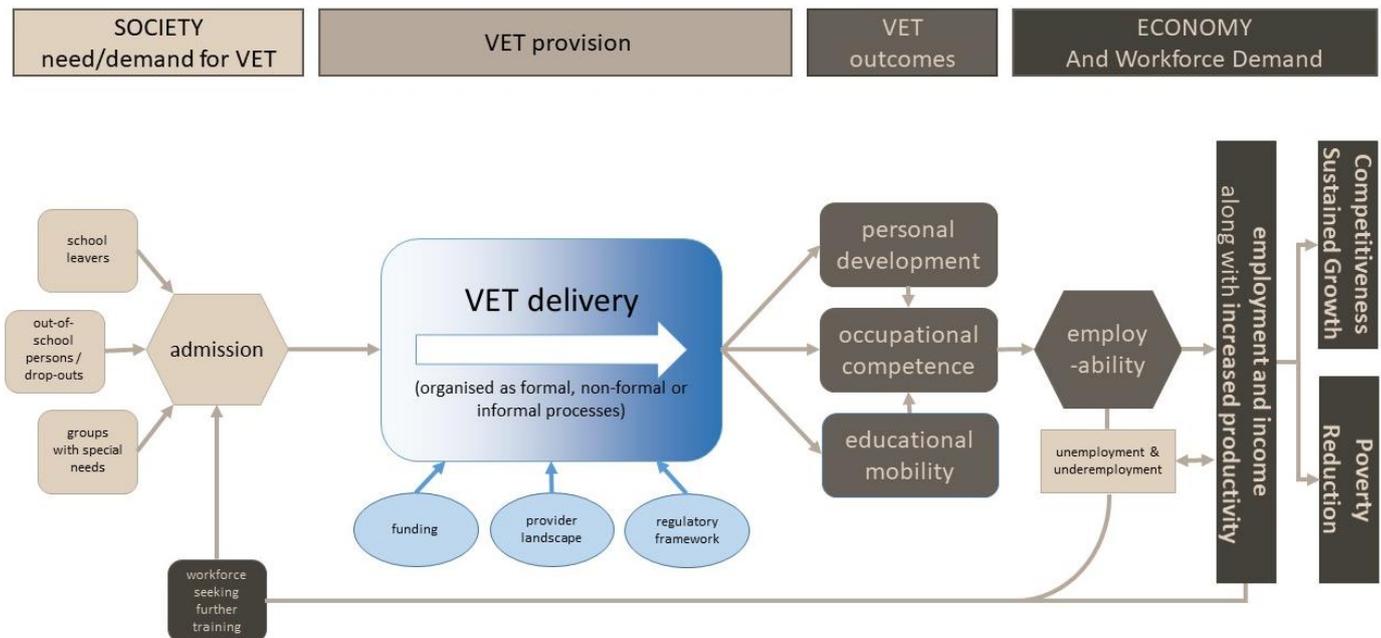


Illustration 7

3.1 Regulatory framework

The regulatory framework of any VET system is a decisive factor for a sustainable and favourable development of VET at all levels and for the reputation VET enjoys in society and the economy.

Two important dimensions are to be distinguished when talking about the regulation of VET systems: first **public regulation**, and, second, **self-regulation**.

Public regulation sets the framework for VET offers leading to publicly recognised VET diplomas and certificates. Public regulation can take place at all state levels, depending on the degree of decentralisation of a VET system.

While public regulation sets the cornerstones and provides orientation, self-regulation in VET is very important too. Most quality developments in VET start within the economy, where new trends emerge and call for some kind of regulation and standardisation.

Any modern public VET regulation can be distinguished using the following criteria:

- **Inclusion:** This has three aspects. First, public VET regulation should include the VET system in the whole education system, in other words it should clearly define the

interfaces with basic education and higher general education. Secondly, it should be **accessible** to all, and offer options for the less qualified and for those not well off. Thirdly it should include the world of work and define its role and responsibility;

- **Competitiveness:** VET should always try to foster the competitiveness of the economy;
- **Permeability:** any VET system regulation should allow its graduates to continue education at other VET levels or in other VET offers at the same level **and** in general education as well;
- **Flexibility and autonomy:** the regulation should leave room for development and foster innovation at all levels of the system;
- **Transparency and limitation** of the VET regulation in the sense that the regulation is to be understandable, developed in a transparent and participatory way and therefore accepted by all actors involved, and limited to the essential.
- **Competence based:** modern VET regulation is based on an outcome orientation (it is competence based) rather than following an input logic.

Regulations for VET, both public and self-regulation, typically define the following core issues:

- IVET (initial or pre-employment training) and CVET offers (tertiary VET or further training),
- admission,
- types of diplomas,
- assessment and certification,
- recognition of certificates for access to both the labour market and higher levels of general education or training,
- qualifications and training of trainers,
- quality assurance and accreditation of training providers, and
- financing.

There are, of course many other issues which may fall within the scope of regulation.

In many VET systems around the globe we find VET regulations either not fulfilling the quality criteria mentioned above, or not covering all dimensions and functions of VET. In many partner countries, public regulation is outdated, and defines a highly centralised system, which caters for the better off, hinders innovation, and does not provide access and pathways to the general education system.

Against this background more and more countries set out to establish so-called **national qualifications frameworks** (NQF). These are instruments to classify and develop qualifications – that is to say the certificates and diplomas issued in general education and VET – according to agreed levels based on generic level descriptors. The aim of NQFs is to facilitate three things:

- the **transparency** of the system of qualifications – all official diplomas, certificates and titles have their place at a specific level corresponding to their related level of competence;
- the **comparability** of qualifications – NQFs allow the value of different qualifications to be compared as regards their level of competence;

- and their **portability** – NQFs facilitate the recognition of qualifications – fully or partly – for admission to further education or training, for employment in other occupational fields or other regions or countries.

However, the establishment of meaningful NQFs requires significant investments in terms of time, effort, financial and human resources. Often the NQFs are over-designed and bureaucratic, and the investments are made at the cost of improved or expanded VET delivery.

Consider the following key analytical questions regarding the regulatory framework:

- Does the current VET regulation fulfil the most important quality criteria, that is inclusion, competitiveness, permeability, flexibility and autonomy, transparency and limitation, and outcome orientation? Where does the regulation fall short?
- What relevant self-regulation exists in the field in which you want to intervene?
- Are there any other regulations outside core VET regulations that play a role? (for example staffing rules and regulations or labour market regulations)
- Who is responsible for what? How decentralised is the system?

3.2 Funding

Quality VET is rather expensive. That is why almost all countries use a mix of financial sources to cover the costs of training infrastructure and VET delivery. The most important contributors are:

- The **tax-payers** – almost everywhere the state budget contributes significantly to the financing of the VET system, in particular in countries where school-based VET, for example in technical secondary schools, prevails.
- **Companies** – here we have to distinguish three main variants, which can also co-exist:
 - First, companies pay – in addition to their general corporate taxes – a **training levy** according to their turnover or number of staff or wage bill, which is used exclusively for training purposes.
 - Secondly, companies offer **internships, work-based learning** or contribute by providing equipment or seconding trainers.
 - Thirdly, companies pay **training fees for their employees** who undergo some kind of further training.
- The third group of funders is the **social partners** – in many countries both employers and employees contribute to public employment services which use part of their funds for active labour market policies including financing training courses for the unemployed or people who need a skills upgrade in order to avoid losing their jobs.
- Fourthly, the **trainees** or their parents may contribute – in many countries VET outside the formal education system is not free of charge, and the participants have to pay a fee and / or cover the costs of training material, which can be significant in

some occupational fields. In this context vouchers and stipends, provided by government, civil society or donor agencies, are important instruments to facilitate the access of special needs groups and to improve quality by stimulating competition among providers.

- Next, **training centres** often follow a “training-cum-production” approach, i.e. they combine training activities with the production of goods or services they sell on a market. The income is used to increase their budget.
- Finally in many countries **civil society** sponsors VET, in particular for special needs groups. NGOs may make donations, provide venues, make in-kind contributions and/or provide human resources for training courses.

Which mix of these sources is applied depends very much on the relative strengths and weaknesses of state, private sector and civil society as well as on traditions.

Given that all VET systems face financial limitations, most of them being seriously or even dramatically underfunded, **resource allocation** becomes an issue of major concern. Decisions regarding a good mix of inputs into the system are among the most difficult ones to be taken, and should be based on a sound analysis and understanding of the interdependencies within the VET system.

For our partner countries, funding a high-quality VET system is an enormous challenge. While their economic and administrative weaknesses do not allow the generation of sufficient tax revenue, they are confronted with an increasing number of young people entering the labour markets. The latter is partly a result of demography – high birth rates – and partly a result of their own success in the field of general education. Nowadays, many more young people successfully complete primary and secondary education, and expect some kind of training opportunity when they leave school.

None of the governments of our partner countries is in a position to cover the costs of high-quality training which can meet the growing social demand, and neither are governments in the so-called developed world. The only way out of this dilemma is a stronger involvement of the economy in financing and providing vocational training – and this means work-based learning.

Consider the following key analytical questions concerning VET funding:

- How is VET funded in the current VET system?
- Who contributes to what and in which ways?
- Are any groups excluded from VET because of lack of funding?
- To what extent is the economy involved in the funding and / or provision of VET?
- Which funding sources are not yet sufficiently used or explored?

3.3 The provider landscape

All over the world, VET is delivered by an array of different institutions. The most important provider of VET in almost all countries is the **state**, in particular in countries with a school-

based VET system. Here, initial VET (or pre-employment VET) is offered in technical secondary schools or colleges under the auspices of the ministry of education. Sometimes the state offers two strands in the system: formal VET in secondary schools which leads to certificates that provide access to higher levels of education, and non-formal VET in training centres that prepare their students for direct access to the labour market. The latter often operate under the auspices of ministries of labour or other relevant ministries, such as industry, health or tourism.

The other big player in training provision is **companies**. In countries with apprenticeship training they account for the major part of training delivery. In other countries they play a complementary role by offering internships for trainees.

In many developing countries **NGOs** play an important role in the VET system, in particular with regard to non-formal training and often with a focus on special needs groups. Sometimes they operate under a public-private partnership agreement with the government, which, for example, stipulates that the government pays the teachers and trainers, while the NGO provides the venue and equipment.

Finally, there are **commercial providers** that offer courses in a market environment. They usually operate in the sphere of continuous or further training (CVET). Many of them limit their training offers to occupational fields that require less investment in terms of training infrastructure. Typical examples are ICT occupations, language courses, sales, marketing, office administration and bookkeeping.

Taking into consideration the growing social demand for VET in our partner countries and the limited financial resources of the public sector it becomes obvious that the heterogeneity of the provider landscape is necessary. And a further expansion would be desirable. Having a broad range of specialised providers is also an advantage in meeting the needs of diverse special needs groups. On the other hand, the **quality** of the training programmes is often as diverse as the provider landscape.

There is no simple way out of this dilemma. What governments increasingly try to do is to establish a system of **accreditation** for VET providers that stipulates the minimum requirements a training provider has to match in order to be allowed either to operate or to issue publicly recognised certificates.

Consider the following key analytical questions with regard to the provider landscape:

- Who are the main training providers in the current VET system?
- Which target groups do they address?
- Which training providers are the most appropriate for a specific intervention or target group?
- To what extent is the potential of companies as training providers already explored and used?
- What is done to assure quality – is there an accreditation system in place?
- How could the overall training offer be increased without worsening the quality?

4 Key inputs for VET delivery

Let us now have a look at the key inputs for VET delivery. The following five are the most important ones in each VET system:

- curricula, training material and media
- teachers and trainers
- training infrastructure
- management
- and mode of training delivery

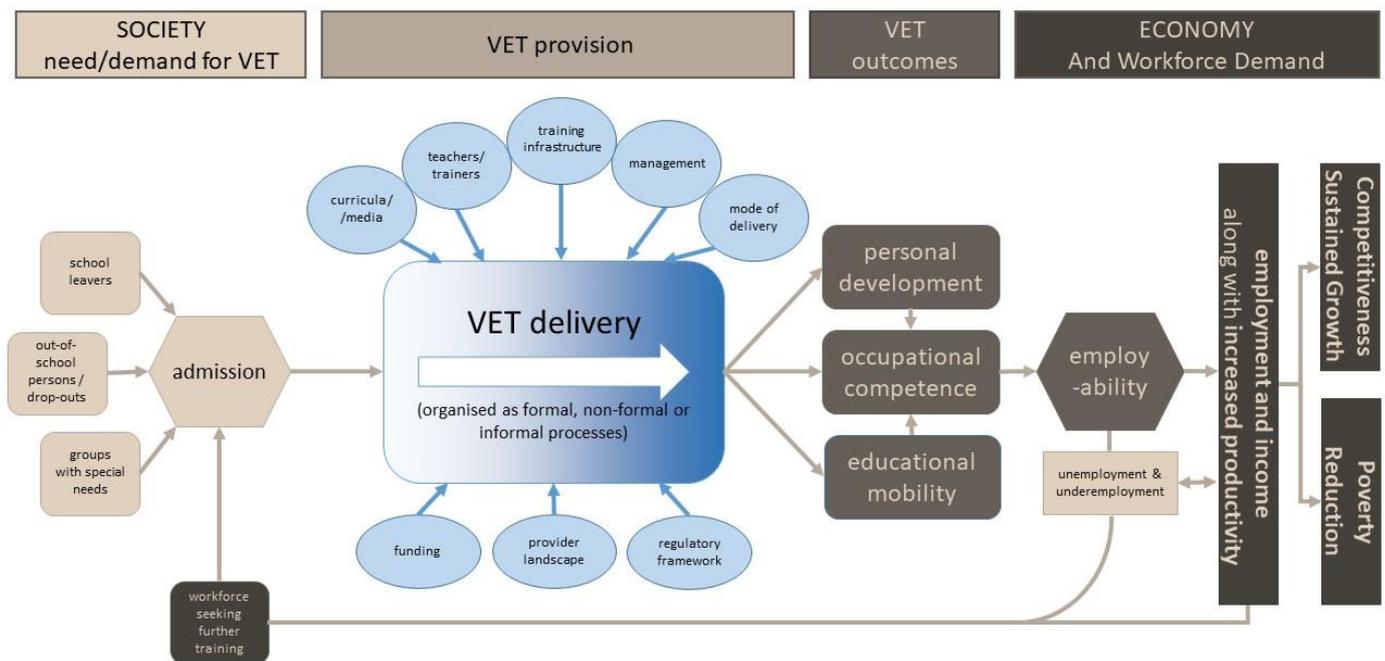


Illustration 8

4.1 Curricula, training material and media

There is no unique and worldwide-accepted definition of “**curricula**”. But as a general rule we can say that curricula determine the objectives and contents of training programmes, and in many cases they also determine their sequence, timing, mode or format and overall duration. Some even provide methodological advice for the trainers who implement the programmes.

Traditional curricula usually list the subjects the students have to learn, whereas modern, competence-based curricula define learning outcomes that describe what the students have to be able to do at the end of the training programme (or module).

The major input for VET curricula derives from the requirements of the **labour market**. These are usually described in occupational profiles or standards that detail what a person in a specific occupation does, and how well the person should be able to do it in order to be

considered competent. VET curricula may also be enriched with content related to general education subjects or to personal development. This depends very much on the nature of the programme, the target group and the chosen mix of the three outcomes of VET delivery mentioned earlier – personal development, occupational competence, and educational mobility.

The quality of the curricula is one decisive factor for the relevance of a training programme. If the curricula do not adequately reflect the requirements of the economy, VET graduates will have difficulty in finding a job, performing well in a job or in starting their own business. Therefore curriculum revision or development is a major area of intervention for VET reforms or donor programmes in the field of VET. Important aspects concerning such reforms are a) making processes more participatory; b) making results more relevant and broadly accepted, and c) making processes faster.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning curricula:

- **Availability:** are curricula available for the most important training programmes offered (or to be offered) in the VET system – and are they up to date?
- **Relevance:** to what extent do the existing curricula reflect the requirements of the economy?
- Are capacities available in the VET system for curriculum revision or development according to modern standards, and who is in charge of this?
- Are the reforms realisable in practice? (considering training infrastructure, training of trainers, funding and so on)

4.2 Teachers and trainers

Teachers and trainers are the backbone of any VET system and any educational intervention. They are the ones who convey knowledge, skills and attitudes to the participants, according to the curricula – if there are any – and according to their own levels of competence. This is why the quality of VET programmes significantly depends on the competences of the teaching staff.

VET teachers and trainers need a balanced mix of technical, methodological and pedagogical skills, and the VET system as a whole needs teachers and trainers who are competent to cover subjects not just related to occupational competence but also personal development and educational mobility. And at least a part of the teaching staff should be prepared for working with special needs groups.

What makes teaching in VET a real challenge is the fact that, because of the speed of innovation and technological change, technical knowledge and skills become outdated much more quickly than they do in general education. For VET teachers and trainers, catching up with technological trends and developments is crucial, and this requires a good system of in-service teacher training, which includes exposure to the world of work.

However, the reality in most of our partner countries is far away from this. The majority of the teachers and trainers in VET have made a purely academic career and have hardly ever gained practical experience in the occupational fields they train in. In-service training is a rare

exception. Moreover the status, employment conditions and remuneration of teaching staff in VET are often poor, which reduces their motivation, readiness and capability to invest time and effort in further developing their competences, since many pursue alternative income generating activities in parallel with their teaching work.

All this makes the teaching staff a real bottleneck for any progress and improvement in a VET system. VET reforms or donor interventions in the field that do not adequately take this issue into consideration are bound to fail.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning teachers and trainers:

- Is the level of competence of the teaching staff (in terms of technical, methodological and pedagogical aspects) adequate for the delivery of high-quality VET?
- Is there an appropriate in-service training mechanism in place?
- Is the teaching staff able to cope with the requirements of updated or new curricula reflecting recent labour market trends?
- Do the status, employment conditions and remuneration of VET teachers and trainers allow well-qualified and motivated staff to be recruited? Can well qualified staff be kept in teaching?

4.3 Training infrastructure

Adequate **training infrastructure** is also very important for high-quality training – and it is often very expensive. For training centres, catching up with technological trends and developments in the world of work is a real challenge that requires frequent investments in venues (classrooms, laboratories and workshops or other simulation facilities) and equipment.

Our partners in developing countries mostly find it impossible to build, equip, and maintain training facilities to the appropriate standard and in sufficient quantity to cover the continuously growing social and economic demand for VET. This makes training infrastructure another crucial bottleneck for any ambitious VET reform or donor intervention, in particular one which covers a large number of people.

In this context, work-based learning and other forms of cooperation with the world of work are possible ways out which it is worthwhile to explore.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning training infrastructure:

- Do the workshops, laboratories and equipment in the existing training centres meet the training needs of the economy?
- Are resources available within the VET system to modernise and extend training infrastructure in order to cope with growing and changing demand?
- Are work-based learning and other forms of cooperation with the world of work applied or at least explored? Could they be extended? Who are potential partners?

4.4 Professional management

VET systems operate through a network of technical schools and training centres, which have a more or less high degree of autonomy. They are local service providers that need good management in order to be efficient and effective. **Professional management** is therefore another key element of modern VET systems.

Management of a training institution comprises management of significant numbers of staff and students, management of valuable assets in terms of training infrastructure, financial administration, and communication with state authorities, with students and their parents, and with the world of work.

Against this background the issue of quality management in VET has been raised both in the scientific community and in the public administrations responsible for VET. Many governments and even some economic sectors have established, or are about to establish, accreditation systems or quality marks for VET providers in order to ensure a certain level of quality in VET provision. Almost all these approaches put the spotlight on management. However, quality management remains underdeveloped on the level of implementation. Therefore, management and its professional development are a key issue for many VET reforms.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning professional management:

- How do the decision-makers in the VET system view the importance of quality management in training institutions?
- Do the relevant training institutions enjoy the degree of autonomy that professional management requires?
- What are the recruitment mechanisms for management staff and the level of competence requested?
- What support mechanisms for managers are available, such as further training courses, handbooks or coaching? Are they adequate and sufficient?

4.5 Modes of training delivery

The final key input is **modes of training delivery**. VET systems usually distinguish between:

- **initial** VET (IVET), also called pre-employment VET, which primarily addresses school graduates and school drop-outs; and
- **continuous** VET (CVET), also called further training, which addresses people already employed or currently unemployed.

A threefold distinction is also drawn between:

- **formal** VET, which takes place within the education system and provides certificates that allow further educational mobility. Typical examples are technical secondary schools;
- secondly, **non-formal** VET, which takes place in training centres outside the

educational pyramid and provides certificates which offer recognition in the world of work. Typical examples are training centres run by NGOs or their partner training providers which address unemployed or underemployed young people or adults;

- and thirdly **informal** VET, which refers to any kind of vocational learning that happens outside regulated frameworks, for instance at the workplace, in groups of peers or colleagues, or on the internet.

Formal and non-formal VET can be delivered in different modes. These delivery modes can be grouped and distinguished according to the following criteria:

- fragmentation;
- hands-on learning;
- distance learning;
- outreach;
- customisation;
- learning progress; and
- timing

Within these criteria, delivery arrangements may again differ. The following illustration provides an overview:

crit erion	arrangements ranging from ... to		
fragmentation	stand-alone modules	module sequence (allowing exit and re-entry)	comprehensive programme
practical exposure	classroom and laboratory focus	simulation (workshop etc.), 'teaching factory'	learning at work (experiential learning)
distance learning	online emphasis	blended learning (online courses plus contact seminars)	offline emphasis
outreach	fixed location	'hub' and satellite centres	mobile units
customisation	individuals select units	pre-defined content plus optional units	pre-defined content
learning progress	Learning duration is flexible, outcomes fixed ('competency-based')	Learning duration is fixed; content can be added (for fast learners)	Outcomes are variable (grading); duration is fixed
timing	full-time	mixed (e.g. full-time at weekends)	part-time

Table 1

Which delivery mode with what kind of arrangement is chosen depends on the overall VET approach and policy of a country but also on the given circumstances of individual training

providers and of the target groups they serve. Often, training providers offer different modes and combinations in order to be able to respond flexibly to different target groups and to optimise the use of their training infrastructure.

All these delivery modes have advantages and drawbacks, and each VET system has to develop its own specific mix according to national priorities, culture, and available capacities.

Consider these key analytical questions for modes of delivery:

- What are the prevailing modes of delivery?
- To what extent do they correspond to the needs and requirements of specific target groups to be addressed by a VET reform or a donor intervention?
- Which other modes of delivery could enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, outreach and quality of the VET system significantly?
- What would be the implications in terms of financial and human resource as well as in terms of duration and challenges?

5 Learner support

Transition from school to work, with VET as its most important cornerstone, is not always and not for all young people a smooth process. There are many obstacles and problems and a certain risk of failure, in particular for special needs groups. This is why many countries have developed different support measures to prepare, accompany, and follow up the training process in the VET system.

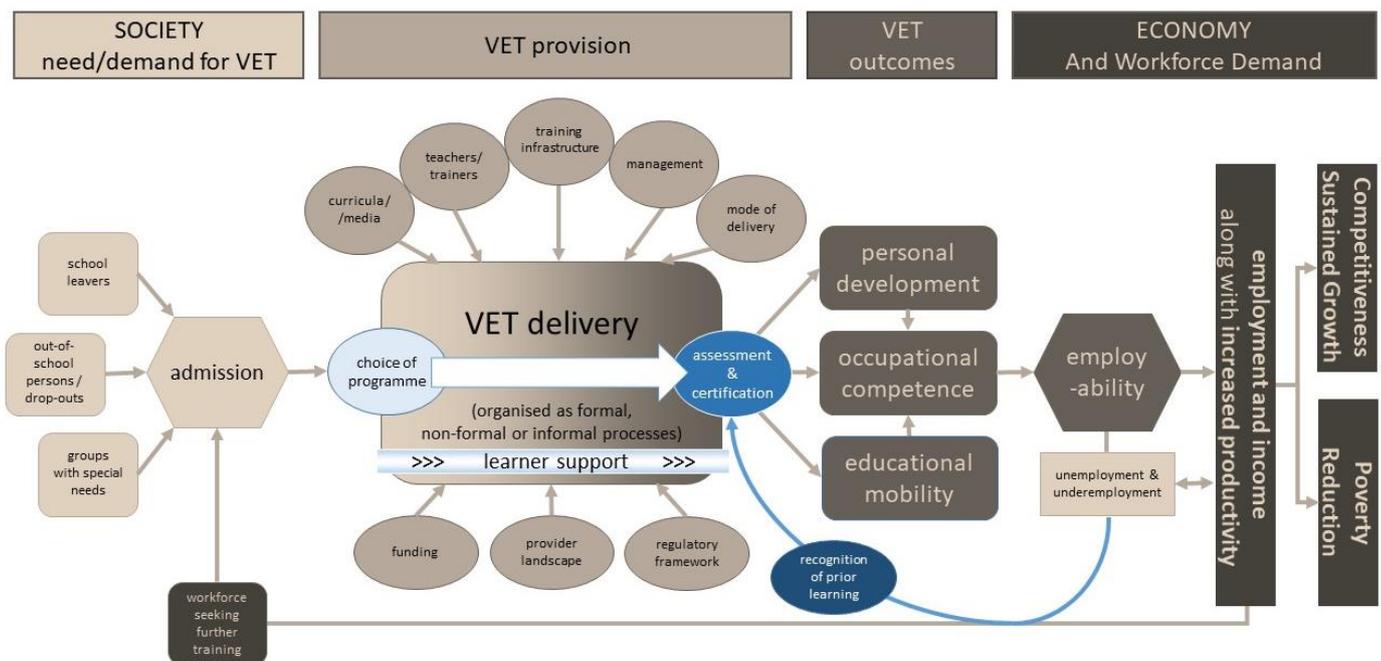


Illustration 9

The most important and widespread learner support measures are the following:

Vocational orientation takes place during the final years of general education and aims to make young people aware of the world of work and help them to identify the occupational areas which might be interesting for them.

Career guidance or counselling is offered at the interface of general education and VET and provides detailed information on specific training pathways and related jobs. It sometimes includes ability tests and advice regarding admission. It addresses job-seekers as well as employed people who want to develop their skills. It is an important instrument to help different target groups make informed choices when opting for a specific VET programme.

Different **advisory services and special supportive courses** are sometimes offered **during** the training process. The aim of these measures is twofold: to prevent or at least reduce or mitigate dropout – which is still a common feature of many training programmes – and to make sure that the participants perform well in the final assessment, thus increasing the number of successful graduates.

Job placement services take place at the interface of VET and employment. Although placement is a key function of the labour market system and in particular of the public employment services it is more and more widely acknowledged that training providers also have a role to play. This covers issues like networking with local companies, internships, and preparation for job search (how to identify job opportunities and how to apply).

Coaching or mentoring for beginners in the world of work **and** their employers can also be found more and more often. It is known that the first couple of months in a job are decisive for stable employment. Support provided by coaches or mentors can reduce the risk of failure during this period. This is very important for special needs groups and in particular for those who opt for self-employment.

All these supportive measures are still underdeveloped or even non-existent in the VET systems of most of our partner countries. But there is a trend to introduce such instruments in order to make the rather expensive training programmes more efficient and effective. For donor interventions in VET, which often emphasise the inclusion of special needs groups, it is almost a must to consider such complementary actions.

Consider the following key analytical questions regarding supportive measures:

- Which of the above-mentioned learner support measures are applied in the current VET system, to what extent, and who is using them, at what level of education?
- What are the experiences so far: to what extent do they contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of VET delivery?
- Which of these supportive measures are needed for the specific target groups of an envisaged VET reform or donor intervention?
- What would be the prerequisites and financial implications of introducing one or more of these supportive measures in the VET system or in a specific donor programme?
- Who could be partners and allies for the introduction of learner support in a VET system?

6 Assessment and certification

VET usually terminates with assessment. Participants have to provide evidence that they have acquired the knowledge and skills that the economy requires for the specific occupations they have been trained for, in other words that they are competent and able to perform the jobs in accordance with industry performance standards.

This is confirmed by certificates issued by the competent authorities, or the competent educational institution or private organisation. These certificates are the “driving licences” for the labour market and the economy. Their value for their holders – that is to what extent they facilitate access to employment and income – depends very much on their degree of recognition.

It is therefore crucial that certificates are credible, i.e. that recruiting companies can trust them. This implies that the assessment is:

- **relevant** – it assesses the knowledge and skills that are decisive for job performance;
- **reliable** – the test instruments used are appropriate to measure whether or not a person is competent;
- and **objective** – the assessment criteria and procedures used are the same for all candidates and the assessors are impartial.

Again, the reality in our partner countries is often far away from this. What we often find is assessment done by the trainers who delivered the course, and certificates issued by the training providers themselves. Very often, practical skills are not sufficiently considered in assessment. As a result, the certificates are more or less useless to the graduates when they apply for a job, and employers have to invest significant time and effort in getting the right applicants.

A relatively new trend in many countries is the opening up of assessment also to people who did not participate in a specific training course but acquired relevant competences at the workplace or through other forms of informal learning. This is usually called **recognition of prior learning** (RPL) and is a powerful tool to help unemployed people to get their occupational competences recognised and to facilitate their labour market integration. It also stimulates lifelong learning because formal certificates are often required for participation in further training.

This is why certification and assessment, including RPL, appear more and more often on VET reform agendas. For our partner countries it is of particular importance because many companies do not take the certificates issued by the VET system into consideration, while at the same time many employed and unemployed people are competent, but do not have a formal qualification.

Finally, consider these key analytical questions on the issue of certification and assessment:

- How is assessment and certification organised in the current VET system? Is there an opportunity for recognition of prior learning?
- How relevant, reliable, and objective is the assessment system?
- To what extent are practical skills considered in the assessment?
- To what extent and how are representatives of the world of work included in assessment?
- To what extent are certificates known and recognised in the world of work?

7 VET systems: the complete picture

The following illustration provides an overview of a typical VET system and its interfaces with general education, labour markets and the employment system.

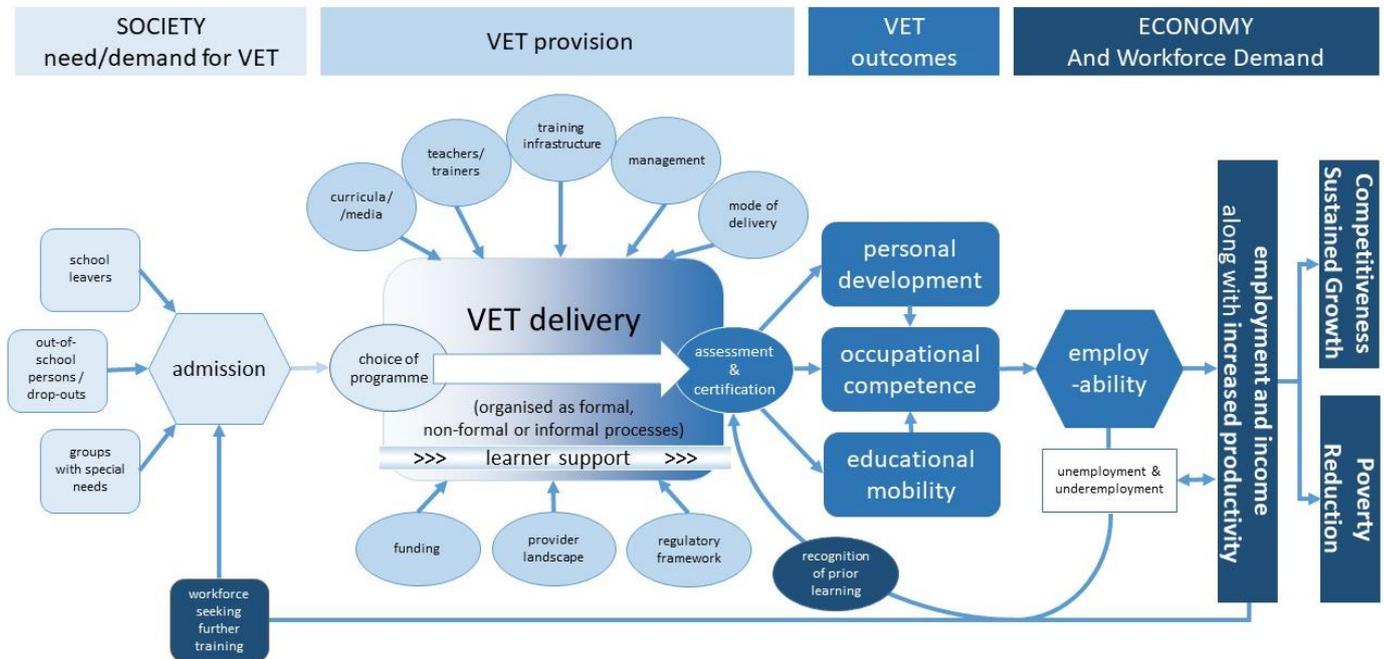


Illustration 10

It goes without saying that the different elements and factors shown in this graphic, and elaborated and explained in the text, interrelate with each other. This is what makes a system a system. The complex interdependencies and **cause-and-effect relationships** between the elements and factors have only been touched in the text and can hardly be depicted in a graphic. Typical examples of such interrelations are:

- Technological change and innovation often require the revision (or replacement) of curricula, which might imply the adaptation of training infrastructure and/or training of trainers and/or assessment and certification, or even a change in the mode of delivery.
- Opening VET up to special needs groups also requires the revision of curricula, not primarily with regard to objectives, but most probably with regard to timing and methodology. It also may imply a change or adaptation in the mode of delivery and trigger the need for specific learner support.
- The closer involvement of companies in VET delivery, for example regarding work-based learning, significantly changes the role of teachers and trainers, has an impact on curricula and training infrastructure, and requires adaptations of management and administration, and funding as well.

Each intervention that changes one of the elements of the system has knock-on effects in other elements and/or requires changes to be made to other elements. Describing and analysing the main interrelations within a VET system would go far beyond the scope of this introduction. This might be subject of follow-up activities within the *employment and income network* of SDC – if and when requested by you, the users of this presentation.

Part II

VET systems in a wider context

VET systems do not operate in isolation. On the contrary: they are embedded in a wider context and interact closely with the labour market and the economy on the one hand and with other parts of the education system on the other. And not to forget some other policy areas that are interrelated with VET.

Responsiveness to current and future demands in labour markets is both characteristic and crucial for any VET system. By providing their clientele with occupational competences to perform and keep a job in industry, VET systems contribute to both, the personal income and social inclusion of graduates and the competitiveness and growth of the economy. Therefore, interventions in VET systems always have to consider possible influences and knock-on effects to and from the economy and the labour market.

But VET is interlinked with other parts of the education system, too. The different sub-systems of the education system are interconnected and influence each other, and they impact on the design and implementation of VET projects and programs. A separate chapter will deal with these interconnections. In detail, the linkages of VET with basic education, higher education and lifelong learning as well as the challenge of creating permeability in between the different parts of the system will be addressed.

Moreover, there is a number of other policy areas that are relevant for VET systems and their performance. These policies and their interlinkage to VET, like social welfare policies, youth policies, and migration policies will be presented in a separate chapter at the end of this part.

1 VET and the labour market

As we have seen in part 1 of this introduction paper, VET systems have to serve a double purpose. They have to provide their target groups with the skills they need if they are to find and keep a job, or to start their own business. At the same time VET systems claim to supply the economy with the labour force it needs to grow and remain competitive. In both cases, to accomplish with the purpose, VET system actors must be aware of and respond to what the economy demands. In other words: it is a characteristic and challenge of VET systems to be **labour market-oriented**.

Labour market orientation requires, as a first step, the identification of occupations (and their respective levels) that have priority for the economy and offer sufficient employment opportunities for VET system graduates. These occupations must be analysed and described in detail, including performance indicators, in so-called occupational standards. These standards are the key input the labour market provides for curriculum development and course design in the VET system. Based on this information the necessary resources – equipment, learning materials and trainers – can be developed and provided for the training process in schools, training centres or companies. At the end of the training process assessment takes place that measures the competencies gained by the trainees against the

performance indicators laid down in the respective occupational standard. Successful candidates receive a certificate that signals a potential employer that its holder is able to perform the occupation according to the agreed industry standards.

All the above-mentioned steps of defining, designing, and implementing training, and of assessment and certification of graduates, require strong involvement of actors from the world of work in order to assure **relevance** of the VET system and its offers for the labour market and the economy. The graphic below illustrates the interweaving of the VET system and the labour market system and the significant role the economy plays in the process described above.

Labour Force Supply and the **Role of Industry** – a Control Loop Model

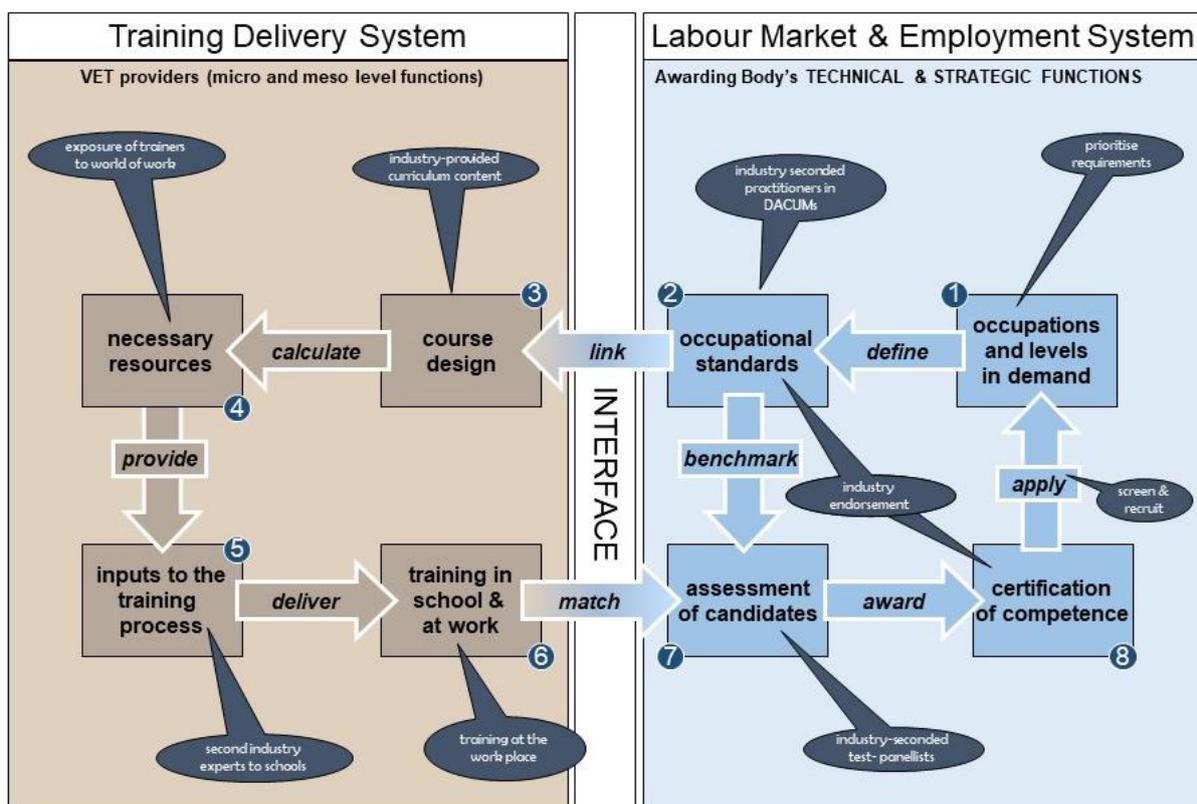


Illustration 11

A VET system that applies such a labour market-oriented approach assures **employability** of its graduates. However, this does not automatically entail their smooth transition to stable employment. Many graduates are not aware of employment opportunities accessible to them and/ or do not know how to search and apply for a job. And even if they find a job there is a certain risk that they drop out relatively soon because they have difficulties to get used to the rather different new environment at the workplace. This is particularly true for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In order to bridge this gap **career counselling, placement services and job coaching** are typical instruments, which in many countries are offered by **employment services**. In some

cases, and in particular in countries with still underdeveloped public employment services, such support is offered directly in training centres.

But even the best counselling and placement services cannot assure smooth transition to work for VET graduates if the labour markets do not offer enough jobs, which is the case in many developing countries with weak economies and high numbers of job-seekers graduating from the education system. Therefore, VET programmes are sometimes combined with **job creation measures**.

The most common approach is the promotion of **self-employment**, i.e. helping VET graduates setting up their own business. This is usually done by integrating **entrepreneurship training** in the curricula of the technical training programmes or offering it as an additional module in parallel to or after the technical training course for those who want to follow this option.

However, experience shows that entrepreneurship training is useful but usually not sufficient to make business start-ups of VET graduates a success. In addition to technical and business skills the young entrepreneurs need **access to (micro-)finance and insurance** as well as on-going **coaching** by experienced advisors or **mentoring** by other entrepreneurs during the start-up phase. Therefore, VET with a focus on self-employment should be embedded in broader economic development policies and combined with **private sector and financial sector development** approaches.

Furthermore, there is a link between VET systems and the labour market when it comes to larger **economic development projects**, e.g. large infrastructure projects such as road construction, pipeline construction, water and sewage infrastructure etc., or value chain and market development projects. Such initiatives require the provision of adequately qualified labour force by the VET system, i.e. VET providers are expected to align their supply according to the emerging new economic policies and demands.

If such economic developments are well-planned and the relevant actors of the VET systems are involved early enough, tailor-made corresponding training programmes can be designed and implemented in due time. But this is often not the case because of lack of communication between the systems and the time-consuming administrative procedures that the introduction of new training offers in the initial VET delivery system requires. Developed and well-functioning VET systems usually comprise a network of mainly private training providers that is able to respond quickly, flexibly and efficiently to such specific requirements of the economy, thus complementing the training offers of the public mainstream systems, which usually focus on initial vocational training. In partner countries of development cooperation such a **continuous VET sub-system** with specialized training providers is often not available, making lack of skilled labour force a bottleneck for investments, economic development and competitiveness.

The latter point mentioned above alludes to another important link between the economy and the VET system. The economy is an important funding source of the VET system. Companies do not only train their staff in-house, they also send staff members to further training courses for up- or re-skilling. Furthermore, the public employment services in some countries finance (re-)training courses or entrepreneurship training and support for

unemployed people, or bridging courses and other support measures for young people who have difficulties accessing the mainstream training system.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding the link of the VET system with the labour market and the economy:

- To what extent are the available training offers labour market – oriented, i.e. responding to identified demand and based on occupational standards?
- Is the industry adequately involved in identifying the need for, and the design and delivery of, training programmes?
- Is there an industry-led assessment system in place that assures reliability and recognition of certificates?
- Are counselling, placement, and coaching services available to facilitate the VET system graduates' transition to work?
- Is entrepreneurship training included in training programmes in regions or occupational fields with limited wage employment opportunities?
- Do young entrepreneurs have access to credits, insurance and coaching? Is there a possibility for collaboration with private sector and/ or financial sector development approaches?
- Does the VET system comprise training providers capable to respond quickly to specific skills needs of the industry and/ or to support sectorial or regional economic development policies?
- To what extent are companies prepared to invest in up-skilling and re-skilling of their staff thus creating and sustaining a market for further training providers?
- What role plays the public employment service in financing training courses and other support schemes for unemployed people and how can these funds be used for specific target groups?

2 VET in the education system

VET builds upon the foundations laid by the general education system in the context of basic education (BE). Furthermore, VET-systems are an integral part of any lifelong learning approach, which is becoming more and more important due to rapid technological change in the world of work. Both issues are addressed in the following paragraphs.

The main challenge in the relationship of VET with BE is to build bridges between these two education sub-systems to allow frictionless transition of school-graduates, weak performers at school or school drop-outs into appropriate VET programs.

In a life-long perspective it is of crucial importance to make sure that participation in initial VET is not a dead-end, but allows taking further professional or educational steps. The challenge here is to create horizontal and vertical permeability within the educational system.

2.1 VET and basic education (BE)

BE usually comprises primary and lower-secondary levels of formal education (public and private) as well as alternative education programs designed to respond to particular learning needs of people of all ages. It delivers competencies such as literacy/numeracy, knowledge, values and essential abilities to survive, to develop one's full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in society, to improve the quality of life, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.¹ In other words, BE is expected to equip the young generations with the foundational skills that all graduates need for successful career pathways, labour market integration and performance at the workplace, regardless of the kind of job they end up with.

There is evidence that a **combination of quality basic education with labor-market relevant vocational skills development empowers individuals** to develop capacities which broaden their social and economic opportunities.²

However, in many of our partner countries the BE systems are still rather weak, i.e. they do not reach out to all children and/ or have high drop-out rates and limited quality of education, resulting in an important share of young men and women ending compulsory schooling without sufficient foundational knowledge and skills to continue their educational pathway in VET or higher education and/ or to live and work in dignity. This constitutes a major challenge for VET systems and, in particular, for donor interventions that often focus on disadvantaged target groups. Many potential addressees are not granted access to (formal) VET programmes because they lack a certificate of completed BE, and those who are admitted – with or without a BE leaving certificate – often have significant deficits with regard to basic education competencies, which hampers the learning process and progress and often results in dropping out from VET. Moreover, many school-leavers, who enter the VET system, have no or only little knowledge regarding the occupations they want to be trained for.

¹ See: The SDC's Education Strategy – Basic Education and Vocational Skills Development, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Berne 2017, page 15

² Ibid., page 15

To overcome such obstacles, **interlinked** BE and VET offers, particularly for out of school and disadvantaged children and youth, are a common option: If basic education is (partly) missed out due to drop-out or exclusion, gaps can be filled at a later stage in life through adapted BE- or VET-offers, responding to peoples' age and learning needs. Depending on the target groups and the specific context of the interventions the focus is either on BE with VET-components included or on VET with integrated BE-components.³

There are **three main types of interlinked BE/VET programmes** that are usually applied to mitigate or overcome problems hampering the smooth transition of graduates (or drop-outs) of the basic education system to VET programmes:

Vocational orientation

Vocational orientation aims at better preparing pupils towards the end of (compulsory) basic education for the transition to VET and the world of work. It usually comprises a set of measures like open-door-days in vocational training institutions and companies, short internships in companies to get a taste of working life, general information and initial career counselling regarding different occupational areas, jobs, and related career opportunities, etc.

Vocational orientation raises awareness amongst pupils and their parents for VET as an attractive alternative to academic pathways and helps them identifying talents and interests and making informed choices regarding available training offers, thus reducing the risk of frustration and drop-out. Furthermore, it supports recruitment for training providers. And finally, it improves communication and cooperation between feeder schools, training providers, and companies, which facilitates smooth transition processes for BE graduates.

Bridging courses

Many graduates of underperforming BE systems in partner countries as well as drop-outs of the formal education system or young immigrants do not have the level of general education requested for successful participation in VET programmes. Bridging courses help overcoming this gap and facilitate the target groups' access to VET. Depending on the context, bridging courses can have different target groups, formats and contents:

- In some countries a certificate of completed BE is a formal prerequisite for accessing VET. In these cases, the focus of bridging courses is on school-leavers with incomplete BE and the content is primarily BE-related, possibly enriched with elements of vocational orientation and counselling; the delivery format is usually school-based.
- In other cases, VET providers put more emphasis on basic vocational knowledge and skills and/ or personal skills of the applicants, and less on a leaving certificate of BE. In these cases, the target groups may include drop-outs as well as graduates of BE. The content is more on vocational skills in one or more occupational areas in order to help participants identifying their interests and talents and to make informed choices. The training often also provides opportunities to bridge skills gaps in general education and/ or to develop personal skills and attitudes relevant for the world of work. The delivery format has a strong focus on workshop- or work-based modalities

³ Ibid. Page 18

with often some complementary BE-based schooling that either takes place in workshop settings or at external educational providers.

VET courses with integrated BE

For target groups beyond school age participation in a bridging course is often not appropriate because they are under pressure to get a job as soon as possible in order to earn their living. A bridging course followed by a VET programme would exceed the time span and budget they could afford to invest in skills development. In these cases, VET programmes can integrate BE in their training curricula.

What seems to be a compromise owed to the precarious situation of these target groups has often turned out to be a perfect solution. Experience shows that general education subjects can sometimes more easily be imparted in the context of vocational training and practical application than in a classroom-setting. School drop-outs or low-performers at school, whose learning capacities are often blocked because of the bad experience they had made at school, particularly benefit from a more hands-on “learning by doing” approach in a different setting. The same applies to the more elder target groups who do not want to be treated like pupils.

Particularly in fragile contexts, where the need for immediate employment and income is high for most of the target groups, the integrated approach of VET and BE is promising. However, it is also challenging because it requires close cooperation and thorough preparation by VET and BE experts and the necessary resources.

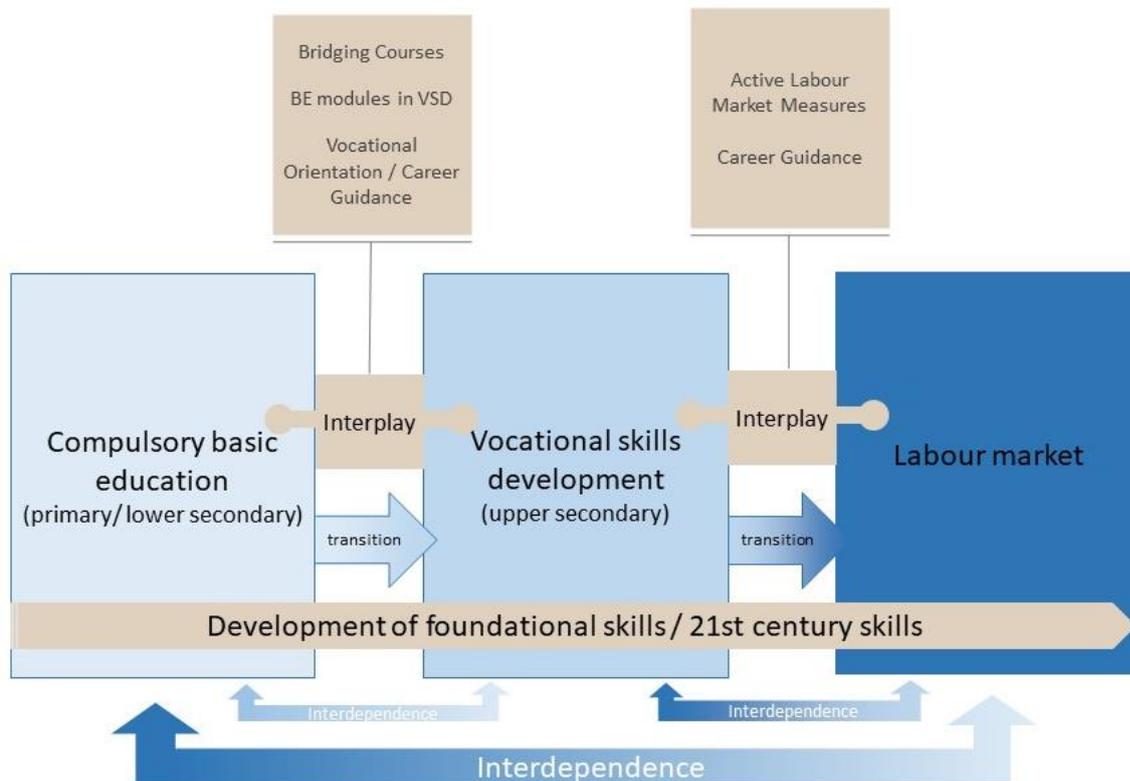


Illustration 12: Continuum and interdependence BE – VSD – LM

Consider these key analytical questions regarding the link with basic education:

- What is the outreach of basic education in the country? Are parts of the population or regions undersupplied? How many and who are dropping out of BE before graduation or at the entrance of VET?
- How is the quality of basic education in the country? Do most of the graduates possess the levels of knowledge and skills necessary for successful participation in initial vocational training?
- Are there specific target groups affected by undersupply or low quality of basic education?
- If lack of basic education is a challenge for VET performance or reform, could an interlinked BE and VET approach be an option?
- Who are potential alliances for such an interlinked approach and which of the above-mentioned formats would be the most suitable?

2.2 VET and higher education (HE)

Higher Education, in some countries also called tertiary education, is delivered at universities, universities of applied sciences, in specialized academies, and institutes of technology. Whereas VET qualifications pursue the specific goal of preparing students with skills for work and support students to join the workforce, HE programmes traditionally do not provide direct preparation for an occupation or job in the labour market.

In some countries “higher VET qualifications” are governed by sectoral reference frameworks, for example for health care professionals, and delivery is undertaken by sectoral (private) institutions, operating independently from actual HE and VET-systems.

However, some **convergence between VET and HE** has taken place in recent years. Many HE programs are re-aligned by adopting the very practical focus of VET qualifications. Practical terms, stages or short placements providing experience in the world of work are part of many HE programmes meanwhile. Dual study programmes taking place in HE institutions in cooperation with companies providing practical training have become very popular, responding to the perception that there is an oversupply of HE graduates lacking practical competences in certain professional fields.

In a number of countries, it is possible for VET graduates to **access HE with specific vocational qualifications**. A growing number of students enrolled in universities of applied sciences come with VET qualifications.

Besides, there are a number of countries, where particular VET qualifications are formally part of HE. These “**higher VET**” **qualifications** have a clear professional focus, they prepare for entry into specific employment, and graduates are offered an academic degree that might be called ‘Professional Bachelor’ or ‘Professional Master’. Such programmes can be delivered by HE institutions and by specialised technical schools or institutes.

As can be seen from these examples, in certain areas traditional boundaries and fixed lines between VET and HE are getting blurred and **permeability** between the two education sub-

systems tends to increase. Without doubt for VET graduates this is a big step forward, as this greatly expands the **options for progression** in their professional career. In general, the lifelong learning approach, which will be presented in the following section, also helps to gradually reduce the traditional division and **increase the permeability** between VET and HE. However, there are still a number of problems and obstacles that prevent smooth transition between the two sub-systems. These will be dealt with in the following section.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding the relationship between VET and HE:

- Are there any indications of some convergence between VET and HE?
- Any opportunities for access to HE with a VET-qualification?
- What kind of “higher VET qualifications” are available and how are they delivered?
- How to increase permeability between VET and HE? What are the options, what the main barriers?
- Which stakeholders should be involved to work across the borderlines of the education sub-systems?

2.3 VET in a lifelong learning perspective

The times that people received initial training in an occupation that allowed stable employment for their whole working life are over for the vast majority of new entrants to the labour-markets. Developing economies and modern technologies require frequent skills adaptation of labour force to maintain employability. The growing need for lifelong learning is a global megatrend that challenges traditional education systems as well as individuals.

Lifelong learning is a relatively new approach to education and learning, covering general education, vocational education and training, non-formal-education and informal learning activities undertaken throughout life, i.e. all activities that result in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences for personal, social and professional reasons.

In the context of lifelong learning continuous VET gains importance. In addition to the – mainly publicly financed - initial VET systems in more and more countries a growing number of further training or re-training courses are offered by public and private training providers in a **continuous VET sub-system** that follows market rules. Clients are companies who want their staff up-skilled, individuals who want to secure their employability or progress in their career, or institutions like public employment services that are in charge of preventing or combatting unemployment.

Although lifelong learning is of particular importance for low-skilled people and for those with only a VET qualification these are the groups who take less advantage of the available learning opportunities. The **access** to continuous VET offers or other educational pathways is a major problem for low-skilled without a formal VET qualification, despite the fact that they often have significant skills and competences in one or more occupational areas acquired by work experience. The same often applies to migrants who have acquired certain competences or even formal qualifications in their home country, which are not adequately considered in their host country.

Against this backdrop more and more VET systems provide opportunities for **recognition of prior learning**, i.e. for assessment and certification of competences acquired informally or non-formally, e.g. at the work-place, in the framework of social activities or in a private context, in order to stimulate and facilitate lifelong learning. Various approaches for recognition of prior learning are applied. Most common are individual skills audits and particular assessments, whereas a coherent and coordinated approach to recognition of prior learning is still missing in many countries.

Recognition of prior learning implies that learning experiences are valued and can be transferred and used as building blocks in further learning and professional careers. This requires a certain degree of **permeability** between the general education and the VET systems as well as within the two systems, e.g. between formal and non-formal VET. The equation of qualifications is prerequisite for both, vertical progression within a certain career pathway and horizontal pathways for individuals who would like to change their career path but build on their existing competences.

The two most promising tools to facilitate a more rule-based transfer across education sub-systems and sectors are the learning outcomes approach and credit transfer systems or credit accumulation systems. The **learning outcomes approach** indicates what a learner should know, be able to do, and understand at the end of a learning sequence. Meanwhile, learning outcomes are widely acknowledged and seen as a common language enabling better transition within education sub-systems and even within labour markets. Above all, recognition of acquired competences will become easier with a learning outcomes-based national qualifications framework.

Credit points and accumulation systems are another tool with potential to improve horizontal and vertical progression in a lifelong learning perspective. They complement the learning outcomes approach by calculating the **volume of learning** for defined learning outcomes and/or the average workload which is needed to achieve the learning outcome. Credits are awarded for successfully completed studies according to the measured volume. But similar to the learning outcomes approach, the potential benefits of both tools in practice are still limited. There are too many differences in understanding, applying, and implementing these tools across education sub-systems and sectors in a coherent way. The definition, structuring and description of learning outcomes still varies enormously between education and training systems, institutions and countries. VET standards are often defined at national or sector levels, whereas the autonomy of universities means that programmes and learning outcomes are decided inside the institutions at department levels. Credit systems used in VET and HE build on partly different principles and they differ widely. Mostly, they are tailored to a particular sector or a set of institutions, which limits both comparability and mutual recognition.

Nonetheless, the worldwide trend to **increased permeability** of the general, vocational education and training systems, and higher education systems is pushing towards stronger coherence and more cooperation between and across education sub-systems. And granting better access to further learning for graduates of VET programmes makes VET more attractive, facilitates career pathways, and thereby supports the concept of life-long learning.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding VET and lifelong learning:

- Is there a lifelong learning policy in the country? What are its characteristics?
- What about vertical and horizontal pathways within and in-between the education sub-systems and the labour market?
- What about access to the Continuous VET-system? What about the quality of the CVET-system?
- Are there any regulations for validation and recognition of prior learning?
- How widespread is the learning outcomes approach used in VET?
- How is the relationship of the learning outcomes approach to the national qualifications framework?
- Is there a credit and accumulation system in place?
- Which factors may contribute to increased permeability within and across the education sub-systems? What are main barriers?
- Which stakeholders should be involved to work on the lifelong learning strategy of the country?

3 Other policy areas relevant for VET

The VET system is the main pillar of the school-to-work transition process of young people. Insofar basic education on the one hand and the labour market and the economy on the other are the two main reference systems for VET actors at all levels. However, there are several other policy areas that have an influence on VET system design and implementation. These will briefly summarized below:

3.1 VET and social policies

VET plays a more and more prominent role in social policies. It is considered a powerful instrument to support the social inclusion and labour integration of the manifold target groups addressed by social policies in different countries, from handicapped people, ethnic minorities, refugees, demobilized soldiers, to unemployed youth and long-term unemployed. The approaches and programmes are numerous and diverse; but in general terms **two main approaches** can be distinguished:

- a) social policy actors provide support services to their respective target groups in order to **facilitate** their **access** to and/ or their **successful performance within the mainstream VET system** (preparatory courses, tutoring, remedial courses in maths or language training, socio-pedagogical support, stipends etc.)
- b) social policy actors **provide and fund separate training programmes** for their respective target groups outside of the mainstream VET system. Depending on the target groups these courses are often enriched with life skills training and/ or basic education modules.

These two approaches usually co-exist. It depends on the capacities and flexibility of the mainstream VET system on the one hand and on the scope and characteristics of the different target groups on the other, to which extent the latter approach with additional and separate training offers outside of the mainstream system is necessary. The main problem with the latter approach is the risk of stigmatization of graduates on the labour market. This can be mitigated with a reliable and competence-based assessment and certification system.

3.2 VET and youth policies

Initial VET addresses young people who are in a transition process not only from school to work but also from childhood to adulthood. They are not only about to become competent workers, employees or young entrepreneurs, they are also expected to become good and socially included citizens. Although modern (initial) VET systems usually cover in their curricula issues like life skills, political and citizenship education complementary offers by youth policy actors are frequent and useful. Making young people aware of their rights as VET students or apprentices, offering them counselling services for individual problems, or simply involving them in leisure time activities with peers are important contributions of youth policy to prevent frictions in the above-mentioned double transition process.

3.3 VET and migration policies

Migration is a global megatrend that affects VET systems in many countries and in many different ways:

- Some countries follow a decidedly labour export policy, i.e. they are aware (or assume) that the expected job growth in the national economy is far from providing realistic employment perspectives for the majority of the young generations about to enter the labour markets. Consequently, they try to orient (parts of) their VET systems towards the demand of labour markets abroad in order to facilitate and to benefit of circular labour migration.
- Other countries actively search for and recruit skilled labour from other countries in order to supply their booming industries with the labour force they need. These countries are under pressure to develop reliable instruments for skills gap analysis, appropriate assessment and recruitment mechanisms, and flexible further training offers for skills adaptation of incoming labour force.
- Some countries are confronted with high numbers of migrants and/ or refugees who challenge their education systems. In particular VET systems are required to develop adequate instruments and offers, from procedures for recognition of foreign diplomas and certificates to competence assessment and provision of tailor-made complementary trainings, and to the adaptation of the mainstream initial VET system to the specific demands and characteristics of young migrants and refugees.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding the relevance of other policy areas for the VET system in your country:

- Do social policy actors play a major role in the provision of support services or separate VET programmes for specific target groups?
- How can the complementarity and the mutual learning of social policy and VET actors be assured and improved?
- Which youth policy actors are relevant for the VET target groups and how can cooperation with them be developed in order to make the best use of their potential?
- Do what extent is the country affected by emigration or immigration? Which of the above-mentioned scenarios applies?
- Has the VET system already been adapted to the migration challenges?