

better steering and learning. The focus is on results and output and key questions refer to the usability of skills acquired in the training programme and the related employability of graduates, the employers' levels of (dis)satisfaction and requests for improvement, etc.

- Research driven: it aims at generating knowledge regarding career prospects and obstacles encountered by young people in the transition from VET to the labour market. Key questions refer to the variety of factors that may contribute to or impede successful labour market integration of graduates.

2. Although tracer/survey studies mainly focus on outputs, outcomes and impacts of VET provision, these studies may also ascertain

- the knowledge and skills that graduates acquire during their VET programmes, particularly their perceived relevance and usefulness in their professional lives
- the satisfaction of graduates with the completed VET programme
- the types and characteristics of VET graduate transitions to employment, the strategies graduate use to find a suitable job
- the activities graduates pursue from the completion of their VET programmes to the time of the survey interview
- teaching/training methods
- contents of VET curricula, etc.

3. Tracer/survey studies apply research techniques such as

- Structured questionnaires (e.g. graduate questionnaire, employer questionnaire, NEET questionnaire), in face to face or telephone interviews or through postal or email questionnaires
- Case studies
- Focus group discussions
- Complementary instruments e.g. associations of ex-VET students/trainees.

4. There may however be factors that influence the quality of information regarding Indicator 5, e.g.

- Availability of human resources, time and funding to carry out such studies, particularly at VET provider level
- Training of people involved in the tracer study to ensure high quality and objectivity of interviews
- Guarantee of confidentiality in order to enhance openness of the interviewees and to protect their personal data
- Response rate, particularly over a longer period of time, e.g. longitudinal surveys.

5. Finally, the PLA participants agreed on a few broad guiding principles to link skills and work:

- Linking VET and skills development to the world of work increases the probability of delivering those skills required by the evolving demands of labour markets (employers, workplaces and enterprises)
- Skills by themselves, however, do not automatically lead to more and better jobs. They need to be part of a broad set of policies, i.e. VET and skills policies are perceived as more effective when they are well coordinated with other policies (e.g. employment, social security)
- The pace of change in labour markets, determined by innovation, technology and markets, is accelerating and presents a continuing challenge to both policy makers and providers
- Timely information enables VET systems and providers to monitor the match between the supply and demand of skills, while employment and career guidance services can use that information to help VET graduates and workers make informed education choices
- Assessing the continued relevance and quality of VET programmes requires further development of tools and methods at national level, including more cooperation between statisticians and administrations collecting data.

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

A key **ingredient in successfully aligning a VET system and the labour market is accurate information**. By tracking VET graduates, national authorities and VET providers are able to get relevant data about young people transitions, either to the labour market or to further education/training.

It is widely recognised that **information supports the link between VET systems and the labour markets** and allows policy makers to answer important questions about the effectiveness of the system and its short term alignment with the needs of the workforce.

The problem of skills mismatch and the adequacy of labour market outcomes of VET is closely related to the relevance of VET programmes, i.e. how to link skills demand and supply.

The historic gap between the world of learning and the world of work seems to have been intensified by the rapidly changing pace of technology and globalisation in the past two decades. Keeping up with these changes has been very challenging for the EU, which is why EU Member States, the European Commission and European social partners have actively sought ways to respond to these challenges.

Key factors in linking skills demand and supply include

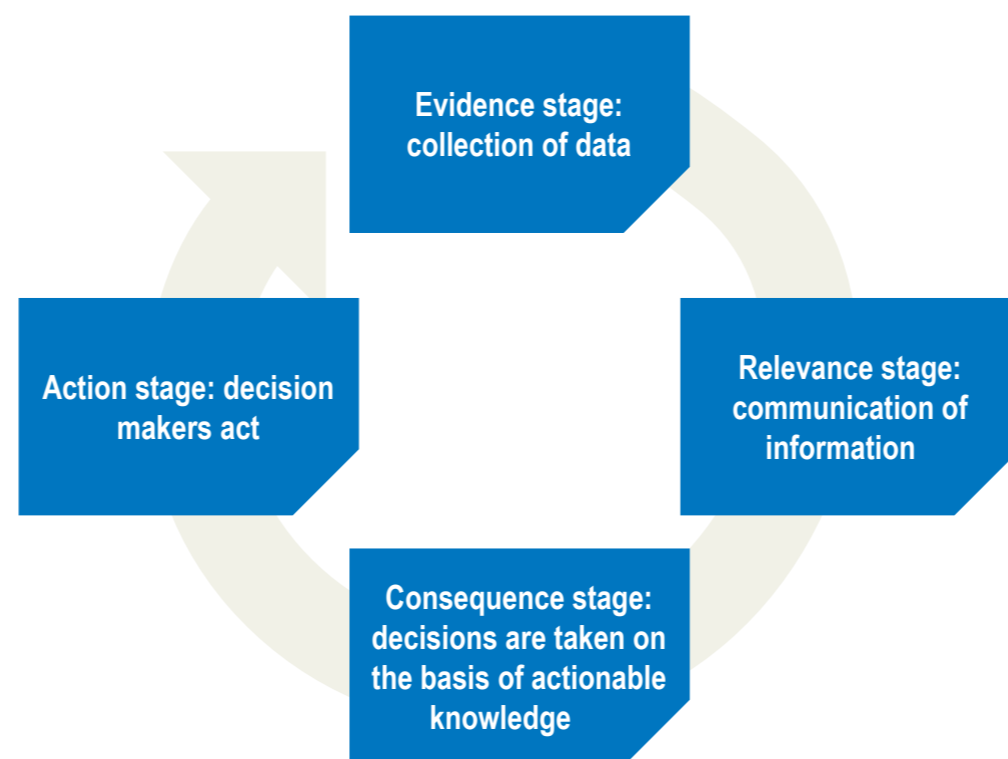
- the involvement of social partners at system level through sector base bodies to facilitate the continuous updating of skill requirements as well as the involvement of employers in the management of VET provision in order to keep VET providers up to date with new technological equipment in enterprises and help them identify which occupations and skills are rising or declining in demand
- the use of workplace learning because "there are benefits from this type of learning for all parties involved, beginning with the learner and the company which hosts the learner and/or cooperates with the VET school/institution, through VET providers themselves and up to the broader level of society"⁶
- monitoring the match between demand and supply through data collection

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Europe 2020 strategy and in particular the **New Skills Agenda** for Europe, emphasise the need to ensure that the right training and the right skills are available to people in the EU. This Skills Agenda highlights three key fields for intervention:

- improving the quality and relevance of skills formation
- making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and
- improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices.

This EQAVET PLA was a showcase of how the VET sector is able to assess the relevance of their VET offerings by tracking their graduates in the labour market or in further education. Ultimately, the data collected through survey-based approaches on the destination of VET learners and the share of employed learners after completion of training needs to be an integral part of the quality assurance cycle, i.e. the "loop" needs to be closed (see figure below): graduates' feedback on their destination should influence the VET provision/system and enhance VET learners' learning outcomes.



⁶ European Commission (2013) Work based learning: practices and policy pointers. Access item at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/alliance/work-based-learning-in-europe_en.pdf

This policy brief has been prepared in order to share the results of an EQAVET Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on EQAVET Indicator 5 "Placement rate of VET programmes" with a broader audience of policy makers, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders. The EQAVET PLAs enable information-sharing, discussion and learning with and from others on areas of strategic significance for the successful implementation of the Recommendation on establishing a European quality assurance reference framework for VET. This policy brief reflects the opinions of PLA participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or EQAVET position.

Peer Learning Activity on

EQAVET Indicator 5 – Placement rate in VET programmes

Participating countries: CY, CZ, DK, EE, EL, FI, HR, HU, LV, MT, PT, RO, SI, UK; and FYROM and Kosovo

SUMMARY

This policy brief is based on the peer learning activity that was held in Cardiff (Wales/UK) on 29-30 September 2016. The PLA, which is part of the **EQAVET Work Programme 2015-2017**, was organised by the EQAVET Secretariat in partnership with CollegesWales (the EQAVET national reference point in Wales) and convened representatives from 16 countries: national and regional government agencies, EQAVET national reference points (NRPs) and VET providers.

The methodology of EQAVET PLAs provides a focused environment for sharing knowledge, information and experiences on VET quality assurance and improvement in Europe. Through the presentation of examples of policy implementation and/or existing practices at system and provision level, PLA participants are encouraged to discuss and reflect on how to address some of the shared issues, concerns and challenges faced by VET systems and providers across Europe when they set about developing quality assurance and improvement processes.

The purpose of this policy brief is twofold: a) to synthesise the presentations and discussions held in the course of the PLA on existing concerns about VET graduates' transitions in the member states of the European Union, in particular the transition from VET programmes to the labour market and/or further education, and b) to analyse the issues considered significant in an EQAVET context, given the need to improve information on how VET graduates enter and progress in the labour market and/or further education. The PLA was also informed by a background paper and an analysis of a questionnaire based on participant experiences of using Indicator 5. More information on this PLA is available on the EQAVET website at http://www.eqavet.eu/qns/what-we-dolpeer-learning-activities/PLA_2016_Cardiff.aspx

POLICY CONTEXT

With a view to developing high quality VET, the EU Member States, the European Commission and European level social partners launched the Copenhagen process in 2002. As part of that process, both the adoption of the Recommendation on the establishment of a **European Quality Assurance Framework for VET (EQAVET Framework)** in 2009 and its implementation over the years constitute significant stepping stones on the path to achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy.

During the latest review of the Copenhagen process in Riga, the Ministers for Education and Training, the European Commission and the representatives of the European Social Partners acknowledged their concern about the high rate of youth unemployment. Accordingly, *the-Riga Conclusions*¹ highlight the need to better understand the skills needed in the labour market and to exploit this understanding to improve VET policies. Essentially, Ministers for Education and Training invited the Commission to develop a VET and skills agenda with a view to increasing employability and competitiveness. The **New Skills Agenda for Europe** was launched in June 2016 and proposes 10 actions to be taken over the next two years, including a) making VET a first choice by enhancing opportunities for VET learners to undertake a work-based learning experience and promoting greater visibility of good labour market outcomes of VET and b) an initiative on graduate tracking to improve information on how graduates progress in the labour market.

The **set of indicators in the EQAVET Framework** were proposed to help decision makers and VET providers measure outcomes and demonstrate

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

the improvement achieved. The EQAVET approach of input-output-outcome characterises and relates the key aspects of VET to each other and assists in both the interpretation of data and its use as evidence. **Indicator 5**, in particular, focuses on the placement rate in VET programmes and its purpose is threefold: to support employability, to improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market and to support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.

Peer Learning Activity OBJECTIVES

This Peer Learning Activity (PLA) aimed to identify approaches used in exploring the two dimensions of EQAVET Indicator 5, i.e.

- destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria,
- share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

The following comments encapsulate the participants' reflections which were stimulated by the background paper and presentations from representatives of Wales/UK, Denmark and the Czech Republic.

The PLA was organised into three discussion stages:

- Stage 1**-Discussion on use of destination data and placement rate in VET programmes at system level
- Stage 2**-Discussion on use of destination data and placement rate in VET programmes at provider level
- Stage 3**-Discussion on Closing the loop of the VET quality cycle – giving feedback to stakeholders on improvement actions and the role of EQAVET

During these stages participants' reflections were prompted by a key question which related to a set of discussion topics as follows:

- Key Question: If there are **constraints/barriers to implementing Indicator 5**, what might be done to overcome them?
- Discussion topics: **VET graduates' employability given the emergence of new skills and occupations**, key drivers, challenges and barriers to the effective tracking of VET graduates, including methodological and operationalisation issues

CASE STUDIES

The case studies looked at system and provider level approaches being used to measure the destination of VET learners and the share of employed learners after completion of training programmes. Further information on each case study is available on the EQAVET website².

The approaches featured in the case studies include:

- Using destination data to inform the work of careers staff with clients, parents, teachers and employers
- Using destination and placement data to: measure the result of political objectives; evaluate the VET-job match; evaluate the transition of graduates to the labour market and their employability; get feedback on the use of knowledge and skills gained from VET programmes
- Using placement data in decision making at regional level and in responding to social partners (employers, trade committees, unions)

CASE STUDY AT SYSTEM LEVEL FROM WALES

Career Wales was identified as having the data to provide reports to the Welsh Government and local authorities on the status of the full 16-18 cohort (mainstream schools, pupil referral units and special schools) against the five-tiered model of engagement, on a quarterly basis from 2013. Accordingly, Career Wales undertakes an annual survey to track pupil destinations (leaving year 11, 12 and 13 on 31st October).

This data is reported on a national and a local authority basis and is used to inform the work of careers staff with clients, parents, teachers and employers. The data collected is also used by partners and staff involved in planning learning, training and employment opportunities, including local authorities who are responsible for improvement plans to reduce the number of NEET³ year on year.

As stated by Career Wales, progress has been made as all local authorities are using the collected data and an increasing number of them are submitting this data to strategic groups.

In particular, Career Wales highlighted the improvement achieved in partnership working and strategic planning around supporting NEET.

However, Careers Wales also acknowledge that the exercise involves such challenges as meeting the increased demand for data and information through their current resources, the need to receive timely notification from providers as well as the need for information-sharing protocols.



² http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/peer-learning-activities/PLA_2016_Cardiff.aspx

³ NEET is an abbreviation for a young person who is "Not in Education, Employment or Training [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_\(NEET\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_(NEET))

CASE STUDY AT SYSTEM LEVEL FROM DENMARK

Four political objectives

- More student must choose to start a VET-programme immediately from 9./10. grade in lower secondary school.
- More students must complete a VET-programme
- All students must be challenge so they become as proficient as they can be
- Strengthen the trust and well-being in VET-schools



This Case Study looked at the use of placement rates at system level by Danish authorities. Three main reasons inspire the use of placement rates of VET graduates: they are used to measure the relevance of VET programmes to the labour market, the maintenance of the high placement rate among the newly qualified and also the results of the reform of the Danish VET system in 2014.

The Danish Agency for Education and Quality monitors the placement rates in the existing 105 VET programmes. It is an annual exercise that takes place in August/September through the collection of data from the national Danish pension system, which data is later validated by Statistics Denmark. The data collected (gender, ethnicity and age data) measures the number of VET programme completers who transitioned to further education or employment (in general terms) as well as those who are self-employed, unemployed or on maternity leave.

This process starts with the decision on the yearly baseline by the National Advisory Councils on Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training which takes into account the economic development of the country. Therefore, the 50 trade committees are important partners which must follow the development of the Labour Market and submit a development review. This review can be made by briefly describing the programme area and the changes the trade committee plans to introduce the following year or, if the placement rate for a specific programme is under the baseline, the respective trade committee must make a more detailed description of the changes that might be made to the programme. At a final stage, the Danish Agency for Education and Quality discusses with the trade committees the possible changes to be incorporated into regulations and curricula.

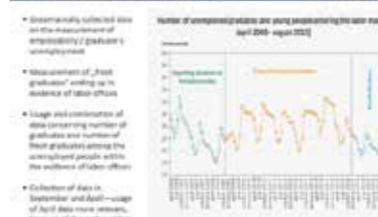
CASE STUDY AT SYSTEM LEVEL FROM CZECH REPUBLIC

This Case Study focused on a longitudinal survey among Czech graduates who were interviewed over a period of six years: before leaving school, 3 and 6 years after leaving school.

The main goals of the research include the evaluation of the education-job match, employability within the studied branch, feedback on the use of the acquired knowledge and skills at the workplace, satisfaction and identification of individuals with the studied branch as well as reasons for not working within the studied branch. A stratified random sampling was used according to the proportion of education categories and groups of branches and data was collected by standard collection modes (PAPI and CAMI)⁴. The main challenges encountered by the Department of Statistics and Analysis of the Labour Market, that carried out the research, was the decline of response rate over time and the protection of personal data.

The analysis of the survey data revealed, for example, that the main reasons for graduates to choose and study a different branch was to acquire a higher qualification, the low income associated with the qualification in a given branch or the difficulties encountered in finding a job. Another important set of responses seemed to clarify the reasons for working in a different branch of study, which included lack of graduates' success in finding a job, limited employability, low income, loss of interest in the studied branch or unsatisfactory working conditions. In analysing the rate of employment among graduates, the results reveal a continuous decline in unemployment across all of the education categories, although the highest rate of unemployment was found among VET graduates and graduates with both certificate and maturity diplomas while the lowest rate was among the grammar school graduates for the obvious reason that the majority of them continue in education.

EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES



CASE STUDY AT SYSTEM LEVEL FROM WALES AT PROVIDER LEVEL



The representative of the Cardiff and Vale College presented the second Welsh case study. It looked at the Welsh experience on the relationship between the engagement of employers and learners' destinations.

The purpose of their work with employers is twofold: they want to inform the curriculum in order to enhance learner experience at the college and maximise their prospects of progressing to employment and, concurrently, they expect to support economic growth in the region by providing relevant training and development for the existing workforce and by working in partnerships to create a sustainable, demanded skills pipeline for the future. To achieve these goals, the College uses a set of interrelated strategies:

- consultation with employers to inform the curriculum and training provision
- provision of work placements and other opportunities for learners and employers to interact and encourage employers to recruit from the college but also by supporting and developing career pathways and providing advice and guidance to support learner career choice
- provision of training and other services directly to employers
- contribution to the future vision and development of the region by early engagement with local influencers.

⁴ PAPI is the abbreviation for Paper and Pencil Interviewing and CAWI is the abbreviation for Computer Assisted Web Interviewing - Source: Handbook of recommended practices for questionnaire development and testing in the European statistical system <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4374310/13-Handbook-recommended-practices-questionnaire-development-and-testing-methods-2005.pdf/52bd85c2-2dc5-44ad-8f5d-0c6ccb2c55a0>

The college's progression towards the above objectives is based on embedding the information acquired through the analysis of data collected, namely LMI⁵ that will support their understanding of the local economy (particularly the key occupations and skills needs) in order to plan for courses that address demand.

In this context, the College has taken decisions on a) the levels of learning they offer (e.g. they have increased the number of Level 3, 4 and 5 programmes as well as programmes of accelerated learning, junior apprenticeships, school link programme & partnerships), b) new suite of qualifications (e.g. aerospace, food and drink manufacturing, games design and commercial courses), c) and have developed junior and higher apprenticeship programmes and bespoke employer programmes.

CASE STUDY AT SYSTEM LEVEL FROM DENMARK AT PROVIDER LEVEL



KL

This second Danish case study reviewed the use of placement rates of pedagogical assistants (PAU) at local government level.

The work of pedagogical assistants at local government level covers a variety of target groups. i.e. specialized care public day care/preschool for 0-5 year-old children, after school care for 6-12 year olds, specialised care facilities and schools for 0-18 year olds and specialised care facilities for people of 18+. Data collected by the local government and the regional salary register showed that the number of untrained staff decreased between 2010-2015 (respectively from c.50,000 to c.37,000). The number of trained staff, on the other hand, rose about 2% in the same period, which constitutes one of the lowest placement rates in the country.

In order to fulfil the national political agenda that aims to bring more young people to VET programmes, local governments felt they needed to ensure that young people's choice of PAU VET programmes were in line with labour market needs. To that end, a survey on the future demand of pedagogical assistants was conducted and the report (2015) showed that 34% of the leaders in the pedagogical sector who have PAU employees expected a reduction in the demand against 8% of the leaders who expected an increase in the demand for PAU. Based on this evidence, it was possible to reach agreement for 2017-2018: there will be a fixed number of VET positions to be defined and geographically determined by employers, limited access to the preliminary introduction programme as well as reduced numbers of VET positions, compared to 2015.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTIONS

The case studies presented during the PLA mirrored the diversity of VET contexts across Europe and showed how data collected by survey/tracer studies, and the information that is subsequently generated, can be used for a variety of purposes and gathered through different approaches. Although obtaining such information is hard, as graduates are sometimes hard to track, labour market outcomes are a central measure of the extent to which VET programmes are meeting labour market needs.

The following discussion attempts to summarise the exchange of viewpoints on the use of Indicator 5 at system and provider level, namely how data and information can be used in relation to VET graduates' feedback on the relevance of VET programmes, the success or degree of difficulty encountered by graduate in transitioning to employment or further education and training and to understand which factors explain graduates' success or failure. It also enables the gathering of data and the organisation of information to feed back to training institutions and to inform policy bodies on key issues. In sum, the discussions focused on how tracer studies/surveys help national authorities and providers listen to the voice of graduates on the quality culture of VET.

A key ingredient in successfully aligning a VET system and the labour market is accurate information. By tracking VET graduates, national authorities at system level as well as VET providers are able to get relevant data about young people's transitions, either to the labour market or to further education/training. It is widely recognised that information supports the link between VET systems and the labour markets and allows policy makers to answer important questions about the effectiveness of the system and its short term alignment with the needs of the workforce.

During the PLA, participants identified a number of issues and agreed that:

1. Depending on the focus, a tracer/survey study can be:

- Accountability driven:** it aims to provide facts and figures and its focus is on relevance and partial impact. It can be used as a monitoring and partly as an evaluation instrument where key questions refer to the measurement of graduates' employability (labour market information), i.e. the percentage of graduates who are employed, their type of job and contracts (temporary vs permanent contracts) etc., or in further education and training. In short, it aims at ensuring accountability and may be used to ensure cost efficiency of the VET system and provision.
- Management driven:** it aims at providing feedback to the VET provider and allows for the adaptation and improvement of VET provision,

⁵ LMI stands for Labour Market Information. According to Larsen & others in Information systems for Regional Labour Market Monitoring(2009) LMI can be defined either in narrow terms (employment, unemployment and activity status of the population) or more broadly (education and qualifications of the population, special target groups, employment structure by industry and occupation, labour force demand and supply etc).