



Making initial vocational education and training (IVET) more attractive



European Network for Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

In some countries vocational education and training (VET) suffers from an image problem. Lack of investment, limited quality management and “dead ends” in terms of progression pathways have contributed to a negative perception of the sector and a reticence from learners to choose a VET programme. Current EU education and training policy recognises this issue and improving the quality and attractiveness of VET is therefore a key priority.

This brochure provides an overview of the actions and conditions that make initial vocational education and training (IVET) more attractive to learners. Key characteristics of attractive IVET pathways and programmes are also presented.

These findings are the results of the ENQA-VET thematic group on making VET more attractive for learners. The outcomes of the thematic group’s deliberations are intended to feed into and add value to the debate on the attractiveness of VET and inform approaches to the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF).

European context

A key priority of EU education and training policy is to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET. This priority is at the heart of the Copenhagen Process.

The Bordeaux Communiqué, the most recent review of the implementation of Copenhagen Process, identified a number of actions that improve the attractiveness of VET including developing school-business partnerships, ensuring equitable access and participation in VET, providing access to information, guidance and counselling, promoting access, transfer and progression through the development qualifications’ systems and frameworks based on learning outcomes, developing and improving quality assurance processes and mechanisms and enhancing strategies for the promotion of VET.

Conditions for making IVET more attractive for learners

There are six conditions that contribute to making IVET more attractive to learners, which can be summarised under the following headings: quality management, labour market relevance, progression pathways, status and image, information and guidance and IVET learning facilitators.

1. Quality management

Quality management has been identified as the key to making IVET attractive and is the common theme running through all six areas. Many countries have well-established legislation and policies that safeguard the quality and relevance of IVET and there is evidence that policies and practices that work well in one context are being adapted and implemented in other contexts and countries.

Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable shift towards multi-actor partnerships of key stakeholders and other specialists in IVET policy development processes at the different levels. The multi-actor partnership approach requires participants to take account of the diverse expectations of different stakeholders and contributes to a culture of co-operation, mutual trust and quality. The quality culture of a development partnership, or community of practice, is underpinned by the quality management capacities of each partner and the quality management system they put in place.

The quality and relevance of IVET is supported by systematic policy developments that can be clustered under the headings:

- Legislation and evidence-based policy planning
- Governance and organisation
- Labour market relevance of IVET
- IVET qualifications
- Information and guidance services
- IVET status and image

2. Labour market relevance

Ensuring the relevance of IVET, for the purposes of gaining access to employment and further learning, is a fundamental factor to be addressed when improving its attractiveness and quality. For IVET to be attractive it must lead to qualifications that have currency in the labour market. IVET systems and arrangements must be linked to economic development and must adapt as rapidly as economies change. These conditions can be best met when IVET providers and business and industry collaborate effectively.

New technologies have considerably altered the nature of many of the traditional occupations accessed through IVET qualifications; this can make IVET attractive for non-traditional target groups. Moreover, many new occupations that are attractive for young people can be accessed through IVET pathways in fields such as: media, sports, leisure, fashion, ICTs and green energy. Working contexts, work practices and remuneration patterns have also been transformed. Young people are attracted to IVET pathways that are closely linked to the world of work, particularly those with integrated work-based training placements.

3. Progression pathways

For IVET to offer attractive education and training opportunities, learners must be able to easily progress from one qualification level and type to another. Ideally, informal or non-formal learning should also be recognised and learners should be able to transfer 'credit' for learning across programmes and, if so wished, between regions and/or countries. This type of mobility is best facilitated through the establishment of internationally referenced qualifications' frameworks.

The last decade has seen a proliferation of such qualifications frameworks, established and in planning, and associated arrangements for the recognition of prior learning and credit systems. These initiatives are designed to facilitate the type of mobility required to increase the attractiveness of VET for learners. The introduction of such frameworks often acts as a catalyst for modernising IVET, improving its quality and flexibility, integrating IVET in the continuum of lifelong learning and facilitating progression pathways.

4. Status and image

IVET must be appealing, have high status and a positive image. Demonstrating the attractiveness of high quality, relevant IVET to young people is reliant on how it is promoted.

Learners often perceive IVET through the eyes of their parents and older generations and the image IVET had in times past. Much needs to be done to portray IVET pathways and qualifications in different and more attractive ways

5. Information and guidance

The image of IVET can be improved through information that is presented in an attractive way. Making good use of the internet can improve the accessibility of information on IVET and involving employers and young people in promotional activities can demonstrate that IVET is an up-to-date, relevant sector offering quality education and training leading to attractive careers.

The provision of professional and appropriate career guidance prior to enrolment and during training helps to make IVET more attractive. Over the past decade measures to enhance career guidance services have been introduced in many countries to support lifelong learning. As learning opportunities become more numerous and diverse and qualifications systems more flexible, learners will need quality information and advice to guide them in making choices.

The quality of advisory services is being addressed through improving the professional qualifications and continuing education of guidance specialists, improving cross-sectoral co-operation, establishing support structures, introducing quality assurance and improving resources.

6. IVET learning facilitators

A learners experience and perception of VET is greatly influenced by the competence of learning facilitators including teachers and trainers.

Insufficiently qualified professionals, lacking up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience of work in the sectors for which they are preparing learners, has a negative effect on the quality of IVET and its attractiveness for learners

The continuing professional development of IVET learning facilitators in all areas should therefore be made a priority in Member States. Funding will need to be allocated to the development of the working-life skills of vocational teachers and to the training of workplace instructors in order to improve the quality and attractiveness of IVET.

Characteristics of attractive IVET

While attractiveness is a subjective concept, the value that the labour market and society in general, place on an IVET pathway will have a major impact on its attractiveness.

The value of IVET pathways can be related to a range of characteristics that include:

- Quality of research underpinning IVET policy and practice;
- Qualitative co-operation between stakeholders/partners, including suitable collaboration between IVET and the labour market on matters such as needs analysis and the development of standards and contents;
- Suitably accredited and quality assured IVET provider institutions;
- Use of effective learning approaches, methodologies and tools;
- Quality assured qualifications esteemed in society and the labour market and recognised in relation to progress to another level of qualification;
- Quality information, guidance and counselling services;
- Tangible and pro-active links between the IVET school and the labour market that facilitate work-based learning;
- Environment, ambiance and facilities that appeal to young people.

Supporting effective policy development

1. European initiatives to improve the quality, relevance and attractiveness of IVET should take full account of its heterogeneity.
2. Key stakeholders, including employers, social partners and IVET providers, including teachers and trainers, are important partners in European processes for the development of quality IVET.
3. The role of context in shaping countries' responses to European policy initiatives is important.
4. Shifting emphasis to 'involving stakeholders in a culture of continuous improvement' is the key to enhancing the quality and relevance of IVET.
5. Quality assurance processes and procedures should be responsive to diverse IVET provision.
6. Capacity-building for quality development and quality management should be integrated in formal initial and continuing education and training for IVET teachers, trainers, and other staff (including guidance specialists).
7. Quality assurance practice should be 'fit-for-purpose' and should not introduce inappropriate rigidity that may inhibit the responsiveness of qualifications to labour market needs.
8. Learning 'on-the-job' increases the attractiveness of IVET for learners and enhances the quality and relevance of their qualifications for employers.

Further information

For more information on this topic please see the full report "Making initial vocational education and training more attractive for learners" available for download from the ENQA-VET website www.enqavet.eu



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Contact Details

For further information please visit www.enqavet.eu or contact the ENQA-VET Secretariat.

FETAC, East Point Plaza,
East Point Business Park,
Dublin 3, Ireland.

T: 00353 1 865 9546

F: 00353 1 865 0072

E-mail: info@enqavet.eu

Website: www.enqavet.eu

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