



Learning for Jobs – The OECD Policy Review of Vocational Education and Training

For OECD member countries, a well-skilled workforce is one of the main supports for prosperity and growth. Some of the skills are coming from the expansion of general education at all levels. But OECD countries also need specific occupational skills – in quickly expanding fields such as in health care, in jobs driven by technological changes, as well as in traditional trades like electricians and plumbers. The collective importance of these skills is high in all OECD economies, although the mix of skills and occupations in demand is changing fast. Typically, initial vocational education and training systems have a big part to play in supplying these skills – and therefore play a critical role in meeting the needs of a well-functioning modern economy. These systems are now under intensive scrutiny to determine if they can deliver the skills required, and ensure that they adapt to fast-changing needs. Launched in 2007, *Learning for Jobs*, the OECD policy review of vocational education and training (VET), is designed to help countries with this task.

Vocational education and training takes diverse forms. For example in continental Europe, many young people enter a vocational programme in upper secondary education, sometimes linked to workplace training. In the United States, by contrast, career and technical education (as vocational education and training is described in the US) is concentrated largely at tertiary level, particularly in the community colleges. Some countries have extensive formal apprenticeship systems, others practically none.

Despite the international diversity, some common lessons emerge:

MEETING LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

- ❖ Provide a mix of VET programmes that reflects both student preferences and employer needs.
- ❖ For VET beyond secondary level, share the costs between government, employers and individual students according to the benefits obtained.
- ❖ Engage employers and unions in curriculum development and ensure that the skills taught correspond to those needed in the modern workplace.
- ❖ Through VET systems, provide young people with the generic, transferable skills to support occupational mobility and lifelong learning, and with the occupationally-specific skills that meet employers' immediate needs.

TEACHERS AND TRAINERS

- ❖ Deliver sufficient recruitment of teachers and trainers for VET institutions, and ensure this workforce is well-acquainted with the needs of modern industry. To this end:
- ❖ Encourage part-time working, promote flexible pathways of recruitment and take advantage of the current economic slowdown to encourage those leaving industry with good practical skills to enter the workforce of VET institutions
- ❖ Provide appropriate pedagogical and other preparation for trainers (including the supervisors) of trainees and apprentices in workplaces.
- ❖ Encourage interchange and partnership between VET institutions and industry.

- ❖ Adopt standardised national assessment frameworks.

WORKPLACE TRAINING

- ❖ Make substantial use of workplace training in initial VET.
- ❖ Ensure workplace training is of good quality, through the provision of a clear contractual framework for apprenticeships, and through effective quality assurance.
- ❖ Ensure there are sufficient incentives to participate in workplace training for both employers and students.
- ❖ Balance workplace training by other provision (e.g. training workshops in schools) where other learning environments work better, or where workplace training is not available.
- ❖ Devise effective responses to the current economic crisis, to sustain workplace training, and cope with increased demand for full-time VET.

POLICY TOOLS

- ❖ Engage employers and unions in VET policy and provision and construct effective mechanisms to that end.
- ❖ Collect good data on the labour market outcomes of VET, and provide the capacity to analyse and disseminate that data.
- ❖ Provide careers guidance accessible to all, informed by knowledge of labour market outcomes.

The OECD is conducting individual policy reviews of vocational education and training in 14 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England and Wales), and the United States (South Carolina and Texas). Short reports on Chile and the Peoples Republic of China are also to be prepared. All reviews are being published on our website. Canada, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands also provided voluntary financial contributions in support of the work.

The initial report of the comparative study is available on the OECD website indicated below. The final comparative report will be published as a book in Autumn 2010. Other working papers prepared as part of the study are also available on the website. These include reviews of previous literature and a study of the effect of the economic crisis.

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Links and documents are available at www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs

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