

Vocational Education and Training in Chile Strengths, Challenges and Policy Options

STRENGTHS

The Chilean VET system has a number of strengths:

- It has been underpinned by a dynamic economy, with GDP growth averaging 6% over the last two decades – but Chile has not escaped the global economic slowdown in 2009.
- Society places a high value on education and training, with strong social demand for education, and fast-increasing participation in post-compulsory education; upper secondary graduation rates are up from 46% in 1995 to 71% in 2007 (EAG, 2009).
- Efforts to improve schooling quality may be paying off: the reading performance of students in PISA improved between 2000 and 2006 (PISA, 2006).
- The government's commitment to develop and reform the VET system is illustrated by the recent work of the VET Commission and the creation of the National Council for VET.

CHALLENGES

Among the challenges faced by Chile:

- The various elements of the VET system are weakly connected to each other, both in institutional and curricular terms. The initiative to create a qualifications framework is a welcome attempt to address this challenge, but its implementation faces a number of obstacles.
- The literacy and numeracy skills of 15 year olds in Chile are not as strong as they should be, and this is likely to be a particular problem among those in vocational education and training programmes.
- Workplace training, as part of VET programmes, is weakly developed. Many upper secondary VET students do not participate in workplace training and the mechanisms to assure its quality of are weak.

AMONG THE REPORT'S POLICY OPTIONS

- Systematically engage with employers, trade unions and other key stakeholders to develop and implement the qualification framework. This may involve a gradualist approach to implementation, to ensure the full buy-in of all stakeholders.
- Strengthen quality assurance throughout the VET system to support the qualifications framework – within tertiary education ensuring that the existing quality assurance arrangements can address the specificity of VET.
- Ensure that VET programmes devote sufficient space in the curriculum, and sufficient good quality teaching, to the acquisition of hard and soft general skills.
- Identify particular numeracy and literacy weaknesses among students in VET programmes and target help to those who need it.
- Starting with the initiative to set up the National Council, establish systematic architecture for consultation between the VET system and industry, allowing for consultation at sectoral and regional levels.
- Make systematic efforts to encourage workplace training in all parts of the VET system, building partnerships between VET institutions and industry; establish effective quality standards for the workplace training.

FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET) has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Policies. Chile. A Report on Selected Policy Issues (OECD, 2009) was released in December 2009. It assesses the main challenges within the three topic areas previously agreed with the Chilean authorities (the implementation of a qualifications framework, the balance between generic and specific skills in vocational programmes, and the need to create partnerships with employers), and presents the OECD's analysis of these topics and suggested policy options.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs