OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training

A SKILLS BEYOND SCHOOL COMMENTARY ON SPAIN

Simon Field, Viktória Kis and Małgorzata Kuczera

September 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The OECD is grateful to the Spanish national co-ordinator Rosario Esteban for her work in providing information and advice and organising the visits and meetings. We would also like to thank the other people in Spain who, during our visit and meetings, gave their time to welcome us at their schools and other institutions and answered our questions.

Summary assessment of Spain: strengths and challenges of the system

Strengths

- The social partners are well engaged in the VET system. Nationally, this takes place through the National Commission on VET, which aims to build consensus among the national and autonomous community governments, and employers and unions, on VET policy. Locally, employers are engaged in the system particularly through the provision of workplace training.
- Reform has been pursued systematically in recent years, while a substantial degree of consensus has been maintained through consultation with different levels of government and the social partners. This is a real strength, and there remains a need to sustain and develop this consensus between national government, autonomous communities in the regions of Spain, employers and unions on VET policy.
- Recent reforms have been designed to improve permeability in the VET system and access to post secondary education. Graduates of upper secondary VET (with VET diplomas) were previously required to restart upper secondary academic programmes in order to spend another two years studying before obtaining the Spanish Baccalaureate – this has now been reduced to one year.
- The VET system as a whole, and the pathways through it, are generally clear and comprehensible to participants. A recent reform, which has yet to be fully implemented, has aligned the VET diplomas (accredited by the Ministry of Education) with the individual competences (certified by the Ministry of Labour), so that typically completion of any diploma will include the acquisition of certain certified competences. This is a welcome and positive development.
- A number of countries use vocational programmes at compulsory level to engage or re-engage adolescents at risk of dropping out of school, and a number of previous OECD reviews of Spain have urged this approach. In Spain, at lower secondary level, the VIP (vocational initial programme) has now adopted this approach as it aims to reintegrate some young people in school through vocational programmes. Workplace training is required for the final three months of any intermediate or higher vocational programme. We heard that this works well in terms of integrating graduates into the labour market, as training firms often offer the trainees jobs, and there are normally sufficient workplace training places. Mandatory workplace training, as in Spain, is

desirable not only because of the value of the workplace as a learning environment, but also because it binds provision more closely to the needs of employers.

Challenges

- There is no requirement for VET teachers and trainers to have worked in their vocational field – although they do need to be qualified in that field and often spend periods of training in companies. This is a particular challenge in a system which relies extensively on school-based workshops to develop practical vocational skills. Current budgetary pressures are putting particular strain on Spain's school-based model of vocational training. Retiring teachers are not being replaced – ageing the workforce and perhaps distancing it further from industry, while postponing the replacement of out-of-date training equipment.
- Students enter intermediate VET programmes with school certificates which should ensure some minimum level of basic skills as the certificate is similar to that required to enter the general stream of *Bachillerato*. Students entering higher VET programmes need to have the *Bachiller* certificate, the same award required to enter university, but some weaknesses in academic skills may remain. The intermediate and higher level curricula include practical training and teaching of the theory associated with the vocational field, but little direct teaching in maths, literacy, or other academic subjects. This means that there is no direct test of numeracy and literacy although these skills may continue to be developed in the context of the theoretical part of the vocational programme. This is a challenge, given the evidence that good numeracy and literacy is not only important for successful completion of vocational programmes, but also for further education and career development.
- Career guidance in schools needs reform, as it is delivered by teachers trained in psychological counselling but usually with limited labour market knowledge or experience. Current attempts to reform guidance include measures designed to integrate school-based guidance with employment advice for the unemployed.
- While mandatory workplace training serves well at the end of VET cycles as a means of transition to the labour market (since training employers often offer jobs to trainees), it is a very much less substantial element of the training element of vocational programmes than would be found in apprenticeship systems for example. So an issue remains of whether there might be scope for further development of workplace training in the system.

The commentary on Spain and its place in the wider OECD study

This commentary is one of a series of country reports on postsecondary vocational education and training (VET) in OECD countries, prepared as part of an OECD study (see Box 1). The series includes *reviews*, involving an in-depth analysis of a country system leading to a set of policy recommendations backed by analysis. The *commentaries* are simpler exercises, largely descriptive but also including an assessment of strengths and challenges in the country system. The commentaries are designed to be of value as free-standing reports, but are also prepared so that they can become the first phase of a full review, should a country so wish.

Box 1. Skills beyond School: the OECD study of postsecondary vocational education and training

Increasingly countries look beyond secondary school to more advanced qualifications to provide the skills needed in many of the fastest growing technical and professional jobs in OECD economies. The OECD study, *Skills beyond School,* is addressing the range of policy questions arising, including funding and governance, matching supply and demand, quality assurance and equity and access. The study will build on the success of the previous OECD study of vocational education and training *Learning for Jobs*[1] which examined policy through 17 country reviews and a comparative report. The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD *Skills Strategy* (OECD, 2012a).

Full country policy reviews are being conducted in Austria, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (with case studies of Florida, Maryland and Washington State). Shorter exercises leading to an OECD country commentary will be undertaken in Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Iceland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and in Northern Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Background reports will be prepared in all these countries, and in France, Hungary and Mexico.

See *www.oecd.org/education/vet*

This commentary describes the context of the wider OECD study, outlines the main features of the Spanish VET system, and compares its main features with those of other countries. It also sets out a number of key statistical indicators comparing Spain with other OECD countries. These cover both the education system and the labour market. It then provides a brief assessment of the main strengths of the system, and the policy challenges which need to be addressed by Spain in the future.

This commentary was prepared using a standard methodology. The Spanish authorities provided a range of background documentation, following which an OECD team made a visit to Spain on 19-21 October 2011, where they discussed issues arising with a range of key stakeholders and made a visit to a training institution. By agreement with the Spanish authorities this particular commentary covers the upper secondary (intermediate) level of VET as well as programmes at postsecondary level.

A snapshot of the vocational education and training system

The Spanish initial vocational education and training system is organised at "intermediate" (upper secondary) and "higher" (tertiary) levels. In addition, there are some programmes at lower secondary level. The arrangements for intermediate and higher level VET are very similar in many respects, other than being different in level, and often take place in the same institutions.

Compulsory education in Spain is comprehensive, and finishes at around the age of 16 with the compulsory secondary education certificate, signifying the successful completion of compulsory education. In the final year of compulsory education the students choose between: (a) two general programmes (either science and technology, or humanities and social science) leading towards upper secondary academic education and the *Bachillerato*; or (b) pre-vocational studies, leading to an upper secondary vocational programme. In all cases the compulsory secondary education certificate provides them with the right of entry into the upper secondary programmes.

Around 30% of the cohort do not receive this certificate because of weaknesses in their academic performance. As a means of addressing this problem, and reintegrating these students, since the 2007/8 academic year, those students who reach the age of 16 and have not obtained the certificate enter vocational initiation programmes. These "VIP" programmes provide a range of special modules including vocational modules. The aim of the VIP programmes is that all students should achieve competences at least equivalent to a level one professional qualification and have a chance of entering the labour market and/or continuing their studies by pursuing an intermediate vocational programme. First evaluation evidence has been is apparently favourable.

Just over half of those who obtain the compulsory secondary school certificate opt to continue with academic programmes in a school leading to the *Bachillerato*. The remainder – just under half (or around one third of the entire cohort) – enter intermediate vocational programmes. These programmes involve 2 000 hours of study over two years leading to a

technical diploma. Intermediate programmes are delivered either in a dedicated vocational school – typically with a specialisation in particular fields of study – or in a school which undertakes both academic *Bachillerato* studies and vocational programmes.

Students apply for places in the intermediate programmes and schools indicating first and second preferences for both programme and school. When a school is oversubscribed, a selection typically takes place on the basis of academic performance. There are some particularly attractive specialisations where there is often excess demand. The number of places available in different specialities is determined by the autonomous communities on the basis of labour market information. The vocational programmes include a mix of theoretical education in the chosen vocational field, and practical training using school equipment and workshops.

Possession of the technical diploma gives graduates the right to enter higher vocational programmes, subject to an entrance examination. Technical diploma graduates may also pursue a baccalaureate. Until recently this required two additional years of study, but a recent reform has reduced this period to one year. Following recent reforms, students who have obtained the higher technical diploma (*Tecnico Superior)* also have access to university studies.

All vocational diplomas, at both intermediate and higher levels are grouped in 26 professional families, including families such as "agriculture", "computing and communications", and "health".

In both intermediate and higher vocational programmes, workplace training takes place through a compulsory three month module right at the end of the programmes (except for those who can accredit previous work experience and may therefore be exempt). Apparently there are few difficulties in finding training firms willing to take students, (although when the scheme was first introduced in the early 1990s firms took some time to get used to taking trainees). The firms receive a nominal payment of around EUR 5 per day per student for their expenses from the education authorities. From the firm's point of view the trainees are attractive for two reasons: firstly because they represent almost free labour provided by fully trained students (as they are at the end of their programmes); secondly because they offer a recruitment device: many trainees are offered jobs by the training firm at the end of the training period (when their programmes are completed and they are therefore immediately available for work).

Curricula for intermediate and higher vocational programmes are nationally determined, with a small element of discretion for the autonomous communities to make local additions.

The vast majority of teachers and trainers of vocational programmes at both intermediate and higher levels are required to have a university degree in an appropriate subject and pedagogical training. (In a small number of fields, such as for restaurant management there is a dispensation because there have not been, at least until recently, appropriate university degree programmes). Teachers and trainers have to pass a test in their field of speciality but there is no requirement that they should have worked as practitioners in their field of speciality.

Graduates from the intermediate and higher level programmes are awarded a technical or higher technical diploma in the relevant speciality, which is national and recognised in the labour market. This is supported by the Ministry of Education. In addition, they will, once new reforms are fully implemented, obtain one or more "certificates of professionalism" issued by the Ministry of Labour – linked to competence standards. Certificates can be issued at level 1, 2 or 3 corresponding to three levels of competence.

Careers guidance in schools – which should help to orient young people in their choice of a vocational or academic track in upper secondary education, and to choose an appropriate vocational track is closely linked to the counselling profession. National legislation requires the provision of career guidance throughout the Spanish school and adult education systems. One class hour per week of guidance is included in compulsory primary and secondary education and in the two years of baccalaureate upper secondary education. Both lower and upper secondary vocational education students take a "vocational training and guidance" module for 65 class hours per year. Those involved do not necessarily have a lot of knowledge of the labour market. However there are attempts under way to merge or coordinate more closely the career orientation provided by the employment service (particularly for the unemployed) and schools-based careers guidance.

Policy reform is led by the national government but involves extensive consensus-building with all the autonomous communities as well as employers and trade unions. The "general council on VET" groups all of these bodies and meets roughly once every quarter. The main recent policy reforms have been introduced with the support of all these parties.

In international comparison

The Spanish VET system at intermediate (upper secondary) level is similar to that found in a number of European countries, with separate vocational schools, and a separate vocational track at upper secondary level. It therefore differs from the approach of some English-speaking countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, where there is very limited

vocational education (outside apprenticeship systems) at upper secondary level. It also differs from dual system vocational training in the Germanophone and some other countries, where the vocational track involves apprenticeship with part-time vocational school occupying no more than one or two days per week.

The higher (postsecondary) VET system in Spain is rather more distinctive by international standards. In many countries, postsecondary VET involves a distinctive set of institutions articulated with and linked to other institutions and programmes in the postsecondary sector including universities. In the case of Spain, higher VET programmes are aligned to the upper secondary vocational programmes and the institutions providing them (often the same institution).

Comparing Spain with other countries: key indicators

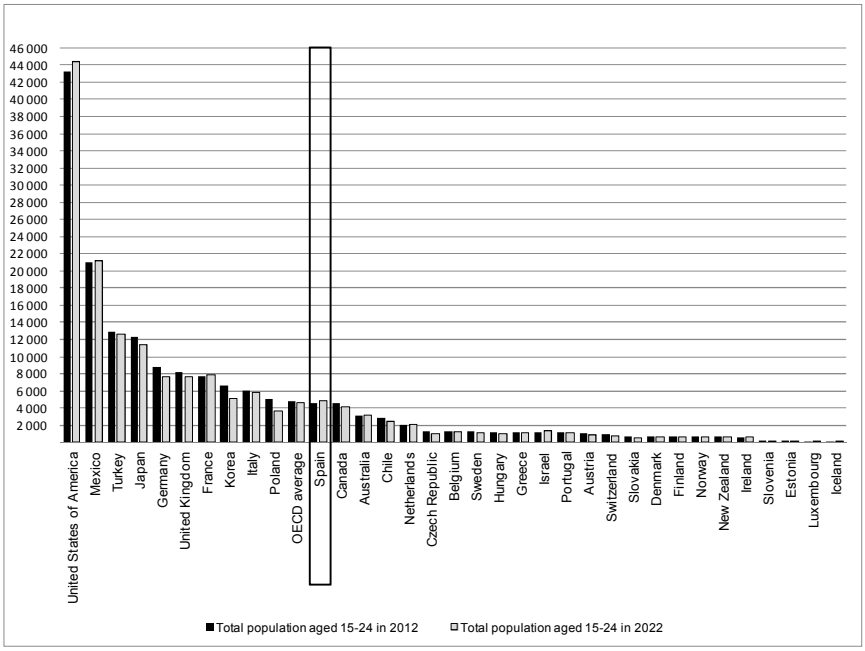
This section looks at some indicators comparing the Spanish VET system, and its labour market context, with the pattern found in other countries. Comparisons of a statistical indicator for any one country with the OECD average are useful, but must always be interpreted with caution. Few indicators are unequivocally positive in one direction, and, there can be no presumption that convergence with the average is desirable.

The demographic context

In Spain, declining fertility rates mean that the numbers of students of all ages over 15 is set for a modest decline (assuming constant age participation rates). See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Total population aged 15-24 in 2012 compared to projected population in 2022

In thousands



Source: Author's calculations based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2011), *World Population Prospects: the 2010 Revision*, CD-ROM Edition.[1]

Indicators of education and training

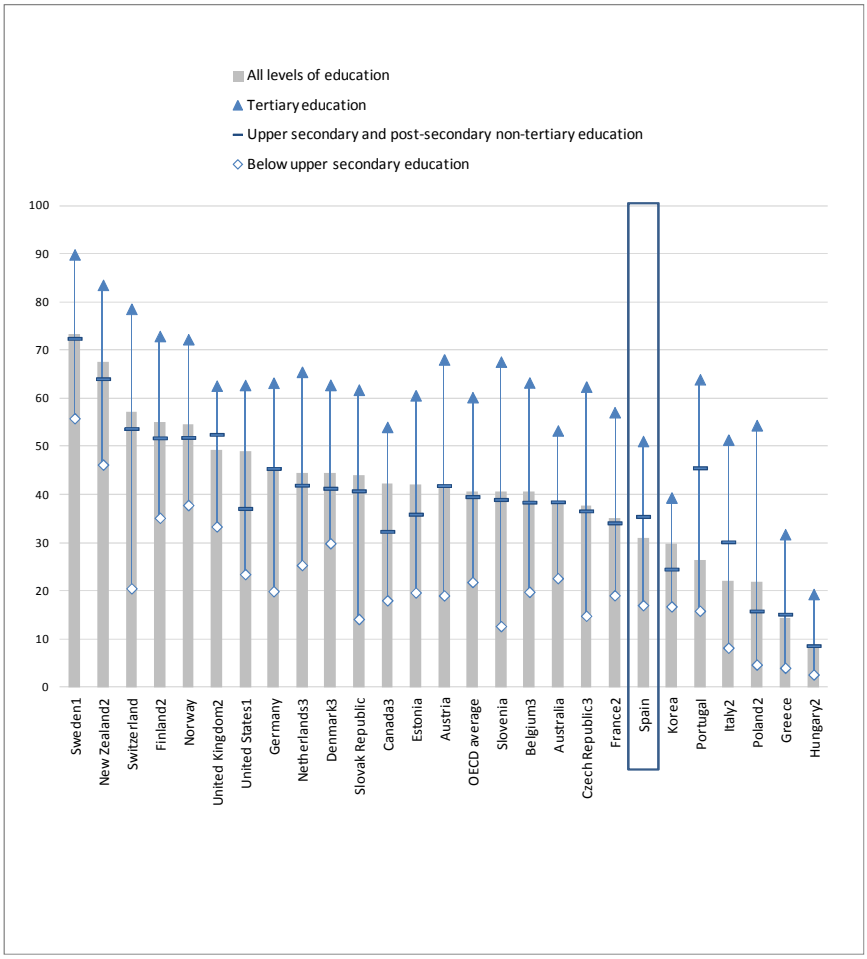
The development of higher vocational training programmes has led to rising graduation rates from tertiary type B programmes in Spain over the past 15 years. While in 1995 less than 2% of the cohort graduated from this type of programme, in 2009 this figure rose to 15%, above the OECD average of 9% (OECD, 2011a, 2011b). Over the same period graduation rates from tertiary type A programmes rose modestly from 24% to 27%, well below the OECD average of 38% in 2009.

Adult participation in education and training is an important contextual indicator for initial vocational programmes, because it reveals the extent to which later on in life, adults can catch up in response to missed opportunities in initial education, augment basic skills with additional qualifications, and attain higher level qualifications. Participation of adults

in formal or non-formal education in Spain is below the OECD average for all levels of education. In 2007 overall 31% of 25-64 year-olds participated in formal and/or non-formal training, while the OECD average was 41%. Participation rates by education attainment are shown in Figure 2. Patterns of participation in formal and non-formal training in Spain resemble international patterns as employed persons, particularly those working full-time, and those with higher level qualifications are much more likely to participate. In 2007, 36% of employed adults and 19% of those not employed took part in formal and/or non-formal education.

Figure 2. Participation in formal and/or non-formal education, by educational attainment

Participation rate of the 25-64-year-old population, 2007



Notes: 1. reference year 2005; 2. reference year 2006; 3. reference year 2008.

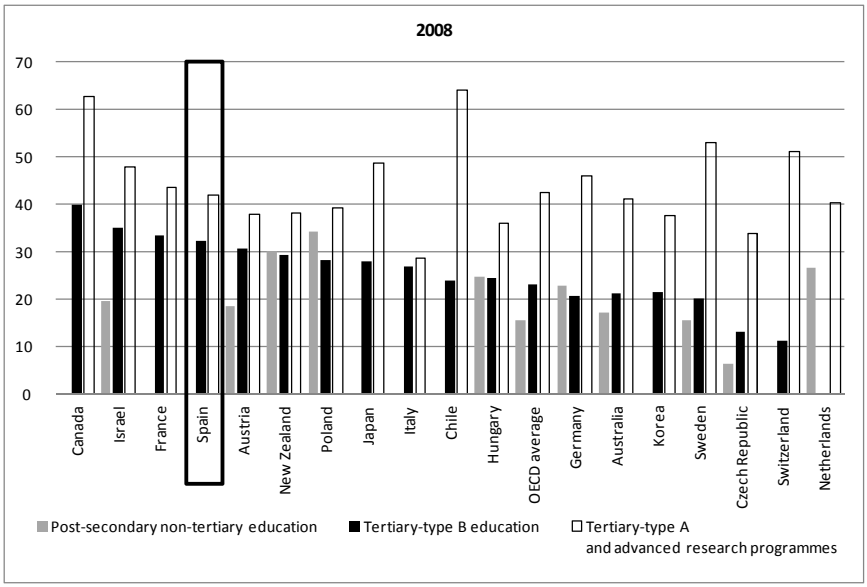
Countries are ranked in descending order of participation in formal and/or non-formal education, for all levels of education.

Source: OECD (2010a), *Education at a Glance 2010*: *OECD Indicators*, Table A5.1b, OECD Publishing. doi: *10.1787/eag-2010-en*. (*www.oecd.org/edu/eag2010*).

Postsecondary VET in Spain is relatively costly, reflecting the costs of well equipped vocational schools. In relation to per capita GDP, annual expenditure by educational institutions per student is one of the highest in tertiary type B education among OECD countries (32% compared to the OECD average of 23%). Expenditure in tertiary type A institutions and advanced research programmes is identical to the OECD average (42%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Annual expenditure by educational institutions per student for all services relative to GDP per capita (2008)

By level of education, based on full-time equivalents



Source: OECD (2011a), *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/eag-2011-en

Labour market indicators

Table 1. The Spanish labour market

	Unit	2000	2009	2010	2010 OECD-Total
Unemployment rate	% of labour force	13.9	18.1	20.2	8.5
Youth unemployment rate	% of youth labour force (15-24)	25.3	37.9	41.6	16.7
Long-term unemployment (12 months and over)	% of total unemployment	47.6	30.2	45.1	32.4
Employment rate of women	% of female population (15-64)	42.0	53.5	53.0	56.7
Temporary employment	% of dependent employment	32.1	25.4	24.9	12.4
Part-time employment	% of total employment	7.7	11.9	12.4	16.6
Growth of real GDP	% change from previous year	5.1	-3.7	-0.1	2.9

Source: OECD (2011c), *OECD Employment Outlook 2011*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/empl_outlook-2011-en

The youth unemployment rate of 15 to 24 year-olds, at 41.6% in 2010 was the highest of all OECD countries (the OECD average was 16.7%) (OECD Labour Force Statistics, OECD, 2011d).

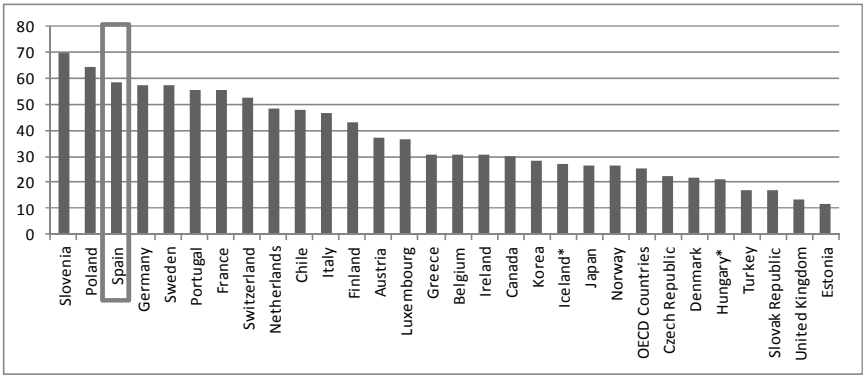
According to a survey undertaken prior to the economic crisis, transition from school to work was easiest for graduates of vocational secondary education. Young people with an intermediate level vocational qualification needed the least time to find their first job (4.8 months). Tertiary graduates and those with general upper secondary education needed about the same time (6.2 and 6.3 months respectively), which is surprisingly very close to the time needed for secondary school drop-outs (6.7 months) (OECD, 2007). Training contracts (*contratos en prácticas* for graduates of tertiary programmes, and *contratos para formación* available for 16-21 year-olds who are not eligible for *contratos en prácticas* and for some specific target groups) had low take-up, in 2005 only 4% of total youth in employment were hired on training contracts (OECD, 2007).

Reforms of employment protection legislation since the 1980s have facilitated the use of temporary contracts. Although this may have reduced youth unemployment, it does also risk trapping young people in jobs with limited chances of career advancement (OECD, 2007). While the incidence of temporary employment among young people has decreased from 68.6% in 2000 to 58.6% in 2010, it remains one of the highest among OECD

countries (see Figure 4). Similarly to other OECD countries, many young people enter the labour market with a temporary contract. But in Spain, unlike most OECD countries, they tend to remain on such contracts for a long period of time and face frequent unemployment spells between one contract and another (OECD, 2007).

Figure 4. Incidence of temporary employment

15 to 24 year-olds, 2010



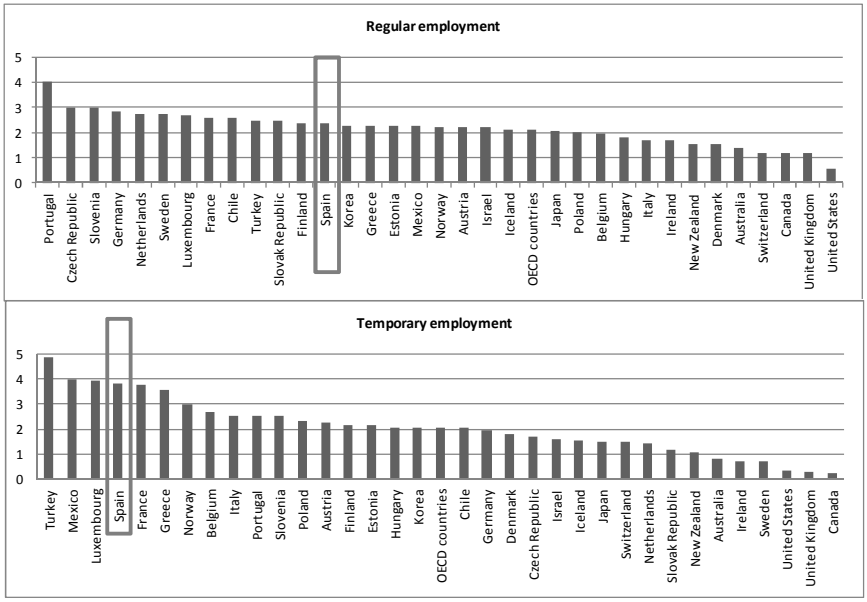
1. * Reference year 2009.

Source: OECD (2012b), OECD.Stat website, http://stats.oecd.org, accessed January 2012.

Employment protection in Spain is relatively strong for regular workers but very weak for temporary workers (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Strictness of employment protection

2008

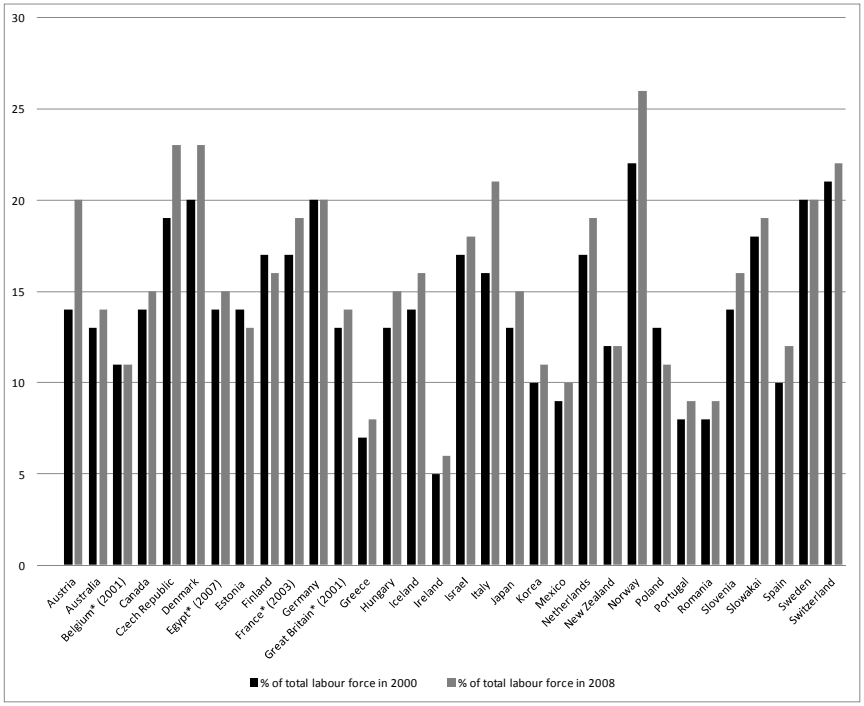


Source: OECD (2011d), OECD data browser, *dotstat.oecd.org,* accessed August 2011.

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate current and historic trends in the occupational mix in Spain, and an extrapolation into the future. The category of "technicians and associate professionals" used in internationally comparable data is most strongly associated with postsecondary VET as it includes a wide range of occupations not requiring a full bachelors qualification or higher. The separate category of "professionals" is primarily university graduates. People with postsecondary VET qualifications are also found in nearly all the other categories, for example in managerial occupations. Compared with many other OECD countries, Spain has relatively few people in these categories, although the proportion is growing somewhat.

Figure 6. Percentage of technicians and associate professionals in the labour force

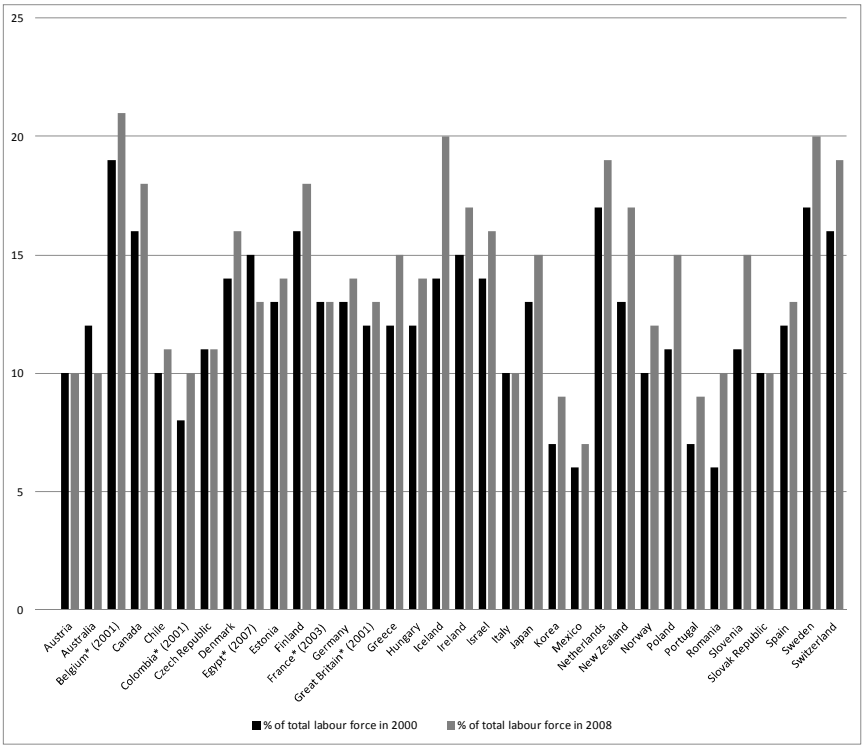
In 2000 and 2008



Source: International Labour Organization (2011), ILO Department of Statistics, Laborsta Internet, http://laborsta.ilo.org, accessed August 2011.

Figure 7. Percentage of professionals in the labour force

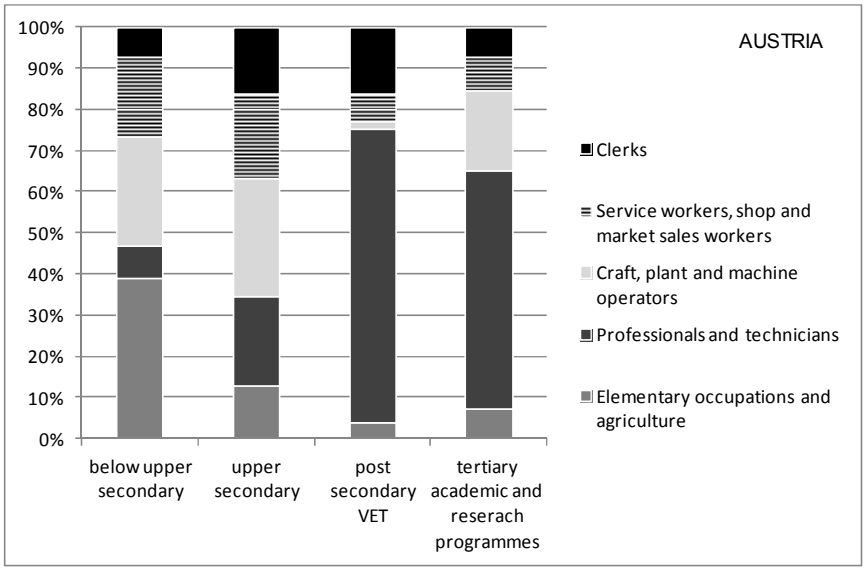
In 2000 and 2008

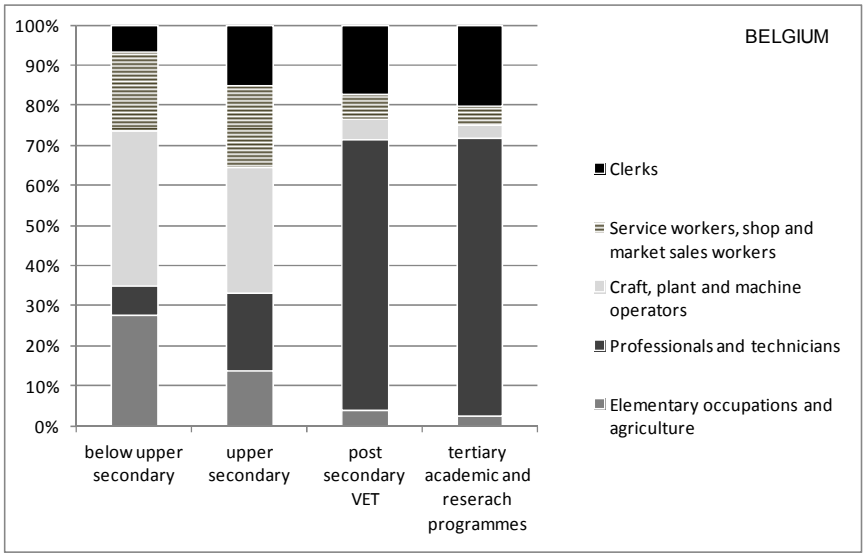


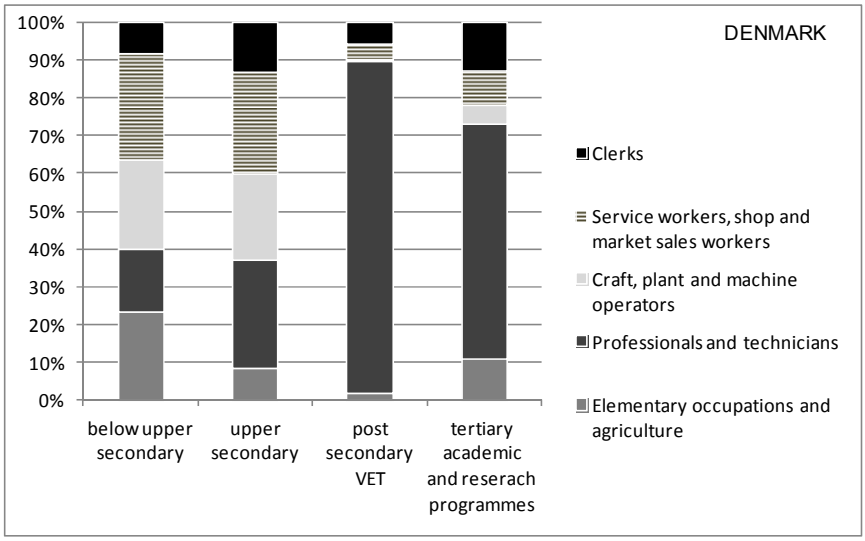
Source: International Labour Organization (2011), ILO Department of Statistics, Laborsta Internet, http://laborsta.ilo.org, accessed August 2011.

Figure 8. Distribution of workers (25-34 year-olds) by type of education across occupations

2009



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below upper secondary
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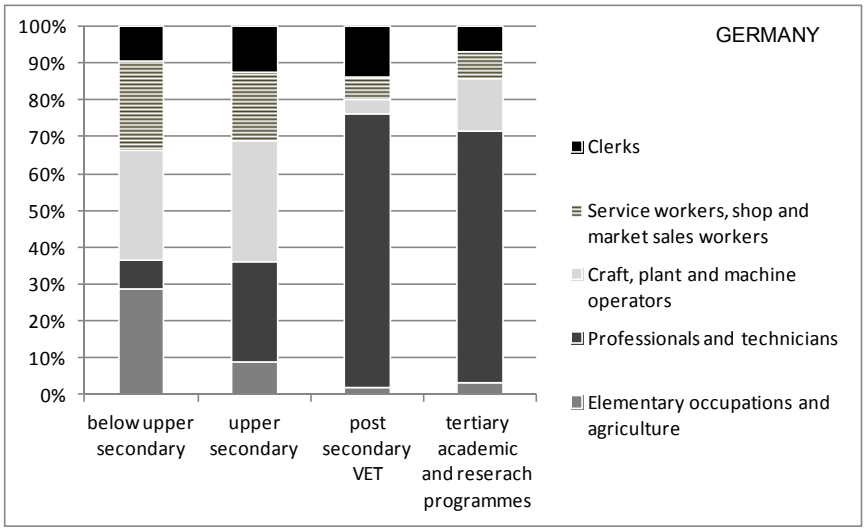
Clerks
Service workers, shop and market sales workers
Craft, plant and machine operators
Professionals and technicians
Elementary occupations and agriculture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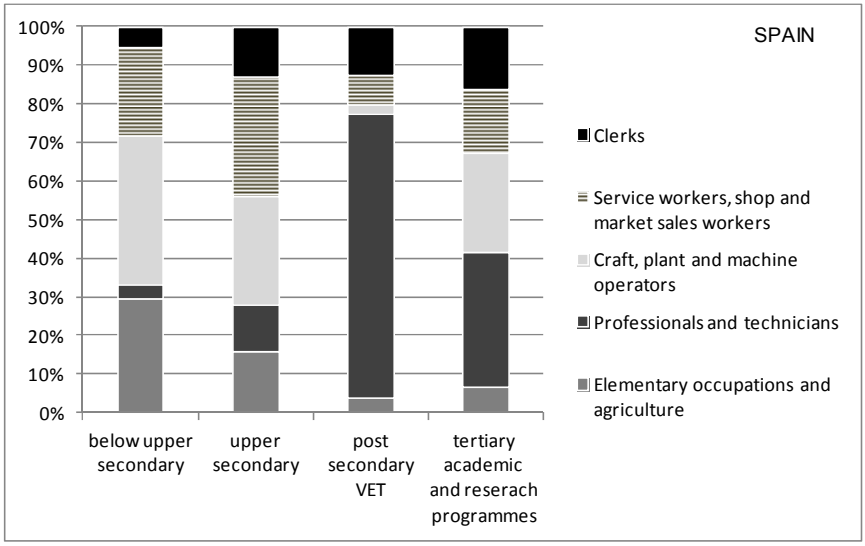
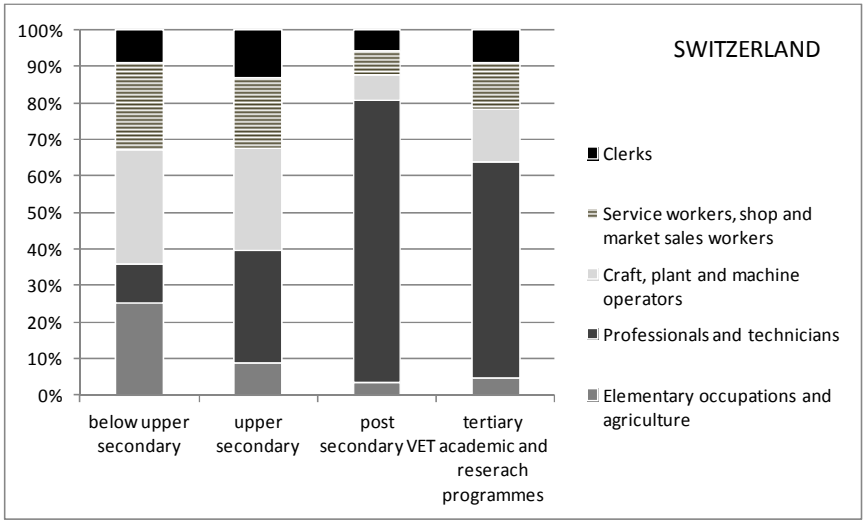
Craft, plant and machine operators
Professionals and technicians
Elementary occupations and agriculture





Notes: Figures above show distribution of young adults with specific education across five ISCO occupation types (see: *www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco88/publ4.htm*). The professionals and technicians group includes jobs of professionals, technicians and associated professionals.

If NIej is the number of individuals with education e, employed in occupation j, the share of those in occupation j in the total population (25-34 year-olds) with a specific education e can be calculated as $SIej = NIej / \sum_{j=1}^{5}$ NIej

Source: Author's calculations based on Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey, 2009.

The Eurostat EU Labour Force Survey 2009 data allows an estimation of the occupational profile of post secondary VET graduates (ISCED 5B, higher VET in Spain) and its comparison with outcomes of other educational groups (see Figure 8). It shows that in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Spain workers (25-34 age group) with postsecondary VET qualifications (ISCED 5B) are more likely to work in high skill occupations of professionals, technicians and associate professionals than people with upper-secondary education and below. In Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Spain employees with post secondary VET are also more often employed in jobs of professionals than those with tertiary studies (ISCED 5A), with the contrary being true for occupations of technicians and associate professionals, except in Austria. Regarding low and middle skill occupations, workers with post secondary VET are less likely to work in elementary jobs, services and craft jobs than individuals with a lower education level. Surprisingly in many countries post secondary VET graduates are also less often employed in these occupations than those with tertiary academic studies, with the gap being the most striking in Spain.

Previous OECD analysis and recommendations

Recent OECD work on Spain, bearing on VET, includes a 2004 review of career guidance, a 2006 review of equity in education, a 2007 review of the youth labour market, the 2008 and 2010 economic surveys, a 2009 review of tertiary education, and a 2010 regional review of higher education. Some of the recommendations for reform in these reports have therefore already been addressed.

The OECD's review of career guidance (OECD, 2004) noted that Spain, in common with many other OECD countries, requires only general psychological or pedagogical qualifications from school and career counsellors, and makes no requirement for specific training in career guidance which might include knowledge of the labour market.

A number of OECD reports have urged Spain to take more action to retain potential drop-outs in upper secondary school, making particular use of vocational routes. The OECD review of equity in education (Teese *et. al*., 2006) recommended that in Spain more use should be made of vocational modules to promote student engagement in lower secondary education. It also recommended solutions "…which are more supportive of students 'at risk' aiming to extend to all young people a statutory right to two years of upper secondary education (academic or vocational) by creating a platform of successful learning permitting all to advance."

A review of the youth labour market in Spain (OECD, 2007) showed that compared to other OECD countries, a relatively small share of secondary students opt for a vocational programme, despite relatively good labour market outcomes. Although there are vocational programmes for drop-outs from compulsory education ("social guarantee programmes"), their take-up is low and they do not offer direct access to upper secondary programmes – those who want to pursue an upper secondary vocational programme have to take a qualifying exam and there are no routes back to general education. Similarly, vocational programmes targeted at those unskilled 16-24 year-olds (apprenticeship schools, *Escuelas Taller* and craft schools, *Casas de Oficios*) do not provide a bridge back to mainstream education.

Given the benefits of work experience for those entering the labour market, the report argues that barriers to students' work should be removed to facilitate school-to-work transition. The limited use of part-time employment makes it hard for young people to combine employment with studying. Internships (*prácticas becadas bajo convenio*, typically available for tertiary students) can facilitate labour market insertion, but should be monitored to ensure quality. Employers should be engaged in the design of programmes that combine education and work. The report identified as a challenge the fact that short-cycle university courses and professional tertiary education – more relevant to labour market needs – are still not as developed as in other European countries.

The 2008 OECD economic survey (OECD, 2008) made a number of relevant recommendations:

- Returning to the issue of how best to tackle drop-outs, it argued that the options offered at the final stage of compulsory schooling be diversified and include vocational subjects. Conditions for grade advancement and access to upper secondary education should focus on the core competences required for any type of upper secondary education and allow for the inclusion of vocational subjects.
- VET programmes should be evaluated according to the transition of graduates to qualified jobs, and the results of this evaluation should be published.
- Barriers to the access of professional practitioners to VET teaching should be reduced, given that employers appreciate their role.
- Weaknesses in basic academic competences should be tackled to improve VET graduates' employability throughout their careers.

- Measures should be taken to ensure that schools can adapt the curriculum in vocational programmes to local labour market needs.
- Improving access from upper secondary VET to tertiary education would make vocational pathways more attractive.

The report also argued that at tertiary level, students' incentives are biased towards vocational programmes, but returns from these programmes are lower than from university education. The report proposes the introduction of income-contingent loans for all tertiary students, including those in vocational programmes.

The OECD review of tertiary education in Spain (OECD, 2009) offers a large number of recommendations for the tertiary system as a whole, and for higher vocational education. These include:

- A strategic review designed to ensure that tertiary education effectively integrates higher vocational education, and gives it a distinct and valued role.
- Responsiveness to labour market needs as a key factor in the accreditation of higher vocational institutions and institutions should have strong links with external stakeholders.
- Better pathways from vocational upper secondary education and tertiary education and between vocational and academic tertiary programmes (including remedial and bridging programmes).
- Development of a funding framework, with a balanced mix of input and output indicators, for higher vocational education. Such a framework should be based on three principles: cost-sharing, using relevance as a basis for allocation, and providing a comprehensive student support system (based on means-tested grants and a universal income-contingent loan scheme).
- The establishment of a comprehensive and coherent framework of quality assurance, with fewer and better co-ordinated evaluation activities. The report welcomes the proposed co-ordination plan between relevant regional authorities and argues that higher vocational institutions should be also be in the scope of evaluations by existing agencies (*e.g.* ANECA).
- Development of an equity framework, which uses an empirical performance indicator system to monitor access, participation, retention and success of disadvantaged people. Policies should intervene at earlier stages of education to reduce inequalities in access to tertiary education. While means-tested grants complemented with income-contingent loans

can provide financial support. The supply of programmes should be further diversified to cater for a diversity of student backgrounds.

- The expansion of tertiary enrolment should be accompanied by a rebalancing in favour of vocational programmes, in particular first-cycle professional programmes and short-cycle vocational programmes should expand in size.
- Teaching staff in higher vocational education should have their own career structure and be trained for their distinctive role. The framework regulating their careers (*e.g.* academic ranks, performance expectations) should be aligned with the mission of such institutions (*e.g.* instead of basic research, applied research and consultancy should be encouraged).
- The promotion of internationalisation in higher vocational education.
- Strengthened links to the labour market, allowing students to respond to labour market signals and institutions to respond to student preferences. This would involve:
  - Better data collection on labour market outcomes and ensuring that students are aware of these through career guidance.
  - The involvement of labour market actors in the development of relevant policies at institutional level (*e.g.* in the design of programmes, assessment of students, approval of new or existing programmes).
  - Stronger partnerships between institutions and the business sector. Institutions should have enough autonomy to flexibly respond to labour market needs.
  - Flexible, work-oriented study options should be promoted with adequate support for low-income workers. Raising the profile of higher vocational education should be a priority, these programmes should no longer be viewed as an extension of secondary education, but as an integral part of tertiary education.

The 2010 economic survey (OECD, 2010b) offers further recommendations and reviews action taken on previous recommendations. Actions taken in the area of VET policy include plans for the introduction of separate vocational and academic streams in the last year of compulsory schooling and new curricula for support programmes (*formación profesional inicial* or VIP) for poor performers. With the aim of increasing the attractiveness of VET, as of 2010/11 information is being collected on student acquisition of professional competences and their transition to the

labour market. Since 2008 vocational programmes offer more generic skills (*e.g.* foreign language, communication), and legislation promotes mobility between upper secondary vocational and university education and opens more room for the participation of companies in the design and implementation of vocational programmes.

The 2010 report reiterates the recommendation to focus criteria for grade progression on the core competences required for upper secondary education. It recommends closer cooperation between schools and public employment services (*e.g.* early career counselling in secondary schools) to target support at those at risk of unemployment. It recommends that continuing training should be made more accessible for firms, in particular SMEs and adults (*e.g.* through training grants in the form of vouchers or training allowances), while ensuring that training is of high quality.

A recent OECD report on higher education in regional and city development in Andalusia (OECD, 2010c) reiterates a number of recommendations presented earlier, including: the need to strengthen VET for the benefit of regional industry; to ensure better pathways between different levels of education and between vocational and general programmes; to collect data for evidence-based policy making; and to adapt VET curricula to labour market needs. It also argues that vocational higher education can support improvements in secondary education, by reaching out to secondary schools and raising aspirations.

A brief assessment of the Spanish vocational education and training system

The assessment set out here rests on the OECD mission to Spain, documentation on the VET system provided by the Spanish authorities and previous OECD work on Spain as described above. But the main framework for the assessment is provided by the analysis of vocational education and training systems developed in *Learning for Jobs* (OECD, 2010d) and the 17 country reviews undertaken as part of that exercise. Some relevant references to the individual country reviews are given below for comparison with the Spanish situation. This commentary also draws on the emerging findings of *Skills beyond School*, the new OECD review of postsecondary vocational education and training, which will yield reviews and commentaries on around 15 countries – including this commentary on Spain. The commentary offers a picture of the Spanish system in comparison with other countries; it is therefore not an evaluation of recent reforms.

Strengths

Engagement of the social partners and other stakeholders

In all countries, engagement of employers and unions in the vocational education and training system is very important. Nationally and regionally, this helps to ensure that the overall design of the system, the content of programmes, and the mix of training provision meet labour market needs. Local partnerships between employers and education and training institutions support workplace learning. In Spain, the social partners are well engaged in the VET system. Nationally, this takes place through the National Commission on VET, which aims to build consensus among the national and autonomous community governments, and employers and unions, on VET policy. Locally, employers are engaged in the system particularly through the provision of workplace training.

Effective policy development

Across countries, VET policy development offers particular challenges because of the wide range of different stakeholders involved, and this is further complicated in countries such as Spain where there is an extensive devolution of government to the regions. (For a discussion of how this issue is tackled in Australia, see Hoeckel *et. al*., 2008). Some consensus among the different stakeholders is important, but needs to be balanced by effective leadership to ensure that consensus does not become a formula for inertia. In Spain, reform has been pursued systematically in recent years, while a substantial degree of consensus has been maintained through consultation with different levels of government and the social partners. This is a real strength, and there remains a need to sustain and develop this consensus between national government, autonomous communities in the regions of Spain, employers and unions on VET policy.

Sustaining lifelong learning through permeability and transitions

Most VET systems face the challenge of "permeability", meaning the need to ensure that graduates of the VET system have access to further learning opportunities. Such permeability is desirable because growing technological complexity is increasing the demand for higher level skills, because students themselves are aspiring to higher level qualifications and because the absence of permeability tends to stigmatise VET pathways as low status dead ends. For an OECD analysis of how this issue is being addressed in Germany, see Hoeckel and Schwartz (2010). In Spain, the need to enhance such permeability was, as explained above, underlined in previous OECD reports (OECD, 2008, 2009). Recent reforms have been

designed to improve permeability in the VET system and access to post secondary education. Graduates of upper secondary VET (with VET diplomas) were previously required to restart upper secondary academic programmes in order to spend another two years studying before obtaining the Spanish Baccalaureate – this has now been reduced to one year.

A coherent system of qualifications

The function of a well-designed vocational qualification is to be an information tool, providing a clear signal to potential employers of the skills and knowledge of a person with the qualification. Countries therefore often face challenges when their qualifications systems are undermined by confusion and complexity, clouding the signalling function of qualifications to employers (and therefore the value of the qualifications to the individuals). One particular difficulty arises when qualifications delivered by the education system and recognised by ministries of education are inconsistent with skills standards and associated qualifications recognised by ministries of labour. (For OECD analysis of this issue in Chile and Korea, see Kuczera, Kis and Wurzburg, 2009, and Kis and Field, 2009.) In Spain, the VET system as a whole, and the pathways through it, are reasonably clear and comprehensible to participants. A recent reform, which has yet to be fully implemented, has aligned the VET diplomas (accredited by the Ministry of Education) with the individual competences (certified by the Ministry of Labour), so that typically completion of any diploma will include the acquisition of certain certified competences. This is a welcome and positive development.

Using vocational programmes to reduce dropout

A number of countries use vocational programmes at compulsory level to engage or re-engage adolescents at risk of dropping out of school, and a number of previous OECD reviews of Spain, as indicated above, have urged this approach. In Spain, at lower secondary level, the VIP (vocational initial programme) has now adopted this approach as it aims to reintegrate some young people in school through vocational programmes.

Effective workplace learning

All VET programmes need to make effective use of workplace learning. Workplaces provide a strong learning environment, allowing the development of hard skills on modern equipment, and soft skills through real-world experience of teamwork, communication and negotiation. Workplace training facilitates recruitment by allowing employers and potential employees to get to know each other, while trainees contribute to

the output of the training firm. Workplace learning opportunities are also a direct expression of employer needs, as employers will be keenest to offer opportunities in areas of skills shortage. The benefits of workplace learning depend on its quality. In the absence of quality control, workplace training opportunities for young people can degenerate into cheap labour, or involve very narrow and firm-specific skills. Quality control may involve contractual arrangements setting out the rights and obligations of trainee and employer, inspections, self-evaluation and effective assessment of the skills acquired through training. Workplace learning also requires adequate support and interest from both industry and students because of its advantages as a learning environment for students, its direct value to employers through the productive work of trainees and their potential as recruits and because it signals labour market demand for the skills being acquired in the VET programme. For OECD analysis of the value of workplace training in the context of China, see Kuczera and Field (2010). In Spain, workplace training is required for the final three months of any intermediate or higher vocational programme. We heard that this works well in terms of integrating graduates into the labour market, as training firms often offer the trainees jobs, and there are normally sufficient workplace training places. Mandatory workplace training, as in Spain, is desirable not only because of the value of the workplace as a learning environment, but also because it binds provision more closely to the needs of employers.

Challenges

Keeping vocational schools and their staff up-to-date

In countries where vocational schools provide practical training, the training provided should reflect the needs of modern industry. This requires up-to-date equipment and arrangements to ensure that teachers and trainers remain continuously abreast of changing workplace practices and technologies. This could involve requirements on teachers and trainers to have industry experience before entering the profession, to regularly update such experience, and arrangements to encourage teachers and trainers to continue to work part-time in industry. In Spain, there is no requirement for VET teachers and trainers to have worked in their vocational field – although they do need to be qualified in that field, and they often spend time training in companies. This is a particular challenge in a system which relies extensively on school-based workshops to develop practical vocational skills. OECD (2008), as explained above, has already urged measures to address this challenge. Current budgetary pressures are putting particular strain on Spain's school-based model of vocational training. Retiring teachers are not being replaced – ageing the workforce and perhaps

distancing it further from industry, while postponing the replacement of out-of-date training equipment.

Ensuring students sustain and develop core academic skills

Among general academic skills, advancing technology means that numeracy and literacy are of increasing importance in the labour market, and in many countries, weaknesses in these fields are common among those in vocational programmes. Such problems (often unrecognised) may increase the risk of drop-out, and reduce the prospect of further career development and lifelong learning. Vocational programmes need to give sufficient weight to these skills, and students should be systematically assessed at the point of entry to vocational programmes so as to ensure a basic minimum of skills and identify those in need of targeted support. For OECD analysis of this issue in the context of Belgium Flanders see Kis (2010). In Spain, students enter intermediate VET programmes with school certificates which should ensure a minimum level of basic skills as the certificate is similar to that required to enter the general stream of *Bachillerato*. Students entering higher VET programmes need to have the *Bachiller* certificate, the same award required to enter university, but some weaknesses in academic skills may remain. The intermediate and higher level curricula include practical training and teaching of the theory associated with the vocational field, but little direct teaching in maths, literacy, or other academic subjects. This means that there is no direct test of numeracy and literacy although these skills may continue to be developed in the context of the theoretical part of the vocational programme. OECD (2008) has already argued that in Spain more attention to basic academic skills in vocational programmes is required. This is a challenge, given the evidence that good numeracy and literacy is not only important for successful completion of vocational programmes, but also for further education and career development.

Modernising career guidance

More complex careers, with more options in both work and learning, are opening up new opportunities for many people. But they are also making decisions harder as young people face a sequence of complex choices over a lifetime of learning and work. Helping young people to make these decisions is the task of career guidance. But in many countries career guidance faces a number of challenges: too often those offering guidance are inadequately acquainted with labour market issues, with career guidance sometimes playing a subsidiary role to psychological counselling; guidance services can be fragmented, under-resourced and reactive, so that those who need guidance most may fail to obtain it; advice sometimes lacks objectivity

because guidance personnel are based in education institutions with a pro-academic bias; relevant labour market information is not always available or readily digestible and comprehensible; and the evidence base on "what works" in careers guidance is too weak. For OECD analysis of this issue in the context of the Czech Republic see Kuczera, (2010). In Spain, career guidance in schools needs reform, as it is delivered by teachers trained in psychological counselling but usually with limited labour market knowledge or experience. Current attempts to reform guidance include measures designed to integrate school-based guidance with employment advice for the unemployed.

Furthering the development of workplace learning

The many advantages of workplace training in general and how it works in Spain have been set out above under the heading of "strengths". In Spain, while mandatory workplace training serves well at the end of VET cycles as a means of transition to the labour market (since training employers often offer jobs to trainees), it is a very much less substantial element of the training element of vocational programmes than would be found in apprenticeship systems for example. So an issue remains of whether there might be scope for further development of workplace training in the system.

Notes

1. The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

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Contents

Further reading

OECD (2010), *Learning for Jobs*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing.
See also ***www.oecd.org/education/vet.***
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