



Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training in England Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

- In England the needs of many different groups of learners are met through diverse offers in further education (FE) colleges, universities and other institutions including private providers. Part-time and distance learning options are available to meet the needs of working adults.
- The autonomy of FE colleges allows them to be entrepreneurial and flexible, providing a strong foundation for the development of new programmes.
- Quality assurance arrangements are demanding. They include a blend of institutional audits, direct inspections and student destination surveys, which allow graduates to report on the perceived quality of provision.
- Higher apprenticeships are growing fast and are highly valued by employers and students. They could play a very important role in raising the status of the whole apprenticeship sector.
- England enjoys a strong base of research expertise, and good data. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) plays an important role in providing strategic policy advice to government, based on the input of employers and unions.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE POSTSECONDARY SECTOR

Challenge: England has too little vocational provision at postsecondary level in comparison with many other countries, and relative to potential demand.

Recommendation: Take strategic measures to encourage the expansion of high quality postsecondary vocational programmes reflecting both labour market demand and student needs. Further recommendations in this review are designed to meet this objective. Review funding and progression arrangements to this end.

THE RATIONALISATION OF VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Challenge: The current system of awarding organisations for qualifications inhibits employer engagement in the development of qualifications at either national or local level, and causes confusion because of the large number of overlapping qualifications.

Recommendation: Implement a franchise system for vocational qualifications, under which awarding organisations would bid for the right and the obligation to provide the qualifications within specific professional domains, during a franchise period. Qualifications should allow a proportion of the curriculum to be locally negotiated with employers by training providers.

MANDATORY WORKPLACE TRAINING

Challenge: Postsecondary VET programmes make limited and variable use of workplace training, although it plays a central role in the strongest postsecondary VET programmes.

Recommendation: To make quality workplace training a substantial and mandatory part of postsecondary VET programmes. Build local partnerships between employers and FE colleges to this end.

SUPPORTING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE WORKFORCE

Challenge: Continuing reforms need to get the balance right between pedagogical preparation and up-to-date industry experience in the FE workforce.

Recommendation: Pursue reform of further education college teacher qualification requirements to ensure a good balance between pedagogical skills and up-to-date industry experience. Encourage people with valuable industry experience to enter teaching either full or part-time and promote skills updating. Support teachers new to the profession with effective mentoring and induction. Use local partnerships between FE colleges and employers to sustain and update knowledge of modern industry.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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* which examined policy through 17 country reviews and a comparative report. The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD Skills Strategy (OECD, 2012).¹

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 and Hungary.

[A Skills beyond School Review of England](#), OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training (Musset, P. and S. Field) was published on 23 September 2013.

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

1. OECD (2012), *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, OECD Publishing. doi: [10.1787/9789264177338-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264177338-en)