



A SKILLS BEYOND SCHOOL COMMENTARY ON SPAIN

Skills beyond School, the OECD Review of Postsecondary
Vocational Education and Training



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.



Strengths

- 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.



Strengths

- 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.



Strengths

- 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.



Strengths

- 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.



Challenges

- 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.



Challenges

- 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.



Challenges

- 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.



Skills beyond School Reviews

- 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.



Skills beyond School Reviews

- 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. Further information is available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/education/vet



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