

COUNTRY NOTE FOR SPAIN: NEW OECD WORK PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR SPAIN'S EFFORTS TO ENHANCE WORK-BASED LEARNING

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The newly published report *Skills beyond School: Synthesis Report*, alongside previous OECD work (see box), drawing on 40 country studies, encourages Spain to redouble its efforts to improve the provision of work-based learning.

OECD country reviews of vocational education and training (VET) and adult learning

A first review cycle of country studies led to *Learning for Jobs* (OECD, 2010) looking at initial VET at upper secondary level, and is available in Spanish entitled *Preparándose para trabajar* (OECD, 2011). A second review cycle *Skills beyond School* has already covered 20 countries, and includes a short commentary on Spain's VET system (Field, Kuczera and Kis, 2012), and a synthesis report with the Spanish translation forthcoming. It addresses the growing demand for higher technical and professional skills, which can be acquired in postsecondary programmes. Both review cycles emphasise the great benefits of work-based learning, not only as a powerful learning environment for both hard and soft skills, but also as a direct expression of employer needs.

These studies are now being built on through further country reviews, some on VET, some using the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) to look at issues of literacy and numeracy, and some integrating the two approaches to look at interconnected features of the country skills system.

- The OECD welcomes the recent reforms of Spain's VET sector, now offering basic, intermediate and higher (postsecondary) vocational education (CEDEFOP, 2014). The reform introduced the legal basis for dual vocational training, combining work- and school-based learning, in line with the OECD's 2012 recommendation to extend the work-based element of vocational programmes. Between 2013 and 2014, the number of yearly apprenticeship contracts concluded on the new basis increased by about 40%; the number of schools offering the pilot project for dual VET and the number of students choosing this pathway doubled; and the number of participating companies tripled (EC, 2014). These commendable initiatives now need to be sustained and further developed.
- *Skills beyond School* encourages OECD countries to respond to the growing demand for shorter postsecondary vocational qualifications that require less than three years of full-time study to prepare students and upskill adults in mid-career for particular careers. Of the 20-45 year-olds in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, one in five already holds a postsecondary VET qualification as their highest educational qualification, illustrating the high reputation of VET in these countries and labour market demand for such professional profiles. Nearly two-thirds of employment growth in the EU between 2010 and 2020 is forecast to fall in the "technicians and associate professionals" category – the category most closely linked to postsecondary VET (CEDEFOP, 2012).

- Spain has one of the largest shares of adults aged 25-64 with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills (6 million, representing 23% of this age group). New OECD work also underlines the benefits of work-based literacy and numeracy interventions for low-skilled adults (Windisch, forthcoming). But in Spain participation in education and training of adults generally, and of low-skilled adults specifically, is below the OECD average, and relevant and high-quality job-related training and labour-market information are not readily available for those who need it the most (OECD, 2015). Often, small firms lack the capacity to support worker training - just one of the barriers to increasing the participation of low-skilled adults in education (OECD, 2015). Postsecondary programmes that offer second chance education in combination with workplace-relevant skills could usefully address the needs of adults who dropped out of earlier education.
- According to the *National Skills Strategy for Spain* currently being developed in co-operation with the OECD (OECD, 2015), too few Spanish upper secondary students may be participating in VET, and VET students are still much less likely than many of their European counterparts to participate in work-based learning (OECD, 2015). Despite arrangements for communication between enterprises and VET institutions, work-based training is still not as common as it could be (OECD, 2015). The number of young people neither in employment, education nor training (NEET) has risen steadily and ranks near the top of OECD countries. Effective work-based learning offers the prospect of re-engaging young people who may have become disenchanted by academic forms of learning. International evidence highlights the need for work-based learning to be assessed, credit-bearing, and quality-assured (OECD, 2014).

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