



Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training in Scotland Strengths and Challenges

Scottish postsecondary vocational education and training (VET) includes a wide range of provision for populations with various needs, including school leavers, disadvantaged young people, the older unemployed and those in the middle of their career who wish to upgrade their competencies. Among the main postsecondary vocational programmes are Modern Apprenticeships (industry designed programmes which support employees to acquire certificated competencies required to deliver their job role through work-based learning and or off-the-job training), and Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND) provided mainly in colleges (job-related courses offering a mix of practical skills and theoretical knowledge also allowing progression onto a degree programme).

STRENGTHS

- Recent reforms aim to increase the effectiveness and accountability of postsecondary VET through better co-ordination between agencies and services, more accountable colleges, more consistent quality frameworks for evaluating provision of education and training and better data on student transition to the labour market.
- The structure of career guidance delivery is a strength in Scotland compared with other OECD countries where advice is often more fragmented. In Scotland Skills Development Scotland is the key provider of career services and collaborates with other agencies involved in career guidance including schools, colleges and local authorities. Multiple institutions where career guidance is available and different channels of provision allow the system to reach out to a large number of individuals who might benefit from guidance, including young people transferring to a higher education level and the unemployed. Contrary to many other OECD countries Scotland recognises that career guidance is a distinct and specialist profession. The development of labour market data could further reinforce the career guidance system.
- The national qualification framework facilitates articulation within the system. Scotland has also launched specific initiatives to promote transitions, such as regional articulation hubs which facilitate the transition from schools and colleges to university by building on local partnerships between institutions.¹
- Assessors and college teachers are well prepared. Teachers in colleges are required to have relevant professional experience as well as training as teachers and to maintain and update their skills through continuous professional development. Assessors evaluating the skills and knowledge of individuals who wish to obtain a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) also require special training and need to be certified. SVQs are competence-based qualifications that are delivered and assessed in the workplace. This contrasts with many other countries where a separate profession of assessors does not exist.
- The Scottish HNC and HND are strong brands with a long history and are well regarded by employers and students. Students following these programmes represent 15% of all higher education students. The Scottish Modern Apprenticeships (MA) also have strengths: they are highly valued by both participating apprentices and employers; satisfaction levels are high; evaluation data suggests employment outcomes are good six months after completing an MA.

1. See for example, Scottish Funding Council (2013), The Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub website, www.elrah.ac.uk/ (accessed June 2013).

CHALLENGES

- While workplace training is built into some postsecondary programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships, its use is highly variable in other parts of the VET system. Provision of workplace training depends on the qualification, programme and individual provider.
- While Scottish Modern Apprenticeship has many strengths it also faces challenges related to the provision of generic skills to apprentices, funding arrangements for those aged over 25 who have few qualifications and no relevant work experience, and provision of training to incumbent workers.
- While quality assurance in postsecondary VET is strong overall, current arrangements for the self-evaluation and external scrutiny of quality might potentially lead to variation in quality among providers.
- The focus on labour market relevance in quality assurance of VET could be reinforced. Some aspects of vocational provision ensuring its connections with the labour market are already examined - such as whether teachers have relevant professional experience and if institutions have links with local employers. But the vocational focus could be further reinforced by looking at workplace training opportunities and labour market outcomes as indicators of quality in vocational provision.
- Data on the labour market outcomes of postsecondary VET graduates are limited, in particular on labour market outcomes of college graduates. Consequently it is very hard to evaluate how well colleges are doing in preparing their students for jobs. Decreasing public expenditure increases the need for better data and information so that scarce resources can be used to most effect. College regionalisation should focus college provision more on local labour market needs. In addition, a college leaver destination survey is being piloted and in future this may address some of the gap in information.

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.² The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD Skills Strategy (OECD, 2012).³

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 Commentary on Scotland, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training](#) (M. Kuczera, 2013) was published on 20 December 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

2. OECD (2010), *Learning for Jobs*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing.
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264087460-en>

3. OECD (2012), *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, OECD Publishing.
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264177338-en>