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# Reader

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Summary:  
**Learning for Jobs**

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This Reader is made for the benefit of the Leonardo project

## Career Learning as a Success Factor for Lifelong Learning

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### “Learning for Jobs”. Synthesis Report of the OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training

Research of literature

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## 1.0 Context and Policy Messages

### 1.1 Context

The context within which the report is set includes that:

- vocational education and training (VET) has been neglected in policy discussions;
- early interventions in vocational education and training make a recognised contribution to economic competitiveness, nevertheless programmes are not always rooted in an understanding of the needs of the labour market;
- the review will make proposals as to how the gap can be bridged between vocational education and the needs of employers and the economy;
- the impact of the economic crisis has to be taken into account.

### 1.2 Annex A: National VET centres in OECD countries

The section describes the role and resource background of centres in some of the countries to which the research pertains, and gives examples of the types and scope of research each conducts in relation to vocational education and training.

### 1.3 Annex B: Summary assessments and recommendations for reviewed countries

Each of the countries involved in the review which forms the basis of this book is allocated a section which describes, in relation to vocational education and training, their strengths and weaknesses, and makes recommendations for improvement. Participant countries were: Australia, Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Chile, China, Czech Republic, England and Wales, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

### 1.4 Some of the key policy recommendations are to:

- provide the right mix of skills for the labour the market;
- reform career guidance to deliver effective advice for all;
- ensure teachers and trainers combine good workplace experience with pedagogical and other preparation;
- make full use of workplace learning;



- support the VET system with tools to engage stakeholders and information to promote transparency.

## 2.0 Summary

### 2.1` Chapter 1: the vocational challenge

The arguments for governments to support initial VET include:

- employers are inclined to train only in job-specific skills and do not generally provide employees with sufficient training in transferable skills;
- public investment in VET can be developed to meet any skills gaps with consequent benefit in economic return;
- a positive correlation between investment in VET and tackling youth unemployment.

There are national differences in the nature and scope of VET programmes which include the age at which young people enter vocational programmes and the extent of occupational specialism within them. To meet the complexities of the modern work environment, young people need to have a skillset that is wider than mere occupational competence; they require a set of soft skills

Higher percentages of young people regardless of prior academic achievement, expect to continue with their studies, and therefore come to vocational education and training at an older age than previously. It is therefore an increasing requirement that upper secondary schools engage students in learning that prepares them for work and further study. Students should have an assessed literacy and numeracy level in order to support their long-term work and learning goals.

### 2.2 Chapter 2: Meeting labour market needs

Provision funded by the public purse should be developed based on a mix of employer needs and student preferences, which do not always match. Forecasting and clarifying employer demand is not always easy. The report claims a correlation between employers' willingness to provide work placements with the skills which are in demand and therefore should be supported through vocational programmes. The principles behind the choices providers make to balance employer demand and student preference include: who pays (student, employer, government); student age (assuming older students will have more focused career goals); breadth and orientation of the programme (more broadly-based general skills programmes vs. courses designed for direct labour-market entry); predictability (demand in some sectors is easier to predict than others).



Student preference and employer demand can be achieved through a number of balancing mechanisms, including a range of planning and incentive models, and through workplace training (e.g. apprenticeships). Employers should be engaged in the design of VET curriculum.

VET graduates need to have a mix of occupation-specific and transferable skills, particularly the basic skills of literacy and numeracy which are often low in VET students.

### 2.3 Chapter 3: Career guidance

The diversity of career and job opportunities, and the complexity of choices that young people are required to make has made good career guidance both more necessary and more challenging. In many OECD countries, however, career guidance professionals lack up-to-date knowledge of the labour market, guidance services are often fragmented, or guidance specialists are based in educational institutions with an academic bias.

The responsibility of the career guidance role in influencing young people's choices has to be recognised and where the service is insufficient a clear guidance framework established. Given the significance of student preference in making career choices, young people need careers guidance which is coherent, well-resourced, objective and based on labour market intelligence. Careers services should provide a link between schools and employers to provide an evidence base for demand statements.

### 2.4 Chapter 4: Effective teachers and trainers

The requirement for good teachers is the same in vocational education and training as for general teaching, and many countries are faced with an ageing teaching population are also finding that increasing numbers of vocational teachers lack current workplace and industry experience. Flexible routes from industry into teaching should be encouraged, as well as part-time working combined with teaching to enhance current skills and knowledge.

The converse is true in industry where often workplace trainers lack the pedagogical skill or knowledge to adequately support learners. This needs to be recognised and training put in place for trainers and supervisors in industry.

### 2.5 Chapter 5: Workplace learning

Although most VET programmes involve an element of workplace learning, this is often a very small component of the course. Students have the opportunity to learn practical skills on current equipment, and soft skills



such as timekeeping, teamwork and communication there are mutually beneficial outcomes for both employer and student: the experience acts as a potential recruitment opportunity, and trainees contribute to the firms' production/outputs. Workplace learning vacancies reflect employers' skills shortages and are therefore good guides as to where VET programmes should develop their curriculum content. The research shows that apprenticeships are an 'outstandingly effective' form of vocational training.

The arguments for workplace training are so strong that it is recommended that it should be an element of every VET system. These benefits are dependent on the quality of the work placement experience, however, to avoid young people being used as cheap labour, or the employer focusing only on the narrow demands of the specific job without taking into account the students' wider learning needs. Quality control systems can include contractual arrangements between employer and VET provider, inspections, self-evaluation and assessments.

## 2.6 Chapter 6: Tools to support the vocational education and training system

The effectiveness of VET systems depends on how well connected they are to the labour market and therefore require good employer links and good labour market intelligence. Key tools in supporting good VET systems are stakeholder network and communications opportunities and good analysis of the effectiveness and value added by vocational training, which inform each other. A set of interconnected employer and VET bodies at local, regional, and sectoral levels which make a point of engaging employers are necessary to ensure clarity around responsibilities and contributions for the different elements of the VET system.

Qualifications frameworks are useful tools in facilitating lifelong learning and improving access to higher education, but they need to be understood by all stakeholders, including students and employers. The frameworks need to have a strong methodology for allocating qualifications to levels, and ensure that VET systems are aligned to improve transitions through the education system. Implementing a qualifications framework should be part of a wider national approach to quality and coherence in VET provision.

A standardised national assessment for VET qualifications can help ensure that the mix and level of skills is consistent, and allows for competencies to be developed across a range of learning experiences, including a route for recognising and accrediting prior learning.

It is important that data is collected and used to inform stakeholders: students should be able to see the value of their learning in the labour



market; employer should understand what their trainees are learning; and policy makers in government and training institutions should be able to see whether their graduates are gaining relevant work. The report recommends tracking graduates across a number of years to understand career patterns.

### **3.0 Conclusions**

The report delivers clear messages to those involved in the design and delivery of vocational education and training.

The national differences and similarities as illustrated in the case study boxes provide interesting reading, and examples of the application of the recommended approaches set in a range of national contexts are useful. However, it is clear that application of the key features of the policy recommendations are rarely present altogether in one national VET system.

### **4.0 Implications for Career Learning Project**

The workshops and sub-projects of Career Learning are clearly aligning with the fundamental messages of this report, including:

- 4.1 Increasing understanding and clarity of the national contexts for VET.
- 4.2 Improved understanding of attitudes and approaches to career learning through student, staff and parent panels.
- 4.3 Planned activity which takes the impact of the economic crisis into account, including through electronically communicated international peer group discussion.
- 4.4 Responding to the vocational challenge of a lack of training for young people in softer skills through the planned development of materials and resources in Resilience, Networking Skills and Mental Top.
- 4.5 Building a greater understanding in employers of young people's needs, and supporting young people in their ability to meet the needs of the labour market through work-place learning, work exploration and addressing soft skills development (see 4.4 above).
- 4.6 Adding to the effectiveness of teachers and trainers by developing resources in Coaching Skills.