



Understanding and analysing vocational education and training systems – An introduction

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About this introduction

Who commissioned this?

Commissioned by SDC, focal point employment and income. The text expresses the view of the main authors and does not necessarily reflect SDC positions or the opinion of the persons and institutions who provided feedback.

For whom is it?

This introduction is made for VET practitioners in development cooperation who want to better understand and analyse how VET systems function and how their different elements interrelate.

Why was this introduction into understanding and analysing VET systems produced?

- To provide an introduction to understanding and analysing VET systems for those working in VET contexts;
- To improve the quality of SDC's VET interventions based on a better understanding of VET systems;
- To provide input for SDC's position in the discussion about systemic approaches to development.

Who produced this?

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Note: The views expressed in this introduction are those of the main authors and do not necessarily represent the position of SDC or any other person or organisation mentioned above providing feedback to it.

Where can I leave feedback?

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1 VET demand and access

VET – vocational education and training – serves a **double** purpose, and meets two sorts of demand:

- First, it has to provide the economy with the skilled labour it needs to produce wealth. In this sense it meets an **economic** demand;
- Secondly, it has to equip citizens, and in particular young people, with the skills they need if they are to find and keep a job, or to start their own business. This is the most important way they can integrate themselves into society and the labour market, and develop personally. In this sense it meets a **social** demand.

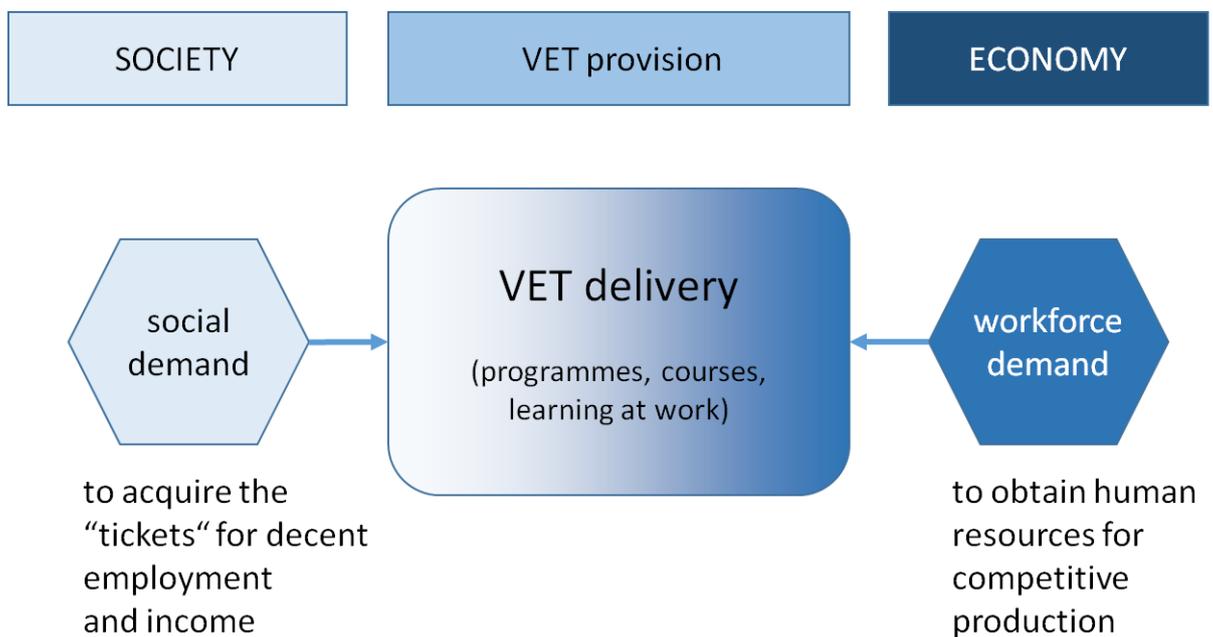


Illustration 1

Both the social and the economic demand, however, are heterogeneous and subject to frequent changes. They consist of many different components, which vary and interrelate in complex ways.

1.1 Social demand

Let us have a look at the **social demand** first. Here we can distinguish at least the following main groups of clients for VET:

1. school-leavers at different educational levels who opt for VET
2. school drop-outs (out of school youth)
3. special needs groups, such as people with no formal schooling, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees and demobilised soldiers
4. unemployed people (adults), and

- under-employed and employed people who need or want to update their skills in order to keep their job or to get promoted.

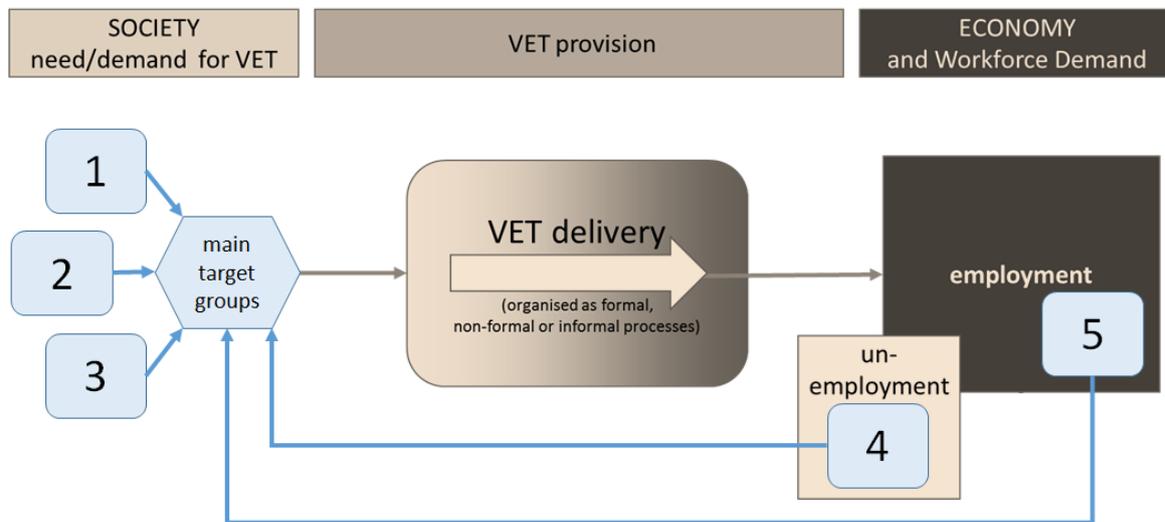


Illustration 2

It is obvious that these different groups have diverse expectations, aspirations, and specific needs – and VET systems have to respond to these as much as possible. When thinking about reforming or intervening in a VET system, it is therefore decisive to clearly identify the specific groups you intend to serve, and to analyse their demands.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding social demand:

- What are the main target groups to be addressed by the VET system (or a VET reform or intervention)?
- What are their aspirations, expectations, and specific needs?
- What are their prerequisites and constraints – for instance in terms of educational level, work experience, mobility, time horizon or financial contributions?

1.2 Admission to VET

It is important to highlight that not all VET programmes are necessarily open to all. On the contrary: in all our partner countries in development cooperation the capacity of the VET systems is significantly lower than the number of young people who need some kind of training in order to get a decent job or gainful self-employment. Therefore, formal and informal mechanisms exist that regulate and limit access to VET – and often exclude the majority of those in need of training.

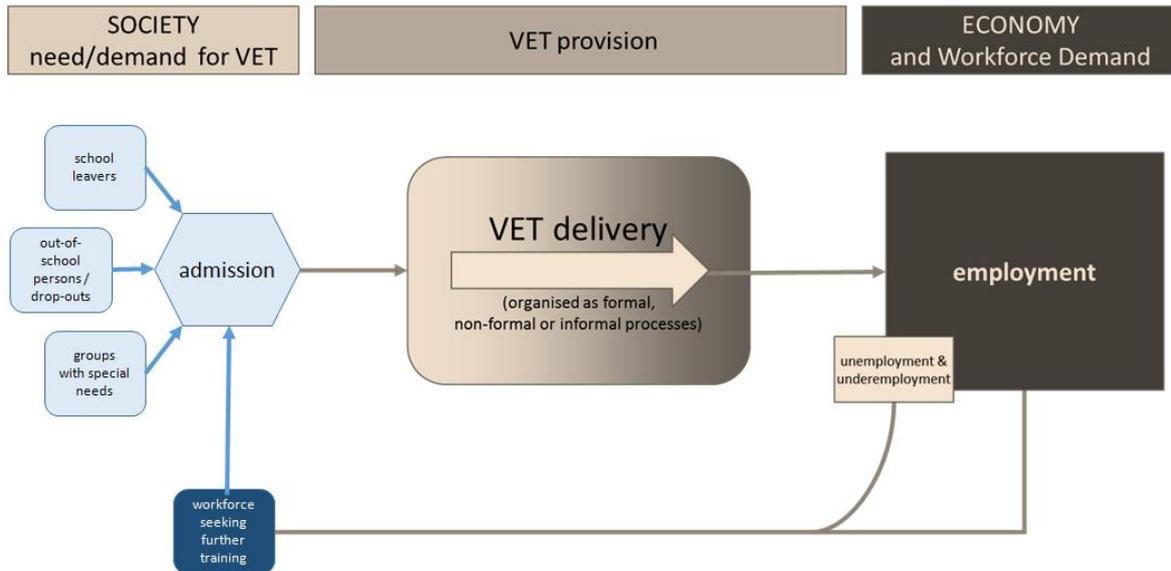


Illustration 3

There are many types of access barriers. These may take the form of educational levels and/or student fees that are often requested, in particular for high-quality training. They also include issues such as the regional distribution of training centres or their timetables and course durations, which are not affordable for many disadvantaged people who have to earn their living as well as undertaking training. Moreover, gender or ethnic discrimination may play a role.

The following illustration depicts a typical exclusion scenario and suggests mitigation measures.

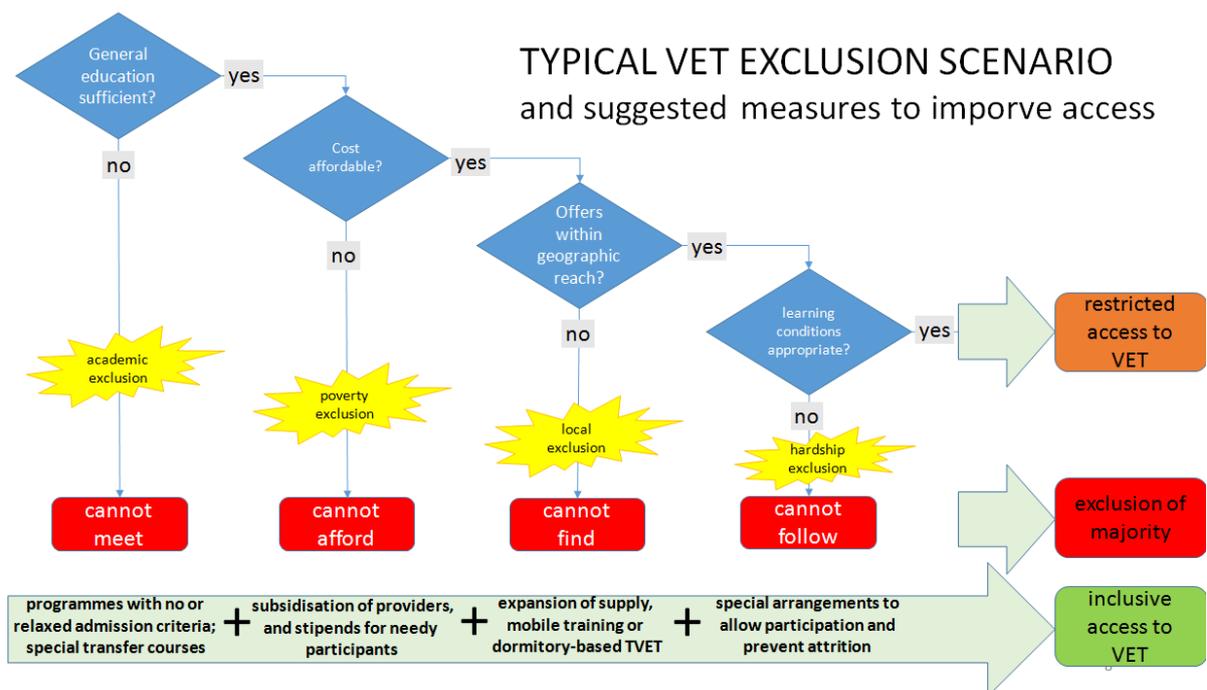


Illustration 4

A careful analysis of such access barriers is therefore another important step in planning the reform of a VET system.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding admission:

- What is the capacity of the existing VET system as compared to the social demand?
- Who has access to what kind of training – and who is excluded? What are the reasons for exclusion?
- What are the criteria and mechanisms that govern admission?
- Which mitigation measures can be introduced in order to improve access for specific target groups?

1.3 Economic demand

Making VET systems responsive to the demands of the economy requires a careful and systematically repeated analysis of employment opportunities, labour markets and training needs. Here, we have to distinguish between:

- the modern sectors of the economy;
- informal employment opportunities;
- the subsistence economy and helping family members; and
- domestic labour markets and regional and international labour markets

Although the situation differs from country to country, it is a common feature of economies in developing countries that the number of job-seekers far exceeds the number of available jobs. That is why self-employment is an important segment of the economies in most of our partner countries, which implies that VET systems have to consider entrepreneurship training as an important element of their service provision. Labour migration is another phenomenon that is gaining in importance in many partner countries. Some countries follow a strategy of labour export. This is why VET systems and interventions by donor agencies may include preparation measures for organised migration.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding economic demand:

- To what extent can the economy be expected to absorb current and future generations of VET graduates?
- Which sectors are the most dynamic and promising ones with regard to the provision of employment opportunities for skilled labour?
- What are the priority occupations for which the economy is prepared to recruit skilled labour?
- To what extent is entrepreneurship training delivered by the current VET system?
- How supportive is the business environment with regard to self-employment? For instance are funding schemes and microcredits available? Is the regulatory framework conducive to doing business? Is the rule of law guaranteed?

2 VET systems and their expected outcomes and impact for the economy and society

2.1 VET systems and their expected outcomes

VET is often associated with imparting only technical skills. This is an appropriate approach if one wants to upgrade the skills of people who are already employed and need to acquire some specific knowledge and skills, for instance in order to cope with new technologies. From a holistic point of view, however, this approach falls short. VET as a **system** has a much broader range of outcomes, which can be summarised mainly under three main headings:

- personal development;
- occupational competence; and
- educational mobility

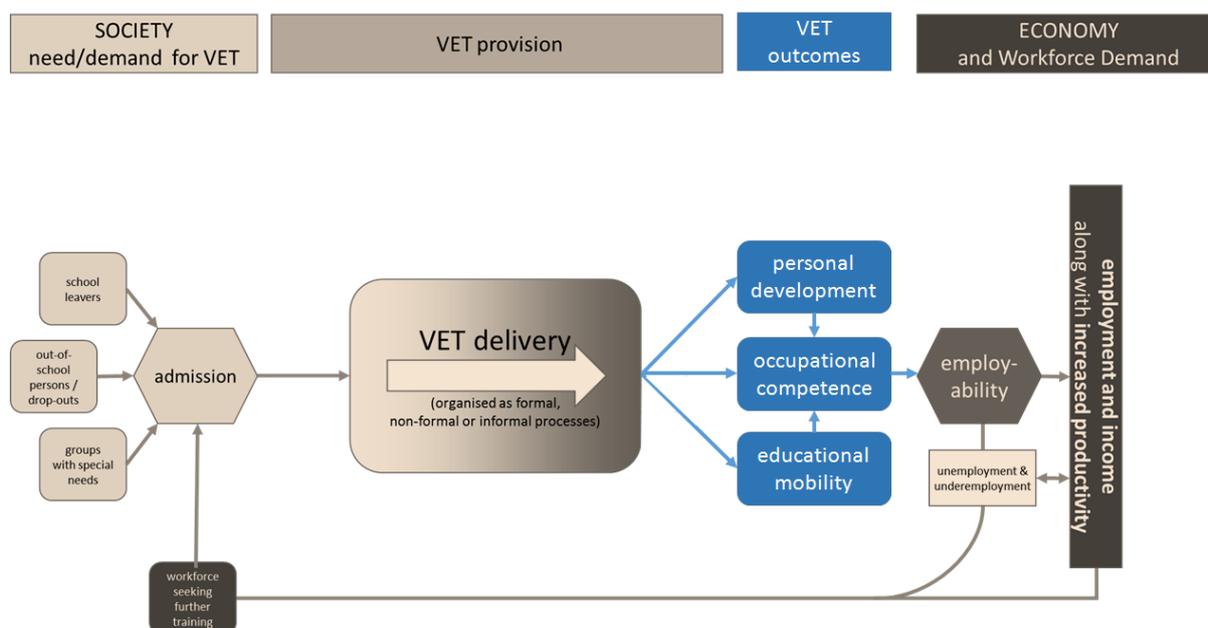


Illustration 5

To take these areas one by one, firstly **personal development** refers to the fact that VET primarily addresses young people between 15 and 25 years of age who are not only in a transition process from school to work but also in a difficult transition period from childhood to adulthood. They need orientation and have to develop values and self-esteem in order to build up their individual identity. This is also true for many unemployed people and in particular for special needs groups. Society expects them to become good technicians, craftspeople, salespeople or clerks, but also to develop into good citizens and responsible fathers or mothers. That is why VET, at least for young people and special needs groups, has to impart **personal** skills, **social** skills, and **life** skills as well as occupational competencies.

Secondly, **occupational competence** starts with having the technical skills and knowledge that are needed to perform a job well. But it is not limited to this dimension. It also comprises elements of what was mentioned before – personal and social skills – as well as certain more general or “meta-skills” that are becoming more and more important, like teamwork, customer orientation, and the ability to learn and organise by oneself. Moreover, entrepreneurial skills are gaining importance in our partner countries where self-employment is often the most realistic option for many VET graduates.

Finally, the concept of **educational mobility** refers to the recognition of VET certificates within the overall education system in a country or internationally. In order to make VET more attractive, and to stimulate lifelong learning, VET graduates receive credits that provide or facilitate access to higher levels of VET, or to higher education in the general education system. This means that VET has to give adequate consideration to general education subjects and international standards and regulations, in order to open up such pathways.

Each VET system, and each specific training programme, has to find its own appropriate and balanced mix of these three areas – personal development, occupational competence and educational mobility – according to its objectives and priorities, and to the target groups it addresses.

In our partner countries the adequate consideration of these three dimensions of VET is of specific importance for two reasons:

- First, the general education systems are often weak, and therefore VET addresses target groups who need complementary general education in order to cope with the requirements of the training programmes. That is why the combination of basic education with VET is a common feature in many donor programmes;
- Secondly, many VET participants live in deprived urban or remote rural areas and grow up in fragile economic, social and family contexts. They lack self-esteem and are vulnerable to risky forms of deviant behaviour, such as dropping out, drug consumption, gangs, violence, crime and teenage pregnancy.

Consider these key analytical questions regarding VET outcomes:

- How does a given VET system cover the three main outcomes – personal development, occupational competence and educational mobility? Which outcomes are underdeveloped or neglected?
- What is the appropriate mix of these outcomes for specific target groups who are being addressed by a VET reform or donor intervention in VET?
- How can alliances with external partners – general education schools, NGOs, civil society – be used to assure an appropriate mix?

2.2 Impact for the economy and society

The main goal of any VET system is twofold, with a societal and an economic dimension: first, it aims to contribute to the competitiveness and sustained growth of the economy, and secondly it aims to make a relevant contribution to livelihoods, social inclusion and thus poverty reduction.

Therefore, any VET system aims to provide a qualified labour force in the sense of competent, confident and compassionate people and workers. If the system is performing adequately, VET graduates are supposed to be found employable, be it in wage- or self-employment. Under favourable economic conditions, these people will find employment and income, and they will contribute to an increase in productivity based on their occupational competence, and due to newly created jobs in self-employment.

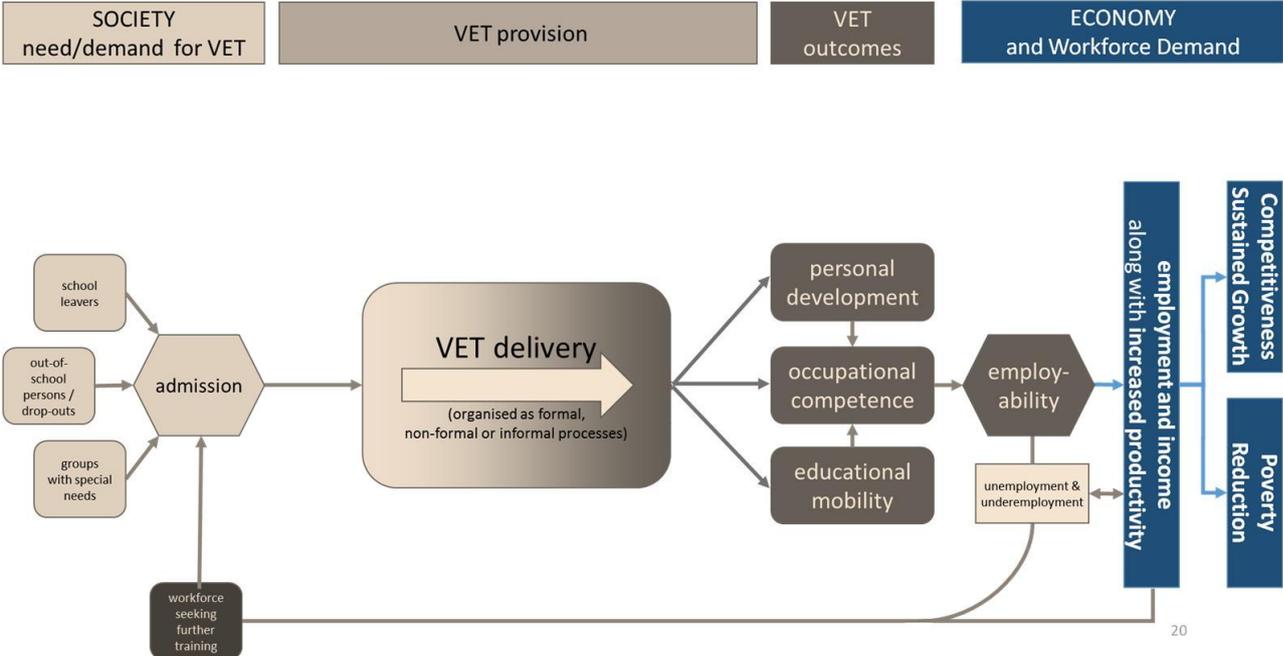


Illustration 6

3 Institutional, financial and legal framework for VET delivery

We have looked at the different demands VET systems have to respond to, and we have learned about the outcomes they are expected to generate for their target groups and the impacts these may have for society and the economy. Let us now look a little more closely into VET delivery itself, starting with its institutional, financial and legal framework.

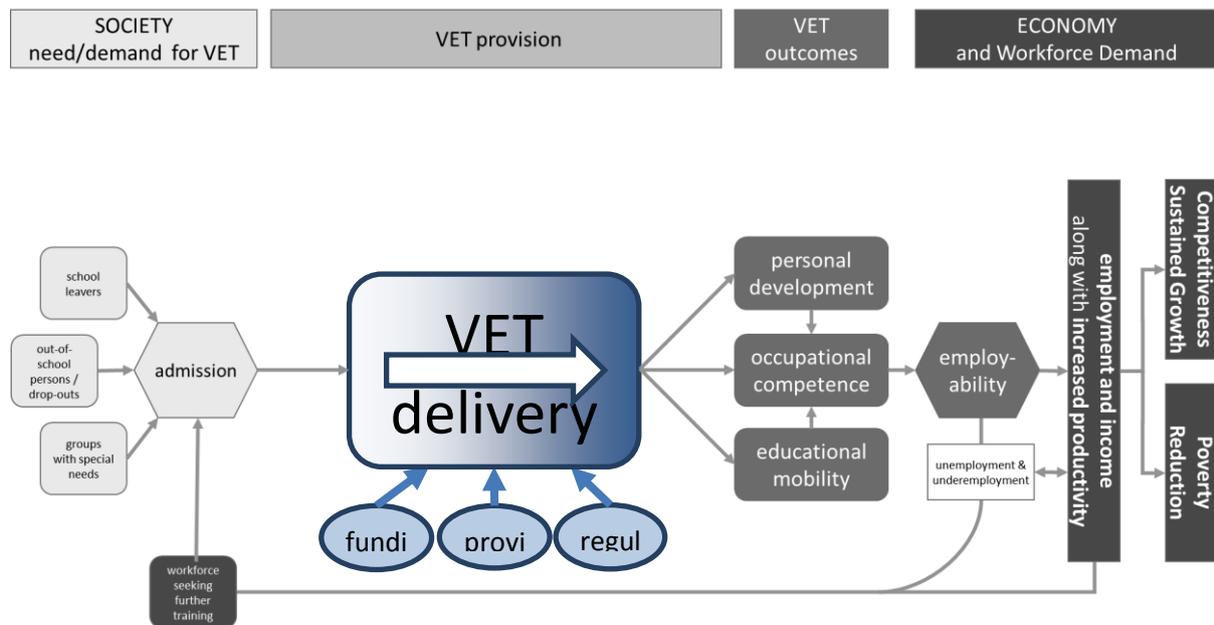


Illustration 7

3.1 Regulatory framework

The regulatory framework of any VET system is a decisive factor for a sustainable and favourable development of VET at all levels and for the reputation VET enjoys in society and the economy.

Two important dimensions are to be distinguished when talking about the regulation of VET systems: first **public regulation**, and, second, **self-regulation**.

Public regulation sets the framework for VET offers leading to publicly recognised VET diplomas and certificates. Public regulation can take place at all state levels, depending on the degree of decentralisation of a VET system.

While public regulation sets the cornerstones and provides orientation, self-regulation in VET is very important too. Most quality developments in VET start within the economy, where new trends emerge and call for some kind of regulation and standardisation.

Any modern public VET regulation can be distinguished using the following criteria:

- **Inclusion:** This has three aspects. First, public VET regulation should include the VET system in the whole education system, in other words it should clearly define the

interfaces with basic education and higher general education. Secondly, it should be **accessible** to all, and offer options for the less qualified and for those not well off. Thirdly it should include the world of work and define its role and responsibility;

- **Competitiveness:** VET should always try to foster the competitiveness of the economy;
- **Permeability:** any VET system regulation should allow its graduates to continue education at other VET levels or in other VET offers at the same level **and** in general education as well;
- **Flexibility and autonomy:** the regulation should leave room for development and foster innovation at all levels of the system;
- **Transparency and limitation** of the VET regulation in the sense that the regulation is to be understandable, developed in a transparent and participatory way and therefore accepted by all actors involved, and limited to the essential.
- **Competence based:** modern VET regulation is based on an outcome orientation (it is competence based) rather than following an input logic.

Regulations for VET, both public and self-regulation, typically define the following core issues:

- IVET (initial or pre-employment training) and CVET offers (tertiary VET or further training),
- admission,
- types of diplomas,
- assessment and certification,
- recognition of certificates for access to both the labour market and higher levels of general education or training,
- qualifications and training of trainers,
- quality assurance and accreditation of training providers, and
- financing.

There are, of course many other issues which may fall within the scope of regulation.

In many VET systems around the globe we find VET regulations either not fulfilling the quality criteria mentioned above, or not covering all dimensions and functions of VET. In many partner countries, public regulation is outdated, and defines a highly centralised system, which caters for the better off, hinders innovation, and does not provide access and pathways to the general education system.

Against this background more and more countries set out to establish so-called **national qualifications frameworks** (NQF). These are instruments to classify and develop qualifications – that is to say the certificates and diplomas issued in general education and VET – according to agreed levels based on generic level descriptors. The aim of NQFs is to facilitate three things:

- the **transparency** of the system of qualifications – all official diplomas, certificates and titles have their place at a specific level corresponding to their related level of competence;
- the **comparability** of qualifications – NQFs allow the value of different qualifications to be compared as regards their level of competence;

- and their **portability** – NQFs facilitate the recognition of qualifications – fully or partly – for admission to further education or training, for employment in other occupational fields or other regions or countries.

However, the establishment of meaningful NQFs requires significant investments in terms of time, effort, financial and human resources. Often the NQFs are over-designed and bureaucratic, and the investments are made at the cost of improved or expanded VET delivery.

Consider the following key analytical questions regarding the regulatory framework:

- Does the current VET regulation fulfil the most important quality criteria, that is inclusion, competitiveness, permeability, flexibility and autonomy, transparency and limitation, and outcome orientation? Where does the regulation fall short?
- What relevant self-regulation exists in the field in which you want to intervene?
- Are there any other regulations outside core VET regulations that play a role? (for example staffing rules and regulations or labour market regulations)
- Who is responsible for what? How decentralised is the system?

3.2 Funding

Quality VET is rather expensive. That is why almost all countries use a mix of financial sources to cover the costs of training infrastructure and VET delivery. The most important contributors are:

- The **tax-payers** – almost everywhere the state budget contributes significantly to the financing of the VET system, in particular in countries where school-based VET, for example in technical secondary schools, prevails.
- **Companies** – here we have to distinguish three main variants, which can also co-exist:
 - First, companies pay – in addition to their general corporate taxes – a **training levy** according to their turnover or number of staff or wage bill, which is used exclusively for training purposes.
 - Secondly, companies offer **internships, work-based learning** or contribute by providing equipment or seconding trainers.
 - Thirdly, companies pay **training fees for their employees** who undergo some kind of further training.
- The third group of funders is the **social partners** – in many countries both employers and employees contribute to public employment services which use part of their funds for active labour market policies including financing training courses for the unemployed or people who need a skills upgrade in order to avoid losing their jobs.
- Fourthly, the **trainees** or their parents may contribute – in many countries VET outside the formal education system is not free of charge, and the participants have to pay a fee and / or cover the costs of training material, which can be significant in

some occupational fields. In this context vouchers and stipends, provided by government, civil society or donor agencies, are important instruments to facilitate the access of special needs groups and to improve quality by stimulating competition among providers.

- Next, **training centres** often follow a “training-cum-production” approach, i.e. they combine training activities with the production of goods or services they sell on a market. The income is used to increase their budget.
- Finally in many countries **civil society** sponsors VET, in particular for special needs groups. NGOs may make donations, provide venues, make in-kind contributions and/or provide human resources for training courses.

Which mix of these sources is applied depends very much on the relative strengths and weaknesses of state, private sector and civil society as well as on traditions.

Given that all VET systems face financial limitations, most of them being seriously or even dramatically underfunded, **resource allocation** becomes an issue of major concern. Decisions regarding a good mix of inputs into the system are among the most difficult ones to be taken, and should be based on a sound analysis and understanding of the interdependencies within the VET system.

For our partner countries, funding a high-quality VET system is an enormous challenge. While their economic and administrative weaknesses do not allow the generation of sufficient tax revenue, they are confronted with an increasing number of young people entering the labour markets. The latter is partly a result of demography – high birth rates – and partly a result of their own success in the field of general education. Nowadays, many more young people successfully complete primary and secondary education, and expect some kind of training opportunity when they leave school.

None of the governments of our partner countries is in a position to cover the costs of high-quality training which can meet the growing social demand, and neither are governments in the so-called developed world. The only way out of this dilemma is a stronger involvement of the economy in financing and providing vocational training – and this means work-based learning.

Consider the following key analytical questions concerning VET funding:

- How is VET funded in the current VET system?
- Who contributes to what and in which ways?
- Are any groups excluded from VET because of lack of funding?
- To what extent is the economy involved in the funding and / or provision of VET?
- Which funding sources are not yet sufficiently used or explored?

3.3 The provider landscape

All over the world, VET is delivered by an array of different institutions. The most important provider of VET in almost all countries is the **state**, in particular in countries with a school-based VET system. Here, initial VET (or pre-employment VET) is offered in technical secondary schools or colleges under the auspices of the ministry of education. Sometimes the state offers two strands in the system: formal VET in secondary schools which leads to certificates that provide access to higher levels of education, and non-formal VET in training centres that prepare their students for direct access to the labour market. The latter often operate under the auspices of ministries of labour or other relevant ministries, such as industry, health or tourism.

The other big player in training provision is **companies**. In countries with apprenticeship training they account for the major part of training delivery. In other countries they play a complementary role by offering internships for trainees.

In many developing countries **NGOs** play an important role in the VET system, in particular with regard to non-formal training and often with a focus on special needs groups. Sometimes they operate under a public-private partnership agreement with the government, which, for example, stipulates that the government pays the teachers and trainers, while the NGO provides the venue and equipment.

Finally, there are **commercial providers** that offer courses in a market environment. They usually operate in the sphere of continuous or further training (CVET). Many of them limit their training offers to occupational fields that require less investment in terms of training infrastructure. Typical examples are ICT occupations, language courses, sales, marketing, office administration and bookkeeping.

Taking into consideration the growing social demand for VET in our partner countries and the limited financial resources of the public sector it becomes obvious that the heterogeneity of the provider landscape is necessary. And a further expansion would be desirable. Having a broad range of specialised providers is also an advantage in meeting the needs of diverse special needs groups. On the other hand, the **quality** of the training programmes is often as diverse as the provider landscape.

There is no simple way out of this dilemma. What governments increasingly try to do is to establish a system of **accreditation** for VET providers that stipulates the minimum requirements a training provider has to match in order to be allowed either to operate or to issue publicly recognised certificates.

4 inputs for VET delivery

Let us now have a look at the key inputs for VET delivery. The following five are the most important ones in each VET system:

- curricula, training material and media
- teachers and trainers
- training infrastructure
- management
- and mode of training delivery

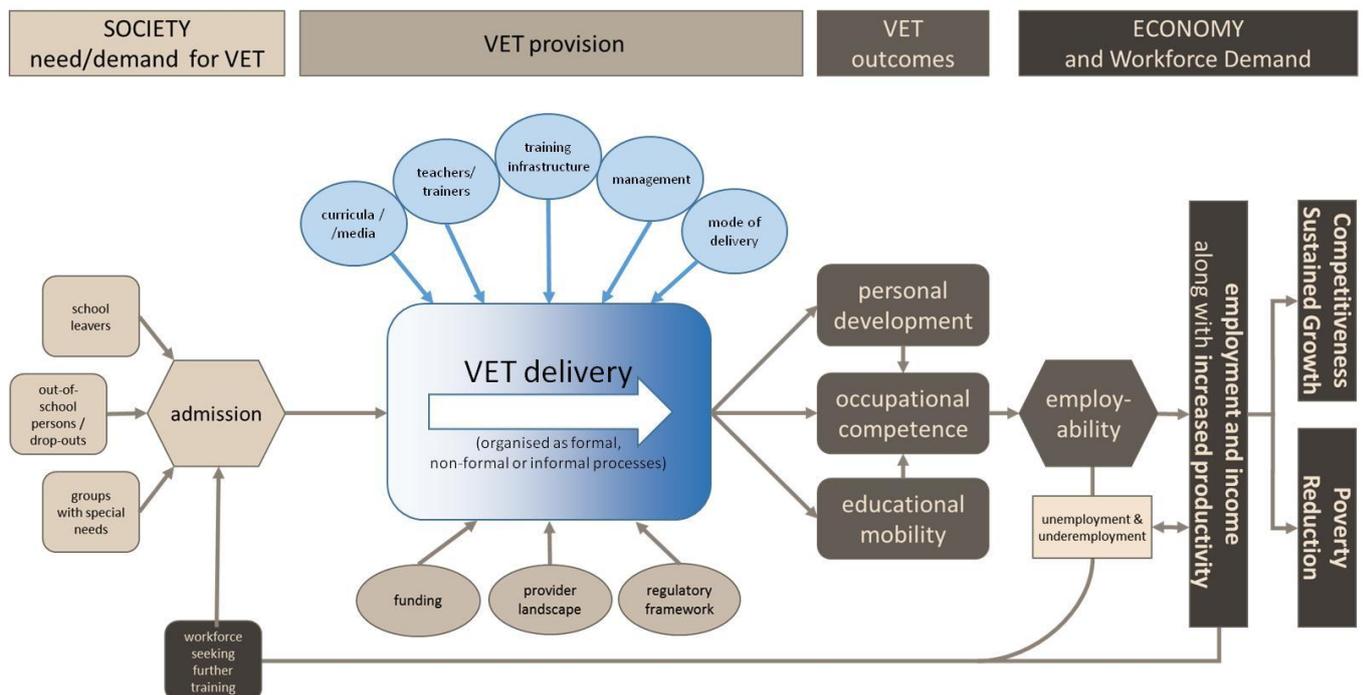


Illustration 8

4.1 Curricula, training material and media

There is no unique and worldwide-accepted definition of “**curricula**”. But as a general rule we can say that curricula determine the objectives and contents of training programmes, and in many cases they also determine their sequence, timing, mode or format and overall duration. Some even provide methodological advice for the trainers who implement the programmes.

Traditional curricula usually list the subjects the students have to learn, whereas modern, competence-based curricula define learning outcomes that describe what the students have to be able to do at the end of the training programme (or module).

The major input for VET curricula derives from the requirements of the **labour market**. These are usually described in occupational profiles or standards that detail what a person in a specific occupation does, and how well the person should be able to do it in order to be

considered competent. VET curricula may also be enriched with content related to general education subjects or to personal development. This depends very much on the nature of the programme, the target group and the chosen mix of the three outcomes of VET delivery mentioned earlier – personal development, occupational competence, and educational mobility.

The quality of the curricula is one decisive factor for the relevance of a training programme. If the curricula do not adequately reflect the requirements of the economy, VET graduates will have difficulty in finding a job, performing well in a job or in starting their own business. Therefore curriculum revision or development is a major area of intervention for VET reforms or donor programmes in the field of VET. Important aspects concerning such reforms are a) making processes more participatory; b) making results more relevant and broadly accepted, and c) making processes faster.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning curricula:

- **Availability:** are curricula available for the most important training programmes offered (or to be offered) in the VET system – and are they up to date?
- **Relevance:** to what extent do the existing curricula reflect the requirements of the economy?
- Are capacities available in the VET system for curriculum revision or development according to modern standards, and who is in charge of this?
- Are the reforms realisable in practice? (considering training infrastructure, training of trainers, funding and so on)

4.2 Teachers and trainers

Teachers and trainers are the backbone of any VET system and any educational intervention. They are the ones who convey knowledge, skills and attitudes to the participants, according to the curricula – if there are any – and according to their own levels of competence. This is why the quality of VET programmes significantly depends on the competences of the teaching staff.

VET teachers and trainers need a balanced mix of technical, methodological and pedagogical skills, and the VET system as a whole needs teachers and trainers who are competent to cover subjects not just related to occupational competence but also personal development and educational mobility. And at least a part of the teaching staff should be prepared for working with special needs groups.

What makes teaching in VET a real challenge is the fact that, because of the speed of innovation and technological change, technical knowledge and skills become outdated much more quickly than they do in general education. For VET teachers and trainers, catching up with technological trends and developments is crucial, and this requires a good system of in-service teacher training, which includes exposure to the world of work.

However, the reality in most of our partner countries is far away from this. The majority of the teachers and trainers in VET have made a purely academic career and have hardly ever gained practical experience in the occupational fields they train in. In-service training is a rare

exception. Moreover the status, employment conditions and remuneration of teaching staff in VET are often poor, which reduces their motivation, readiness and capability to invest time and effort in further developing their competences, since many pursue alternative income generating activities in parallel with their teaching work.

All this makes the teaching staff a real bottleneck for any progress and improvement in a VET system. VET reforms or donor interventions in the field that do not adequately take this issue into consideration are bound to fail.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning teachers and trainers:

- Is the level of competence of the teaching staff (in terms of technical, methodological and pedagogical aspects) adequate for the delivery of high-quality VET?
- Is there an appropriate in-service training mechanism in place?
- Is the teaching staff able to cope with the requirements of updated or new curricula reflecting recent labour market trends?
- Do the status, employment conditions and remuneration of VET teachers and trainers allow well-qualified and motivated staff to be recruited? Can well qualified staff be kept in teaching?

4.3 Training infrastructure

Adequate **training infrastructure** is also very important for high-quality training – and it is often very expensive. For training centres, catching up with technological trends and developments in the world of work is a real challenge that requires frequent investments in venues (classrooms, laboratories and workshops or other simulation facilities) and equipment.

Our partners in developing countries mostly find it impossible to build, equip, and maintain training facilities to the appropriate standard and in sufficient quantity to cover the continuously growing social and economic demand for VET. This makes training infrastructure another crucial bottleneck for any ambitious VET reform or donor intervention, in particular one which covers a large number of people.

In this context, work-based learning and other forms of cooperation with the world of work are possible ways out which it is worthwhile to explore.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning training infrastructure:

- Do the workshops, laboratories and equipment in the existing training centres meet the training needs of the economy?
- Are resources available within the VET system to modernise and extend training infrastructure in order to cope with growing and changing demand?
- Are work-based learning and other forms of cooperation with the world of work applied or at least explored? Could they be extended? Who are potential partners?

4.4 Professional management

VET systems operate through a network of technical schools and training centres, which have a more or less high degree of autonomy. They are local service providers that need good management in order to be efficient and effective. **Professional management** is therefore another key element of modern VET systems.

Management of a training institution comprises management of significant numbers of staff and students, management of valuable assets in terms of training infrastructure, financial administration, and communication with state authorities, with students and their parents, and with the world of work.

Against this background the issue of quality management in VET has been raised both in the scientific community and in the public administrations responsible for VET. Many governments and even some economic sectors have established, or are about to establish, accreditation systems or quality marks for VET providers in order to ensure a certain level of quality in VET provision. Almost all these approaches put the spotlight on management. However, quality management remains underdeveloped on the level of implementation. Therefore, management and its professional development are a key issue for many VET reforms.

Consider these key analytical questions concerning professional management:

- How do the decision-makers in the VET system view the importance of quality management in training institutions?
- Do the relevant training institutions enjoy the degree of autonomy that professional management requires?
- What are the recruitment mechanisms for management staff and the level of competence requested?
- What support mechanisms for managers are available, such as further training courses, handbooks or coaching? Are they adequate and sufficient?

4.5 Modes of training delivery

The final key input is **modes of training delivery**. VET systems usually distinguish between:

- **initial** VET (IVET), also called pre-employment VET, which primarily addresses school graduates and school drop-outs; and
- **continuous** VET (CVET), also called further training, which addresses people already employed or currently unemployed.

A threefold distinction is also drawn between:

- **formal** VET, which takes place within the education system and provides certificates that allow further educational mobility. Typical examples are technical secondary schools;
- secondly, **non-formal** VET, which takes place in training centres outside the

educational pyramid and provides certificates which offer recognition in the world of work. Typical examples are training centres run by NGOs or their partner training providers which address unemployed or underemployed young people or adults;

- and thirdly **informal** VET, which refers to any kind of vocational learning that happens outside regulated frameworks, for instance at the workplace, in groups of peers or colleagues, or on the internet.

Formal and non-formal VET can be delivered in different modes. These delivery modes can be grouped and distinguished according to the following criteria:

- fragmentation;
- hands-on learning;
- distance learning;
- outreach;
- customisation;
- learning progress; and
- timing

Within these criteria, delivery arrangements may again differ. The following illustration provides an overview:

crit erion	arrangements ranging from	...	to
fragmentation	stand-alone modules	module sequence (allowing exit and re-entry)	comprehensive programme
practical exposure	classroom and laboratory focus	simulation (workshop etc.), 'teaching factory'	learning at work (experiential learning)
distance learning	online emphasis	blended learning (online courses plus contact seminars)	offline emphasis
outreach	fixed location	'hub' and satellite centres	mobile units
customisation	individuals select units	pre-defined content plus optional units	pre-defined content
learning progress	Learning duration is flexible, outcomes fixed ('competency-based')	Learning duration is fixed; content can be added (for fast learners)	Outcomes are variable (grading); duration is fixed
timing	full-time	mixed (e.g. full-time at weekends)	part-time

Table 1

Which delivery mode with what kind of arrangement is chosen depends on the overall VET approach and policy of a country but also on the given circumstances of individual training providers and of the target groups they serve. Often, training providers offer different modes and combinations in order to be able to respond flexibly to different target groups and to optimise the use of their training infrastructure.

All these delivery modes have advantages and drawbacks, and each VET system has to develop its own specific mix according to national priorities, culture, and available capacities.

Consider these key analytical questions for modes of delivery:

- What are the prevailing modes of delivery?
- To what extent do they correspond to the needs and requirements of specific target groups to be addressed by a VET reform or a donor intervention?
- Which other modes of delivery could enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, outreach and quality of the VET system significantly?
- What would be the implications in terms of financial and human resource as well as in terms of duration and challenges?

5 Learner support

Transition from school to work, with VET as its most important cornerstone, is not always and not for all young people a smooth process. There are many obstacles and problems and a certain risk of failure, in particular for special needs groups. This is why many countries have developed different support measures to prepare, accompany, and follow up the training process in the VET system.

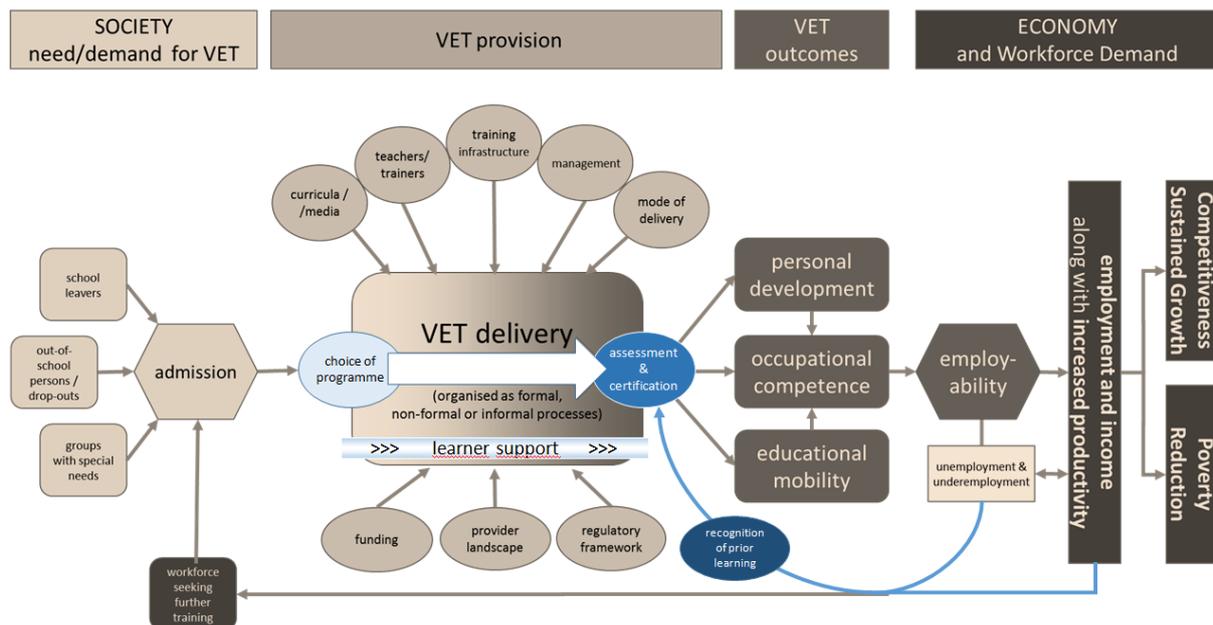


Illustration 9

The most important and widespread learner support measures are the following:

Vocational orientation takes place during the final years of general education and aims to make young people aware of the world of work and help them to identify the occupational areas which might be interesting for them.

Career guidance or counselling is offered at the interface of general education and VET and provides detailed information on specific training pathways and related jobs. It sometimes includes ability tests and advice regarding admission. It addresses job-seekers as well as employed people who want to develop their skills. It is an important instrument to help different target groups make informed choices when opting for a specific VET programme.

Different **advisory services and special supportive courses** are sometimes offered **during** the training process. The aim of these measures is twofold: to prevent or at least reduce or mitigate dropout – which is still a common feature of many training programmes – and to make sure that the participants perform well in the final assessment, thus increasing the number of successful graduates.

Job placement services take place at the interface of VET and employment. Although placement is a key function of the labour market system and in particular of the public employment services it is more and more widely acknowledged that training providers also

have a role to play. This covers issues like networking with local companies, internships, and preparation for job search (how to identify job opportunities and how to apply).

Coaching or mentoring for beginners in the world of work **and** their employers can also be found more and more often. It is known that the first couple of months in a job are decisive for stable employment. Support provided by coaches or mentors can reduce the risk of failure during this period. This is very important for special needs groups and in particular for those who opt for self-employment.

All these supportive measures are still underdeveloped or even non-existent in the VET systems of most of our partner countries. But there is a trend to introduce such instruments in order to make the rather expensive training programmes more efficient and effective. For donor interventions in VET, which often emphasise the inclusion of special needs groups, it is almost a must to consider such complementary actions.

Consider the following key analytical questions regarding supportive measures:

- Which of the above-mentioned learner support measures are applied in the current VET system, to what extent, and who is using them, at what level of education?
- What are the experiences so far: to what extent do they contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of VET delivery?
- Which of these supportive measures are needed for the specific target groups of an envisaged VET reform or donor intervention?
- What would be the prerequisites and financial implications of introducing one or more of these supportive measures in the VET system or in a specific donor programme?
- Who could be partners and allies for the introduction of learner support in a VET system?

6 Assessment and certification

VET usually terminates with assessment. Participants have to provide evidence that they have acquired the knowledge and skills that the economy requires for the specific occupations they have been trained for, in other words that they are competent and able to perform the jobs in accordance with industry performance standards.

This is confirmed by certificates issued by the competent authorities, or the competent educational institution or private organisation. These certificates are the “driving licences” for the labour market and the economy. Their value for their holders – that is to what extent they facilitate access to employment and income – depends very much on their degree of recognition.

It is therefore crucial that certificates are credible, i.e. that recruiting companies can trust them. This implies that the assessment is:

- **relevant** – it assesses the knowledge and skills that are decisive for job performance;
- **reliable** – the test instruments used are appropriate to measure whether or not a person is competent;
- and **objective** – the assessment criteria and procedures used are the same for all candidates and the assessors are impartial.

Again, the reality in our partner countries is often far away from this. What we often find is assessment done by the trainers who delivered the course, and certificates issued by the training providers themselves. Very often, practical skills are not sufficiently considered in assessment. As a result, the certificates are more or less useless to the graduates when they apply for a job, and employers have to invest significant time and effort in getting the right applicants.

A relatively new trend in many countries is the opening up of assessment also to people who did not participate in a specific training course but acquired relevant competences at the workplace or through other forms of informal learning. This is usually called **recognition of prior learning** (RPL) and is a powerful tool to help unemployed people to get their occupational competences recognised and to facilitate their labour market integration. It also stimulates lifelong learning because formal certificates are often required for participation in further training.

This is why certification and assessment, including RPL, appear more and more often on VET reform agendas. For our partner countries it is of particular importance because many companies do not take the certificates issued by the VET system into consideration, while at the same time many employed and unemployed people are competent, but do not have a formal qualification.

Finally, consider these key analytical questions on the issue of certification and assessment:

- How is assessment and certification organised in the current VET system? Is there an opportunity for recognition of prior learning?
- How relevant, reliable, and objective is the assessment system?
- To what extent are practical skills considered in the assessment?
- To what extent and how are representatives of the world of work included in assessment?
- To what extent are certificates known and recognised in the world of work?

7 VET systems: the complete picture

The following illustration provides an overview of a typical VET system and its interfaces with general education, labour markets and the employment system.

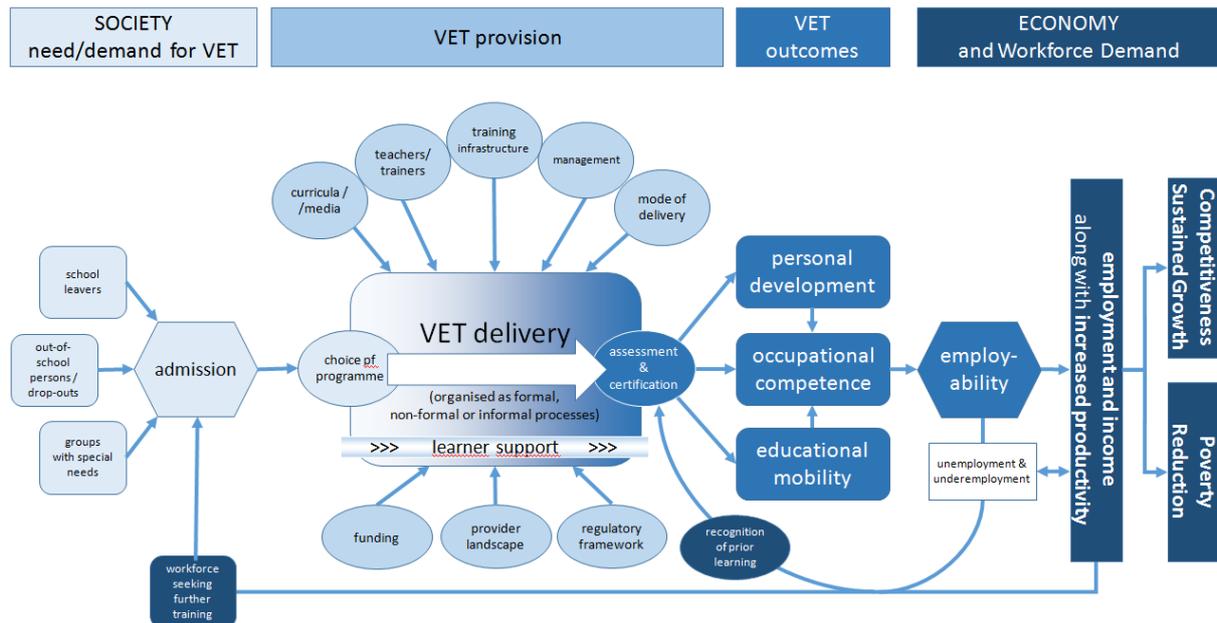


Illustration 10

It goes without saying that the different elements and factors shown in this graphic, and elaborated and explained in the text, interrelate with each other. This is what makes a system a system. The complex interdependencies and **cause-and-effect relationships** between the elements and factors have only been touched in the text and can hardly be depicted in a graphic. Typical examples of such interrelations are:

- Technological change and innovation often require the revision (or replacement) of curricula, which might imply the adaptation of training infrastructure and/or training of trainers and/or assessment and certification, or even a change in the mode of delivery.
- Opening VET up to special needs groups also requires the revision of curricula, not primarily with regard to objectives, but most probably with regard to timing and methodology. It also may imply a change or adaptation in the mode of delivery and trigger the need for specific learner support.
- The closer involvement of companies in VET delivery, for example regarding work-based learning, significantly changes the role of teachers and trainers, has an impact on curricula and training infrastructure, and requires adaptations of management and administration, and funding as well.

Each intervention that changes one of the elements of the system has knock-on effects in other elements and/or requires changes to be made to other elements. Describing and analysing the main interrelations within a VET system would go far beyond the scope of this introduction. This might be subject of follow-up activities within the *employment and income network* of SDC – if and when requested by you, the users of this presentation.