



European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Supporting the implementation of the
European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
for Vocational Education and Training

EQAVET Peer Learning Activity on *how quality assurance processes can be used to make VET more attractive*

28 – 29 November 2019
Berlin, Germany

Background Paper

Introduction

1. The EQAVET Secretariat in partnership with DEQAVET¹ (the NRP in Germany) and BIBB² (the German Federal Institute for VET) is organising this peer learning activity in order for participants to discuss whether:

- different approaches to quality assurance help to make VET more attractive;
- any specific quality assurance activities have encouraged more learners to consider VET as an option.

The PLA will be based on short presentations from Germany, Spain and Slovenia alongside opportunities for discussions with colleagues from a VET school in Germany. Copies of Cedefop's VET charts for Germany, Spain and Slovenia are included in Annexe 1.

2. Cedefop's research³ has identified several system-level initiatives which have made initial VET more attractive. These can be summarised as follows:
 - improving the permeability of educational pathways by offering access to other education and training opportunities;
 - expanding opportunities to access higher education through double-qualifying pathways;
 - promoting work-based learning to attract students who prefer a more practical path or the possibility of learning on the job while working;
 - improving access for special groups, including low-skilled, disabled and socially and economically less advantaged young people, older non-traditional students, learners from minority ethnic groups, and migrants to help ensure their employability;
 - improving the quality of initial VET by developing and implementing national quality assurance frameworks;
 - increasing the transparency of qualifications and programmes, through measures such as developing national qualification frameworks and adopting European frameworks;
 - recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning by assessing knowledge, skills and competences. This can make new or higher level qualifications more accessible, and open up formal learning opportunities for individuals who would not otherwise be admitted to a particular programme;
 - improving guidance and counselling systems so that students have adequate, reliable and up-to-date information before making choices about initial VET programmes;
 - emphasising skill development in initial VET through such means as skills competitions and award ceremonies;

¹ <https://www.deqa-vet.de/en/>

² <https://www.bibb.de/en/>

³ Page 112, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5539_en.pdf Number 39, Attractiveness of initial vocational education and training: identifying what matters

- raising the awareness of initial VET through media campaigns that focus on labour market prospects.
3. Similar conclusions were reached by the ENQAVET working group in 2009⁴ which noted six conditions that contribute to making initial VET more attractive to learners. These conditions could be summarised under the following headings: quality management, labour market relevance, progression pathways, status and image, information and guidance and initial VET learning facilitators. The report of the working group also highlighted the following VET characteristics which helped to support its attractiveness:
- quality of research underpinning initial VET policy and practice;
 - qualitative co-operation between stakeholders/partners, including suitable collaboration between IVET and the labour market on matters such as needs analysis and the development of standards and contents;
 - suitably accredited and quality assured initial VET provider institutions;
 - use of effective learning approaches, methodologies and tools;
 - quality assured qualifications esteemed in society and the labour market and recognised in relation to progress to another level of qualification;
 - quality information, guidance and counselling services;
 - tangible and pro-active links between the initial VET school and the labour market that facilitate work-based learning;
 - environment, ambiance and facilities that appeal to young people.
4. While this ENQAVET and Cedefop research focus on initial VET, some of the characteristics and initiatives are equally applicable to continuing VET. The research by Cedefop and ENQAVET include a focus on the quality of VET and the development and use of quality assurance systems. The PLA discussions will build on the ideas in this paper.

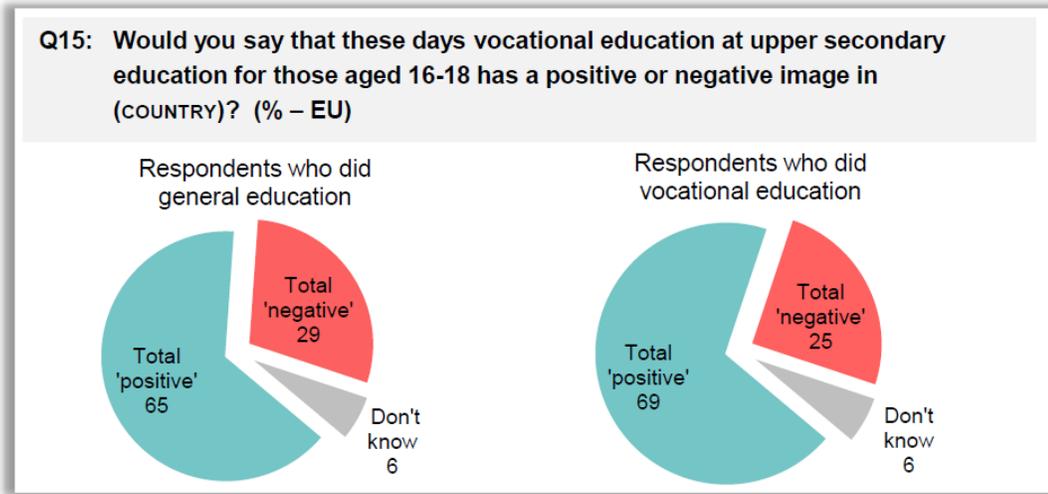
Perceptions of VET

5. Cedefop's 2017 analysis of the public opinions of initial VET comments that the general image of VET is relatively positive in Europe⁵. (This contrasts with the opening sentence of the 2009 ENQAVET working group report which comments that 'in some countries vocational education and training (VET) suffers from an image problem.'). Cedefop notes that around two in three Europeans (68%) think that vocational education at the upper secondary stage has a positive image in their country, while just under a quarter (23%) say that it has a negative image. Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents with a positive image is slightly higher among those that participated in VET (69%) than among general education participants (65%).

⁴ The ENQAVET network preceded EQAVET. The network published 'Making initial vocational education and training (IVET) more attractive' in 2009. <https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/publications/Explanatory-brochure-on-Making-VET-more-attractive.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁵ Page 37, <https://www.feani.org/sites/default/files/CEDEFOP%20Study%20on%20VET.pdf> Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training

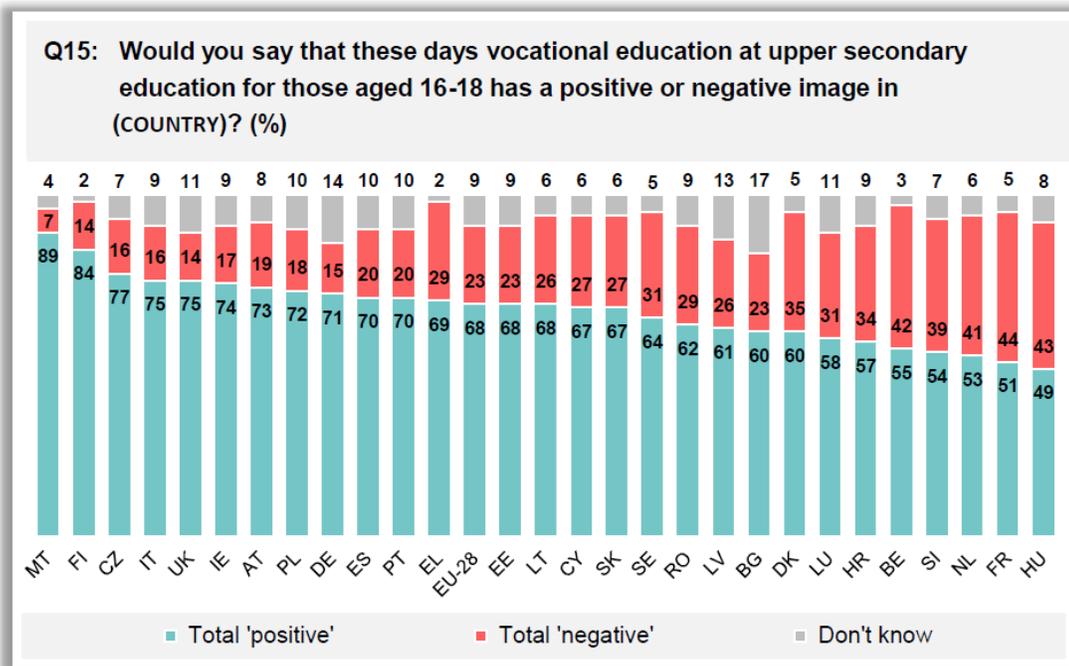
Figure 1 - the image of VET



Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).
 Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

- However, as shown in figure 2, there are significant differences in perceptions across Europe. This suggests that the challenges associated with increasing the attractiveness of VET (at least in the 16-18 initial VET area) differ across European countries.

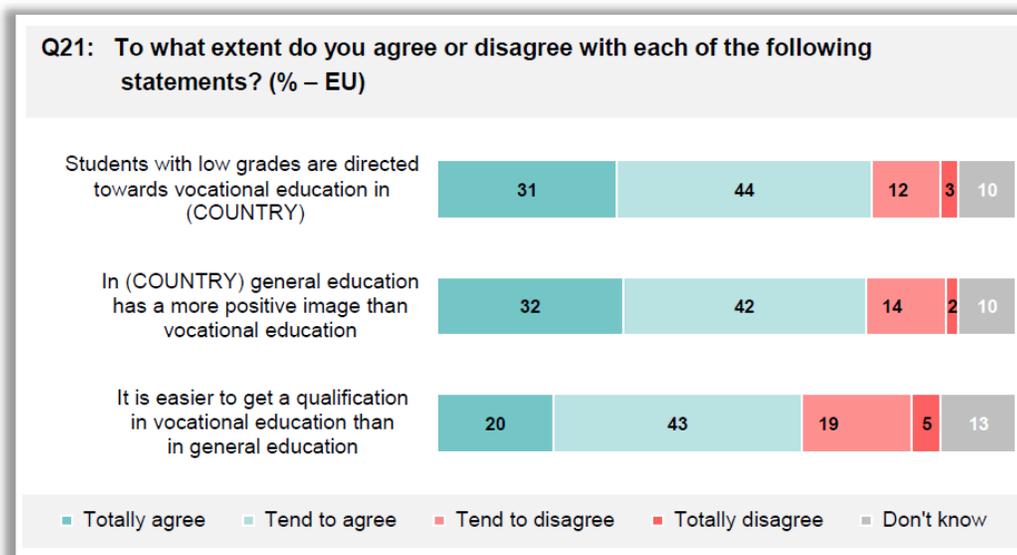
Figure 2 - national image of VET



Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).
 Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

7. Other aspects of the Cedefop survey of public opinion identify the range of challenges facing policy makers seeking to increase the attractiveness of VET. These challenges can be seen in the following charts:

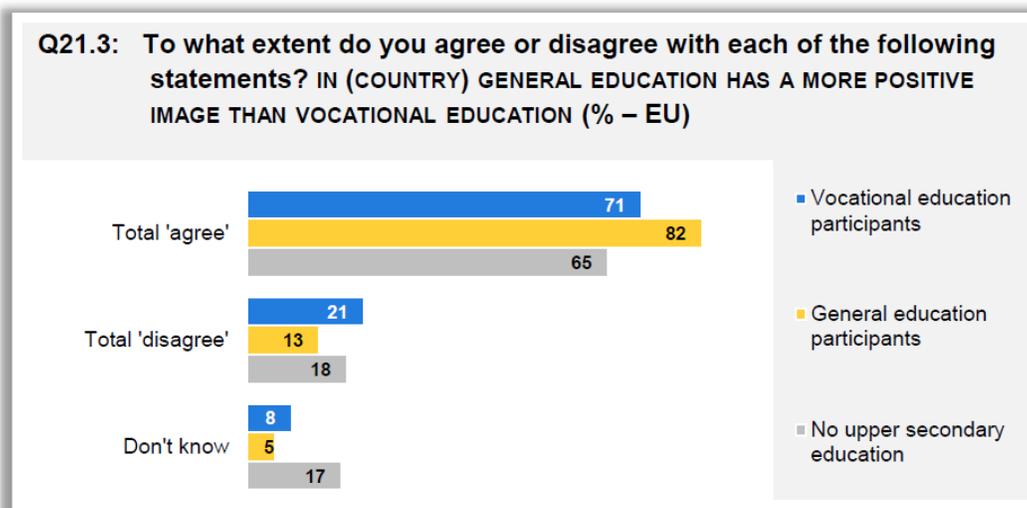
Figure 3 - perceptions of VET compared to general education



Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

Figure 4 - the image of VET compared to general education



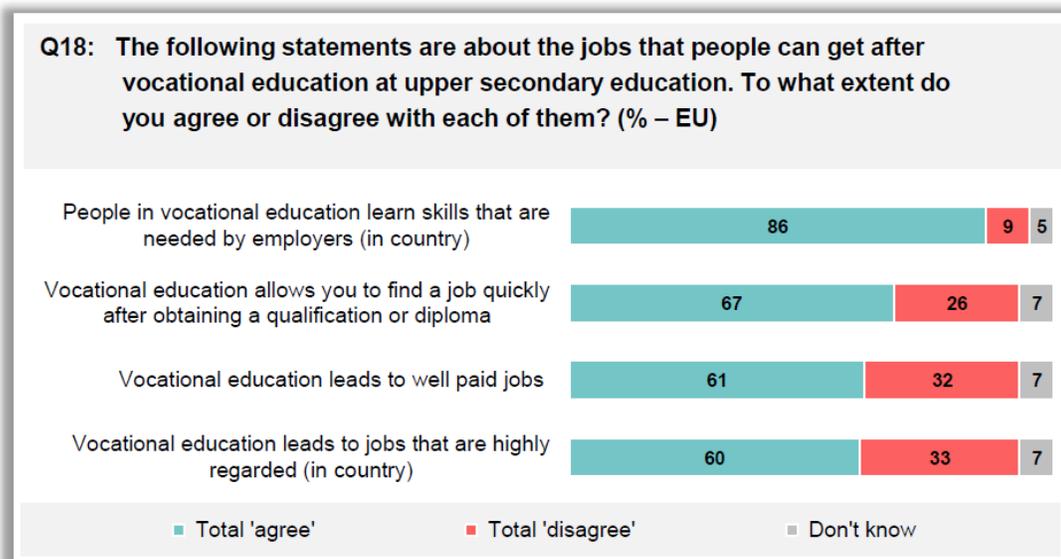
Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

To some extent these perceptions illustrate the issue of whether there is 'parity of esteem' between different education and training pathways. Establishing, in the public's perception, an equally positive view of initial VET and general education has been an important priority in some countries for many years.

8. Despite these perceptions of initial VET (compared to general education) Cedefop's research highlights the strength of VET in relation to meeting the needs of the labour market, and learners' development of skills. These can be summarised in the following figures:

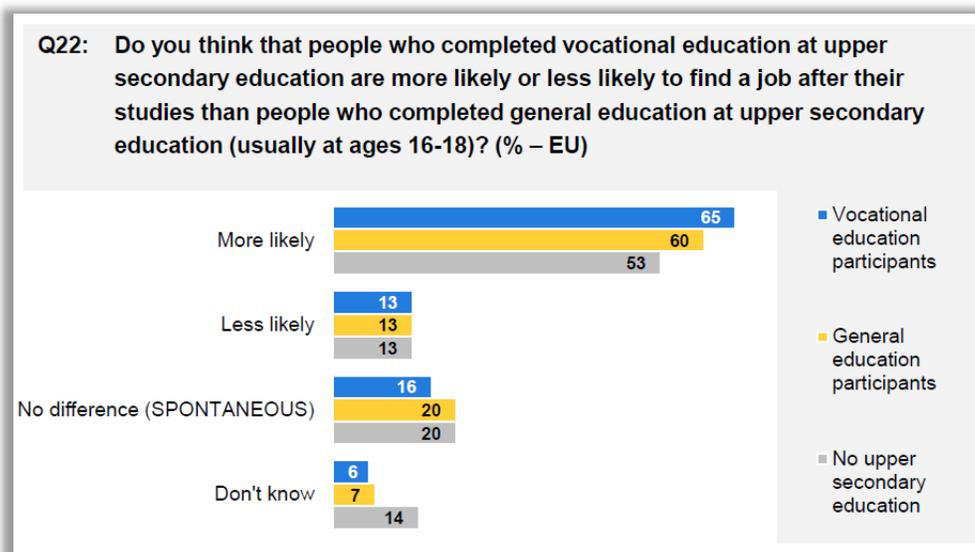
Figure 5 - perceptions of VET and the labour market



Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

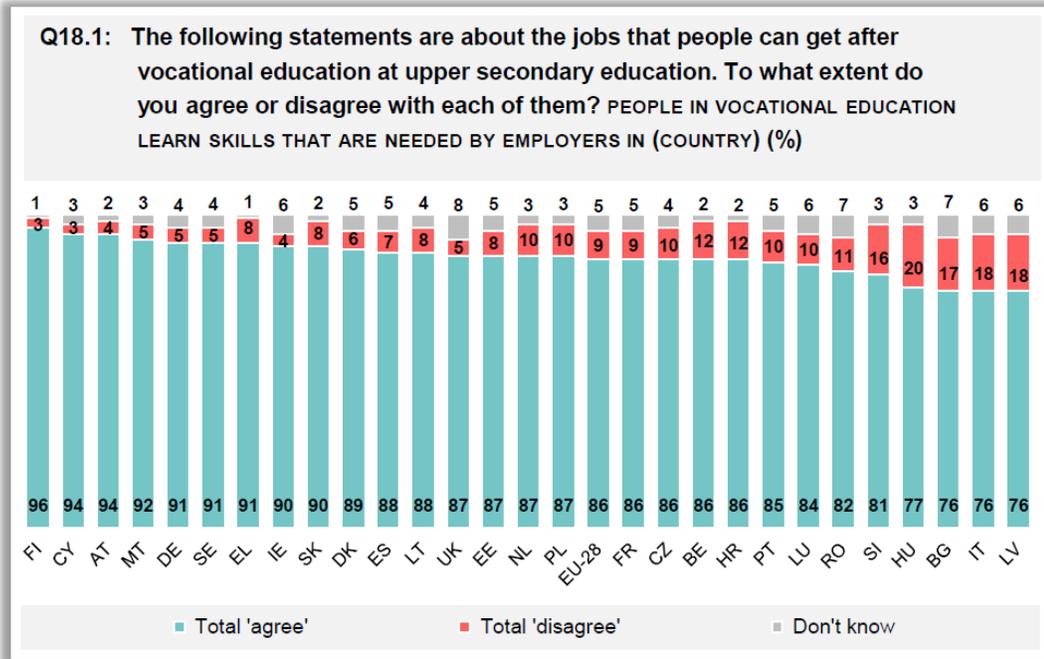
Figure 6 - perceptions of employment



Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

Figure 7 - developing the skills needed by the labour market



Base: All respondents (n= 35 645).
 Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

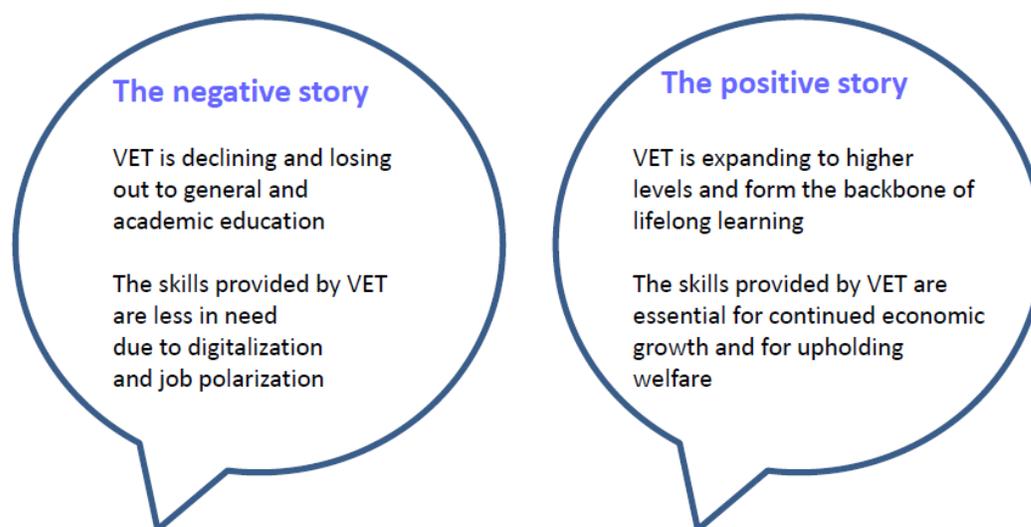
- The apparent contradictions between the positive view of VET in relation to the labour market, and the less positive view in relation to the comparisons between VET and general education reflect some uncertainty about the future direction of VET i.e. it is not clear how important VET will be, and what will be needed from VET in the near future. This dilemma over the future for VET has been discussed in detail by Cedefop (in its 2016-2018 series on *The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe*⁶) - and can be summarised by the following figure⁷ from a 2018 seminar on the future of VET:

⁶ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5563>

⁷ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/fi/events-and-projects/events/vocational-education-and-training-europe-future-scenarios-and-their-implications>

Figure 8 - opposing views of the future of VET

COMPETING STORIES – OPPOSING EXPECTATIONS



10. Within the context of the current positive image for VET in Europe, and the desire to develop figure 8's positive story for VET, it is helpful to look at how quality assurance systems can contribute to increasing VET's attractiveness.

The role of quality assurance

11. High quality initial and continuing VET is attractive to learners, society and employers. Effective quality assurance systems help to increase the quality of provision and make VET more attractive. However quality assurance is just one of many actions which can improve the perception and effectiveness of VET e.g. growth in the economy, increased funding for VET provision, more work-based programmes and apprenticeships, curriculum change can all contribute to making VET more attractive. The distinctive contribution of quality assurance is its ability to increase everyone's confidence in the VET system e.g. learners' confidence about their programmes and job opportunities; employers' confidence about the about market relevance of programmes; and the public's perception of the value of VET. Even when many of the actions (set out above) are taking place, there is always a role for quality assurance in promoting the attractiveness of VET.
12. As it is always possible to improve quality assurance, it is important to find a way of deciding whether enough is being done to support the attractiveness of VET. The EQAVET indicators and indicative descriptors provide a basis for analysing how the system is performing - but they do not provide an objective measure of the effectiveness of quality assurance. Their focus is on measuring the quality (rather than the quality assurance) of VET. This is because the EQAVET quality assurance framework describes a process of continuous improvement based on quality

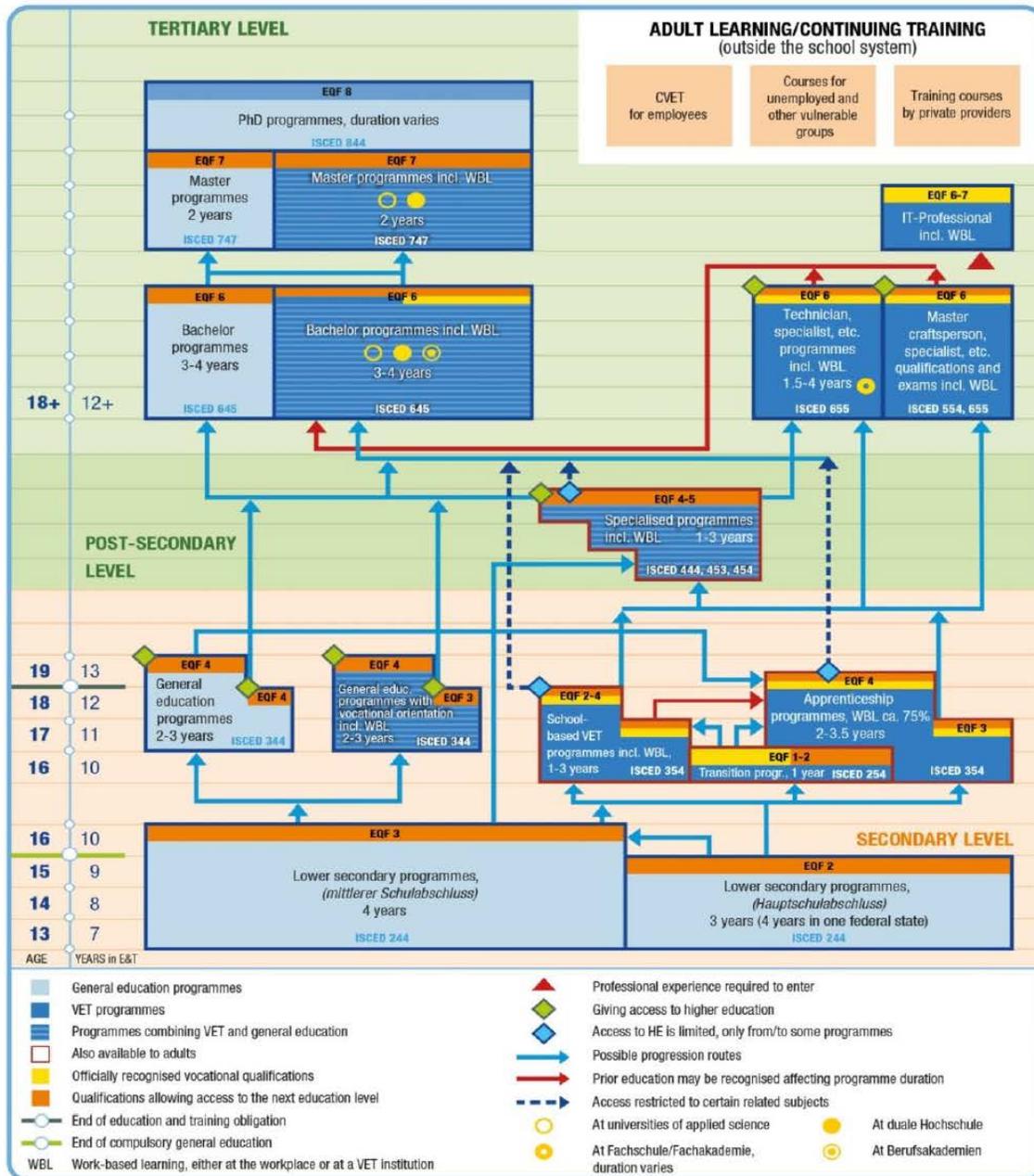
management. The indicators measure the quality of a VET system and this can be used as a proxy measure for the effectiveness of quality assurance.

13. An alternate approach to measuring the quality of VET provision is through the use of a tracking system⁸. Quantitative and qualitative data from administrative systems and surveys can be combined to understand better the progress and performance of learners on completion (or transfer/drop-out) of their VET programmes. Information from this type of tracking system can be useful in reviewing and amending VET as part of a quality assurance process.
14. Based on the EQAVET indicators or the outcomes of a tracking system, it is possible to decide that the quality of VET is sufficiently high to make it attractive to learners. In such situations the role of quality assurance is one of maintaining confidence (which is based on attractiveness and promoting the idea of 'parity of esteem') in the quality of provision. When the EQAVET indicators or the outcomes of a tracking system show that the quality of VET is insufficient, there are opportunities for a quality assurance process to strengthen quality and increase attractiveness.
15. This PLA will look at the situation where the EQAVET indicators or the outcomes of a tracking system have shown that the quality of VET is insufficient. It will explore the range of ways that the quality assurance process has been applied to different aspects of VET in order to directly improve quality and indirectly make VET more attractive.

⁸ The European Commission's report defines VET graduate tracking measures as tools which collect information for the analysis of graduates' educational achievements on completion of VET, their further education and higher achievements, and their employment.

Annex - Case studies education and training system - structures

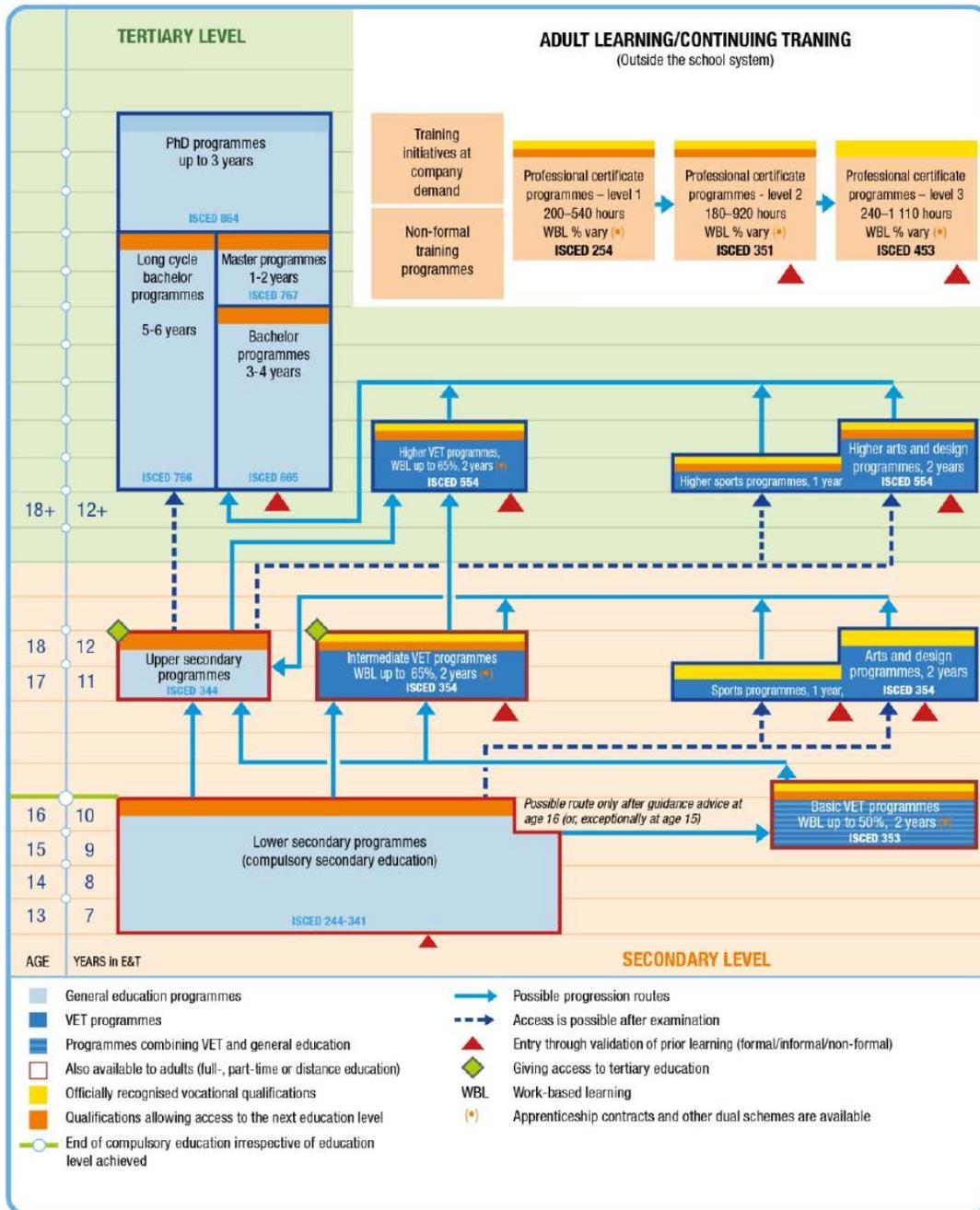
Figure 1. VET in the German education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011. This is a simplified chart, based on the unified approach used for the spotlights on VET in all EU-28 countries plus Iceland and Norway.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Germany.

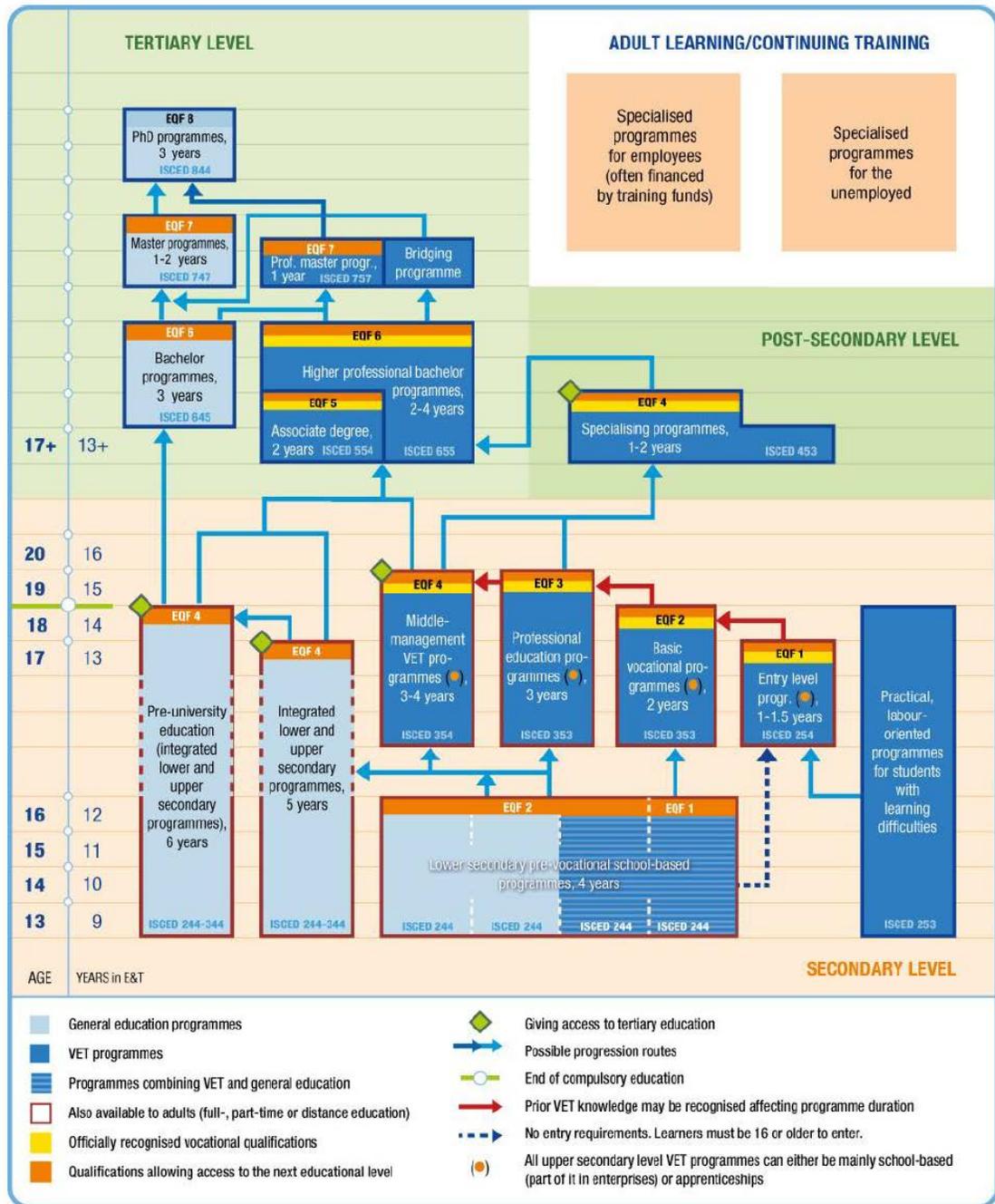
Figure 8. Diagramme of the national education and training system in Spain



NB: ISCED-P 2011. The Spanish education system is not referenced to EQF levels.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Spain.

Figure 10. VET in Dutch education and training in 2015



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Netherlands.