

# European Steel Skills Agenda (ESSA)



## What's New?

### VET System Framework Conditions for New Skills in the Steel Industry

ESSA is studying the VET provision of 5 European countries (DE, ES, IT, PL, UK) in relation to the industry requirements arising from intense digitalisation and technological transformation. In doing this, we have defined two levels of analysis: a) a macro-level that concerns the overall functioning of the national VET systems and the identification of common trends; b) a programme level, which focuses on the main vocational and technical programmes running in the countries that provide skilled workers to the industry. The second level of analysis connects with the in-depth investigation of 9 sample job profiles within the industry that will be conducted to understand how technological transformation is affecting specific occupations.

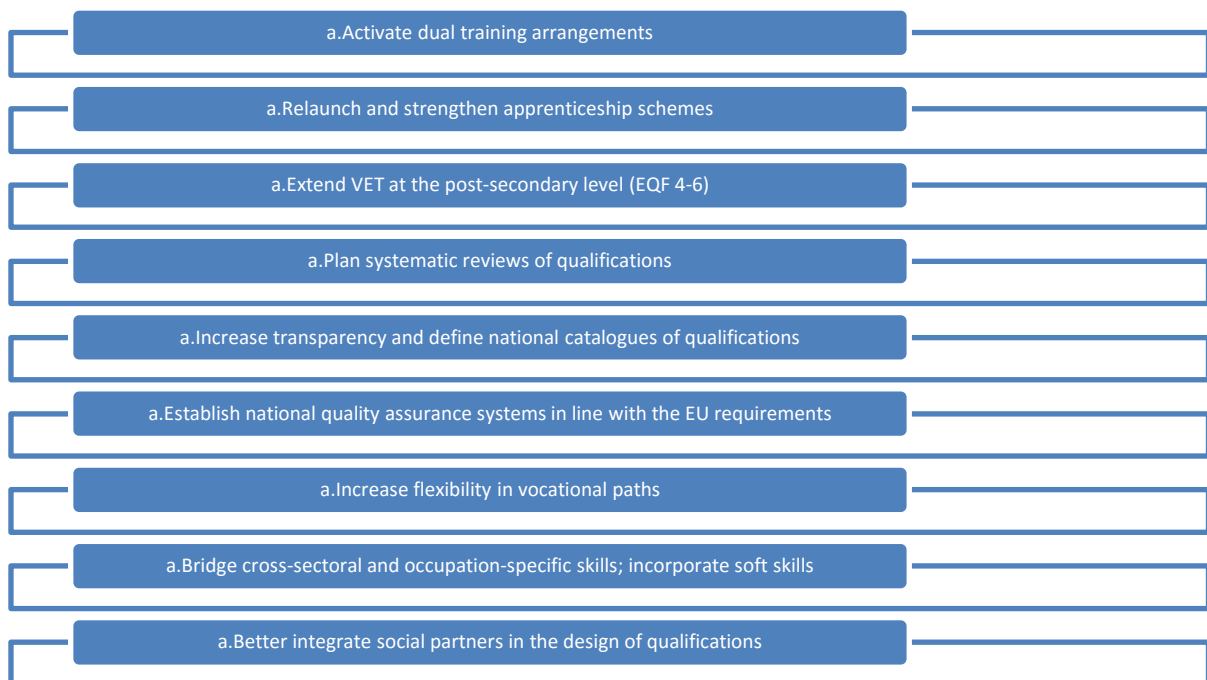
#### 5 case study countries: VET essential characteristics

Germany	Italy	Poland	Spain	United Kingdom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual system</li> <li>• Co-determination</li> <li>• Incremental adaptation</li> <li>• Occupation-based</li> <li>• Holistic approach to occupational competencies</li> <li>• Technology neutral provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National catalogue of occupations and qualifications</li> <li>• National and regional VET provision</li> <li>• Qualification-based</li> <li>• 3 types of apprenticeship</li> <li>• Recently introduced dual VET</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multilevel governance</li> <li>• System undergoing deep reforms</li> <li>• Enhancing flexibility</li> <li>• Qualification-based</li> <li>• Recognition of prior learning</li> <li>• Implemented an occupations/qualifications catalogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double VET route</li> <li>• Dual VET recently introduced</li> <li>• National catalogue of occupational standards</li> <li>• Recognition of prior learning</li> <li>• Strong social dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET mostly at secondary level</li> <li>• Rising demand in apprenticeships</li> <li>• Modularity</li> <li>• Becoming more employer-led</li> <li>• Narrow occupational standards</li> <li>• Undergoing sectoral reviews</li> </ul>

## Common Patterns in the EU VET reforms

Many European countries have undergone VET reforms to cope with the current industrial and labour market challenges. Research conducted by Cedefop has identified some common patterns in the way VET systems are being reformed across Europe. These patterns are consistent with our findings from the 5 case study countries, although to different extents, depending on the characteristics and functioning of each national system.

Most common reforms include:



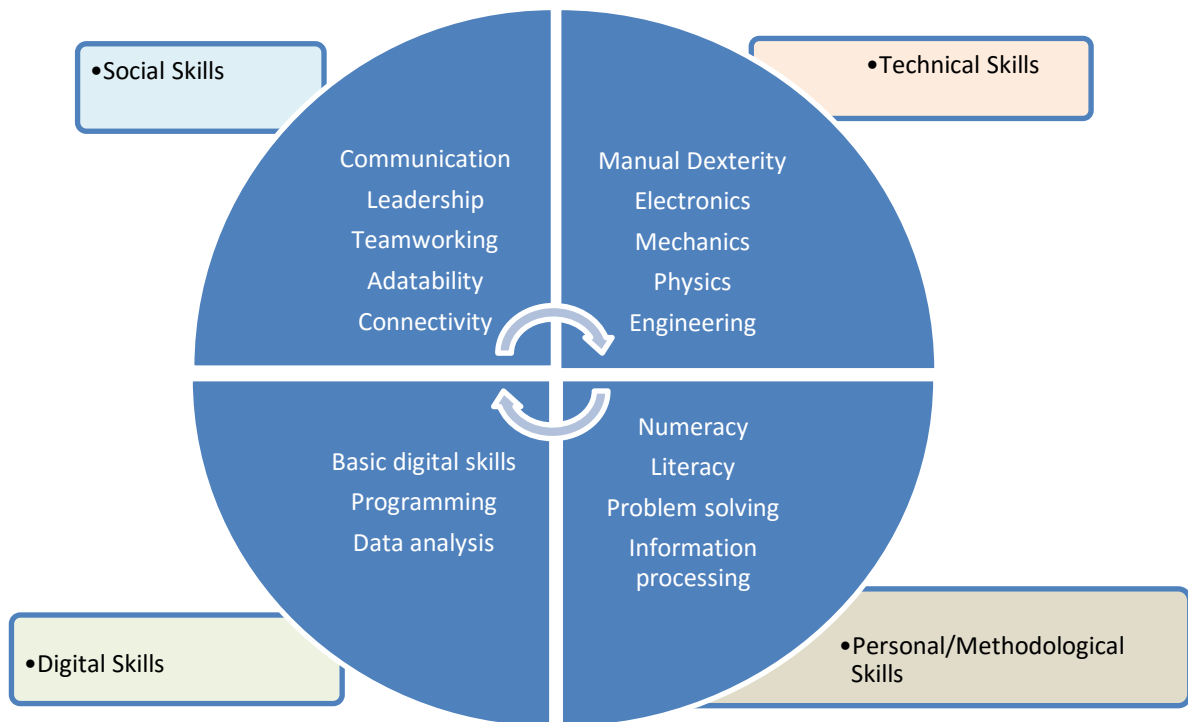
Our research has observed a tendency towards a stronger integration of employers in the qualification design process and the training provision. This indicates an attempt to move the national VET systems towards a more *collective* type of skills formation. This also aims at overcoming frequent VET funding cuts through companies' engagement (this is especially relevant for hi-tech occupations).

VET in Germany shows a less degree of change, compared to the other countries. Initiatives have been undertaken to face the problem of skills mismatches through "occupations screenings" to understand the impact of technological innovation on some industrial key sectors, including metalworking. This resulted in the introduction of additional learning modules on digitalization and 4.0 enabling technologies.

Among our 5 case study countries, Poland is undergoing the deepest structural changes. A thorough reform process has been initiated in 2016 and is changing the landscape of general and vocational programmes, the outcomes of which will become visible only in the coming years.

Italy and Spain have recently introduced the possibility to earn IVET qualifications also through apprenticeships in a dual manner, although this option seems to be not much adopted yet. Italy and Spain have also worked on improving the links between secondary and post-secondary VET.

## Industry requirements and skills needs



## Future challenges for VET

Our comparative analysis shows a latent tension between fast responses and mid- to long-term incremental adaptation to technological change. This is exemplified by the cases of the United Kingdom and Germany and their respective approach to VET reforms.

Experts' point out that while fast responses might lack coherence and do not point to a long-term strategy, too rigid vocational paths have shortcomings in meeting the flexibility required by labour markets. This tension is reflected also in a different view on occupational standards. In contexts, such as the United Kingdom, employers increasing importance in updating and designing new qualifications might lead to a proliferation of narrow-defined occupational standards. This, in turn, brings in the risk of undermining the capacity of the system to deliver skills with a higher degree of *reusability*. Quite the opposite, the German idea of "vocational action competence" seems to point towards a more holistic view of occupations.

A crucial challenge for future VET would be defining the optimal balance between soft, digital, cross-sectoral and occupation-specific skills. A T-shaped approach to skills provision seems to be the most adequate in the context of industry 4.0, although achieving the best balance will require a strong involvement of the relevant stakeholders.

Another criticality concerns the degree of fragmentation of a VET system. Where governance is complex, the consistency of the whole system and its capacity to align with a national economic strategy might be

undermined. A complex regulatory framework might also discourage the engagement of both social partners and learners.

A great challenge for the European countries will be to guarantee high-quality and internationally transparent VET qualifications, at the same making VET systems more permeable and easy to engage with.

## Next Events

- 09-13 November 2020, European Vocational Skills Week 2020.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/european-vocational-skills-week-2017\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/european-vocational-skills-week-2017_en)

## Useful links

- CEDEFOP (2018), The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. Volume 3: the responsiveness of European VET systems to external change (1995-2015). Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 67. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5567>
- PFEIFFER S. (2015). Effects of Industry 4.0 on vocational education and training. Vienna: Institute of Technology Assessment. [http://epub.oew.ac.at/ita/ita-manuscript/ita\\_15\\_04.pdf](http://epub.oew.ac.at/ita/ita-manuscript/ita_15_04.pdf)
- CEDEFOP Skills Panorama – Metal and machinery workers.  
<https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/dashboard/browse-occupation?occupation=7.72&country=>



ESSA website: [www.estep.eu/essa](http://www.estep.eu/essa)

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