

# VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration

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Sound analysis, inspiring ideas, effective delivery



# Purpose of the study

2 priorities set out at Maastricht in December 2004:

- Opening up pathways and linking VET and higher education
- The role of VET in supporting labour market and social integration of groups at risk



# The Demand-side Context - 1

- Broad structural shift out of manufacturing into services
- Growth concentrated in high skill sectors and occupations
- But lower skills remain in demand
- Elementary occupations will continue to expand
- And within this occupational group the need for higher level qualifications, especially upper secondary qualifications will rise
- Therefore serious potential issues for the low skilled



# The Demand-side Context - 2

- Increasing demand for qualifications after upper secondary level
- Increasing demand for general competences in contrast to technical skills and for broader vocational skill sets
- But picture is dynamic and complex, and varies by sector, occupation and country



# The Demand-side Context - 3

- Needs can be for courses to develop specialisms after upper secondary level (post-secondary non-tertiary level - ISCED 4?)
- Or for courses that need tertiary level underpinning knowledge but not the same breadth (short tertiary courses – ISCED 5?)
- Or higher level practical/technical skills without the full underpinning theory provided by tertiary education (post-secondary non-tertiary level - ISCED 4?)
- Either way there is a need for greater flexibility in post-secondary VET pathways

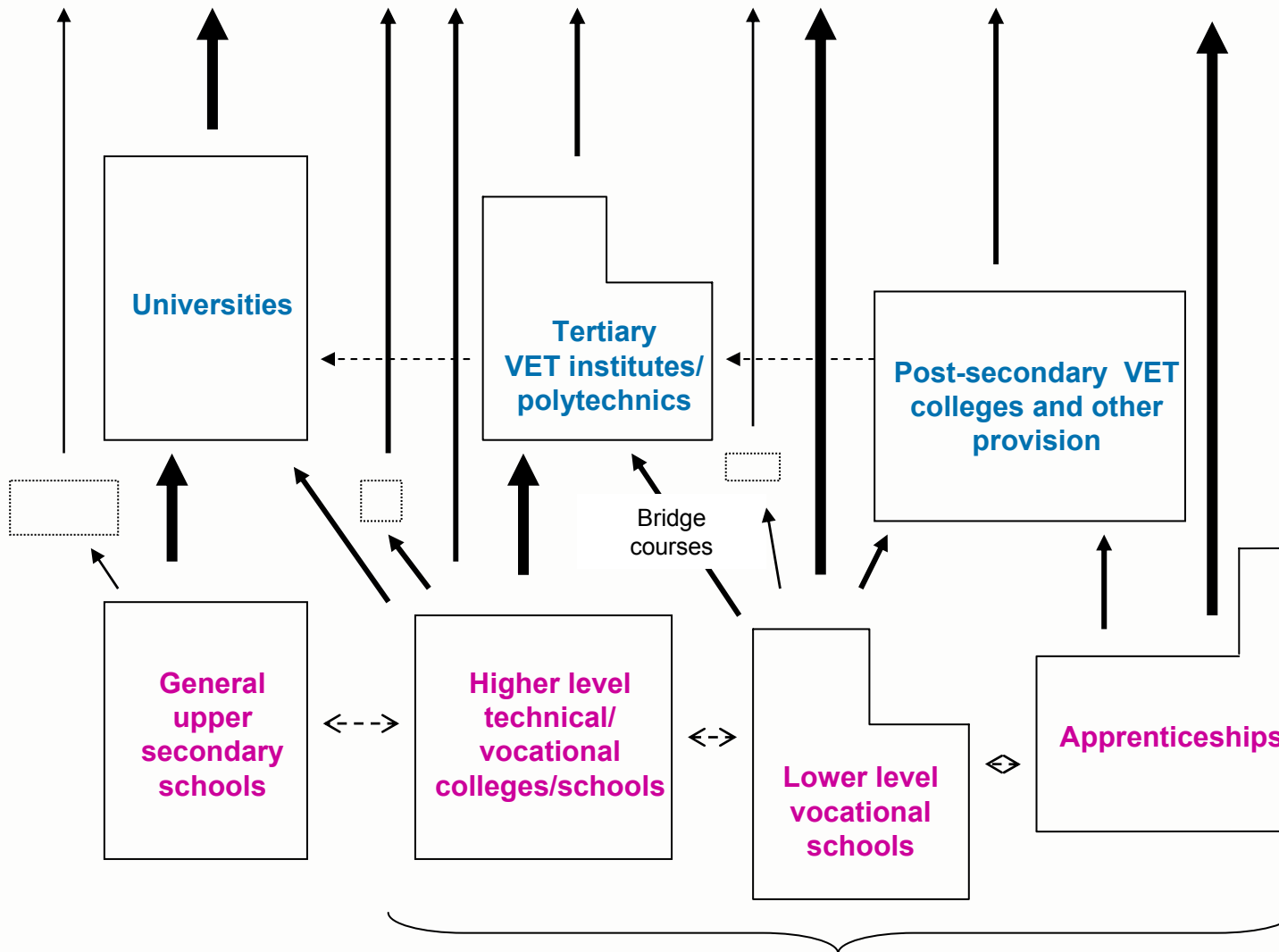


L A B O U R M A R K E T

Tertiary  
(ISCED 5&6)

Post-secondary  
non-tertiary  
(ISCED 4)

Upper  
secondary  
(ISCED 3)



General education

Vocational education and training



# General Developments

- Distinction between vocational and general tracks is blurring
- Share of vocational programmes devoted to generic competence development is increasing
- Vocational programmes are being broadened to avoid over-specialisation



# Upper secondary level - 1

- Participation in upper secondary education is the norm
- Over half of participants are in vocational tracks but huge variation across EU – apparent fall in VET's share in new Member States
- Upper secondary still used mainly for labour market entry - except in a small minority of countries?
- Small proportion of students who do progress is slowly growing



## Upper secondary level - 2

- Higher level (technical) routes being developed as a vehicle for further competence development
- Lower level school-based VET appears to be being squeezed by other options...

but also sometimes being repositioned as pre-vocational option with greater general curriculum content

- Apprenticeships undergoing resurgence (especially new Member States?):
  - being pushed out of their traditional 'home' (up and down the system)
  - better integration into education and training systems
  - increasingly seen as a better option for the less academically able



## Upper secondary level - 3

- Pathways from upper secondary VET into general provision remain a minority choice
- Many people who do transfer do not necessarily go on to higher education
- In systems where tracking is not strong there are risks in reforming upper secondary provision to confer a general right to enter university for all students
  
- In strongly tracked systems, additional provision is required:
  - bridge courses for lower level VET
  - double qualifying pathways for technical routes
  
- Bridge courses mean more time spent in education. Failure rate can be high.
  
- Double qualifying pathways can be challenging for students. The barrier of university entrance exams can remain high. Failure on traditional academic courses at tertiary level can be high.



## Upper secondary level - 4

- There is a need for a variety of transparent and viable vocational routes to higher levels that are distinctive from general provision
- Examine potential for lower level school-based VET to act as pre-vocational route (especially for disadvantaged)
- Realise full potential of apprenticeships
- Examine potential for integrated (modularised) approaches and accreditation *en route* that provides 'stepping stones' (through NQFs)
- Enhance guidance and support for students from vocational backgrounds so they can successfully progress to higher levels



## Post-secondary non-tertiary provision

- Probably accounts for at most 10% of attainment and is highly variable
- Little evidence of enrolment increases at ISCED 4 despite rising demand
  
- A definition of PSNT needs to be agreed amongst Member States
- EQF is the obvious tool to use
  
- PSNT performs three main functions:
  - enables students to obtain further vocational qualifications which may also open up progression to higher levels
  - facilitates specialisation by those already on vocational tracks
  - provides a route into employment or tertiary VET for general upper secondary graduates who do not or cannot progress further in the general education system



## Post-secondary non-tertiary provision

- Fills gaps in less developed VET systems where VET routes are not well established or where tertiary VET is judged deficient
- Gets round the issue of university resistance to ‘vocationalisation’
- Integration and credit transfer needs to be improved



# Tertiary provision - 1

- Tertiary enrolments rising across OECD but % of population going onto vocational courses has been static
- Approximately 13% of EU tertiary students are on vocational programmes
- Old Member States have >2x the % of people enrolled in VET as New Member States
- NMS show no evidence of decline in popularity of VET at tertiary level



## Tertiary provision - 2

- Distinction between vocational and general education is becoming increasingly blurred
- Whether this over-generalises VET or 'downgrades' tertiary academic education is not clear
- But there is a significant risk that it will lead to a loss of clarity in the labour market
  
- Pathways are generally available across Europe
- But there is extensive variation in ease of transfer
- Credit transfer and student support are institution-specific and would benefit from government intervention to ensure wider application
- ECVET offers a potential solution
- Short tertiary VET programmes need full integration through credit transfer systems



# Messages

- Decline in popularity of lower level school-based VET and in some cases repositioning as a pre-vocational option
- Development of apprenticeships
- Development of higher level (technical) vocational provision and post-secondary provision as a tool for further competence development
- Expansion of tertiary provision often with little attention to VET's role
  
- Very few structural 'dead ends' now exist within initial VET systems
  
- VET students can face particular problems in accessing tertiary provision, especially general programmes
  
- Member States therefore need to focus on:
  - encouraging the use of existing pathways
  - ensuring that they are genuinely open by dealing with problems of failure to progress and offering effective guidance services

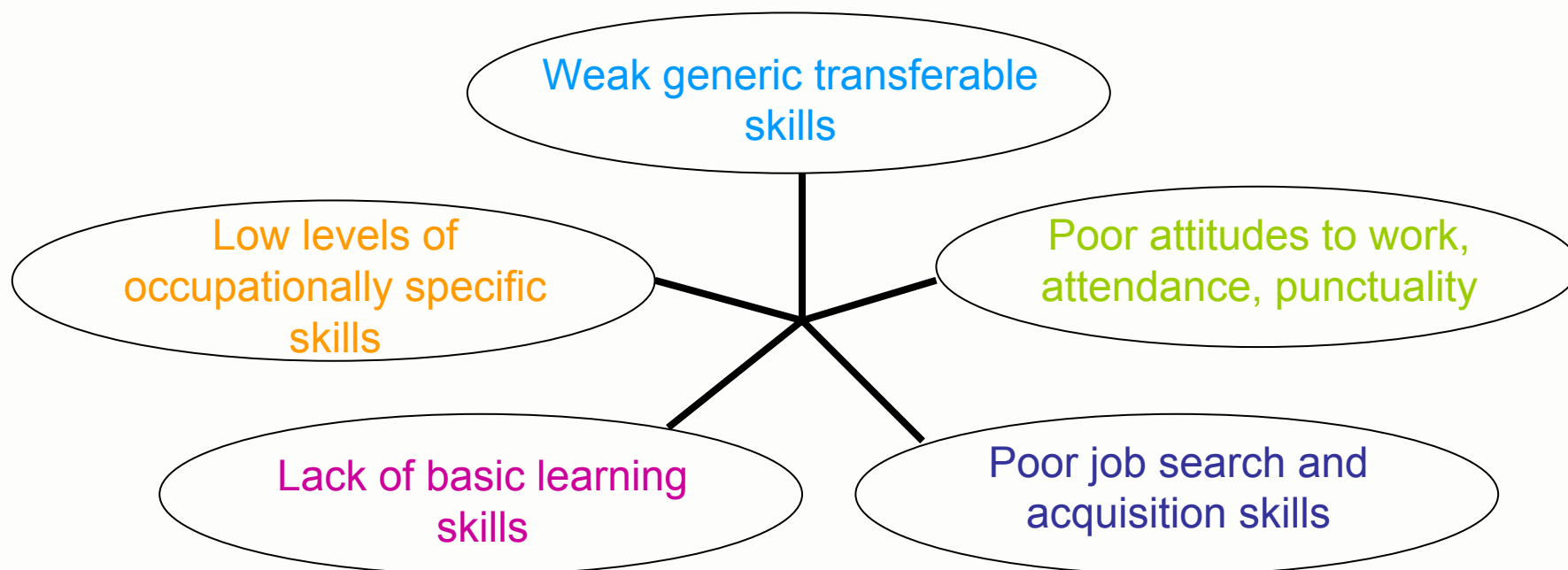


# VET and labour market integration

- Disadvantage and exclusion are complex and multi-faceted phenomena
- Low skills plays a key role
- Forms of exclusion vary in their severity and this places people at different 'distances' from education and training systems
- VET is central to addressing problems of low skills although it is not *the* panacea



# Competence needs of 'at risk' groups



- Weak non-occupationally specific skills are often most important
- An important feature of effective practice is the ability to integrate non-occupationally specific skills seamlessly with VET



# Main features of VET to tackle social integration

- Need for a variety of VET routes to suit all aptitudes
- Broad types of VET response:
  - slimmed down provision with the possibility of part-qualification
  - modularised curricula that allow individuals to construct their own pathways
  - alternative forms of provision after the compulsory phase to re-engage students or to encourage staying-on (remedial aspect)
- These measures are likely to have most impact on 'marginal non-learners' unless accompanied by other (non-VET) measures, e.g. guidance and counselling



## VET's varied role

- VET performs different roles ...
  - in preventing school leaving it can play a central role in tackling poor motivation and alienation but needs to be accompanied by supporting measures
  - to encourage low qualified young people and adults to take up learning again it is an essential component of more comprehensive policy packages
  - in relation to specific 'at risk' groups VET does not necessarily have a role which is distinctive from the general one it plays in relation to the low skilled: what varies are the packages of measures



# Reducing early school leaving

- VET is not necessarily a universal panacea – its role is highly context specific
- Changes are likely also to need changes in social welfare regimes to ensure a shift in the relative costs and benefits of VET versus early exit
- Does early tracking entrench social division?

Not necessarily – there are many options to move tracks and the distance between general and vocational curricula is narrowing

- Is there a ‘hard core’ of early leavers who leave school regardless?

In some countries the rate of early school leaving appears to be intractable. Intensive effort is required to tackle it.



# Tackling low skills amongst young people and adults - 1

- Training plays a major role in active labour market policies
- Most policy is directed at people without work and on the task of getting them back to work as quickly as possible
- VET tends to take the form therefore of short job-related provision:
  - often not accredited
  - equips people only with the immediate skills they need for a particular job

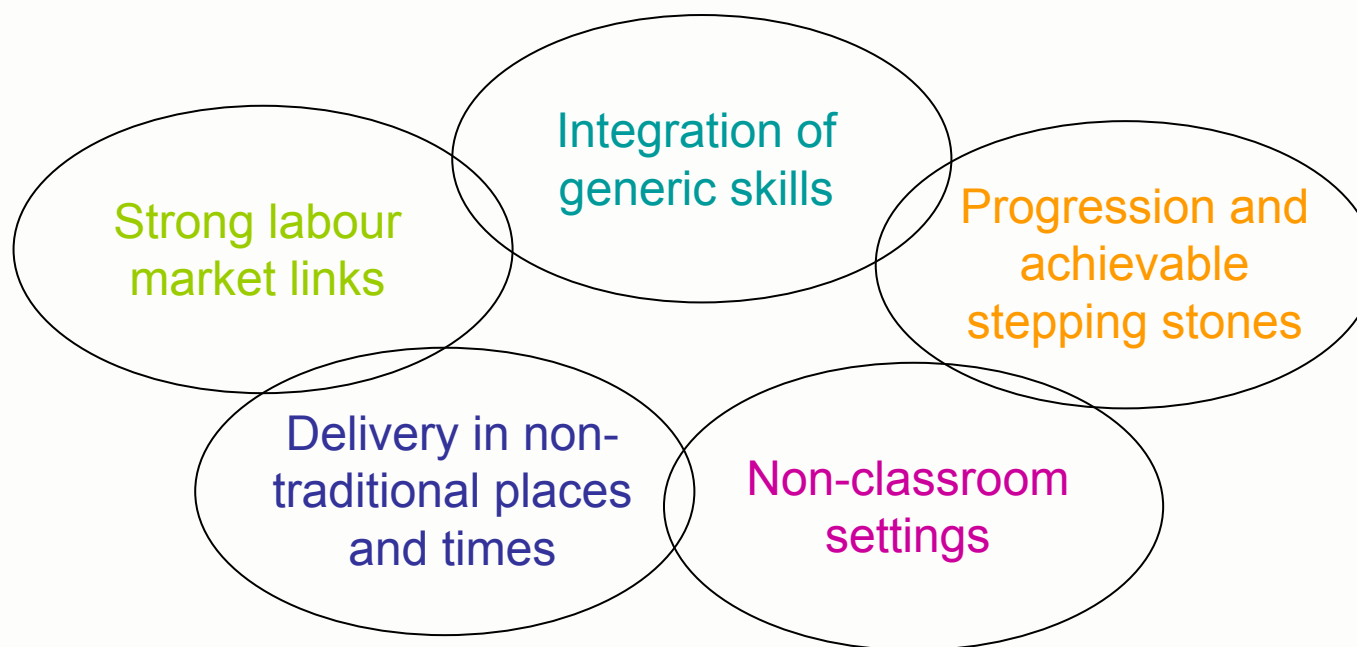


# Tackling low skills amongst young people and adults - 2

- The problem of people cycling between low skilled work and unemployment is generally ignored
- Very few schemes follow up people once they find work to provide follow-up training that might keep them in work or help progression
- Meeting the needs of specific groups such as migrants and disabled people involves:
  - coupling general measures with specific ones, e.g. language training
  - measures to combat stereotyping and discrimination
- An individual's chances of being able to access provision that is well-developed and individually tailored depends on where they live



# Chief cross-cutting characteristics of effective provision



➤ Holistic approaches



## Features of effective holistic approaches

- Early tracking of 'at risk' individuals
- Securing people's 'buy-in', e.g. through action plans
- Flexible VET delivery
- Curriculum enhancements to enrich learning experiences
  
- Personalised guidance and pastoral support
- Counselling and mentoring
  
- Community involvement in VET design
- Mediation between communities and VET institutions
  
- Complementarity with social welfare and labour market regimes
- Close cooperation between agencies
- Involvement of employers and civil society organisations



# Messages

- Ensure enough flexibility within national VET frameworks to allow local discretion without undermining the value of qualifications in the labour market
- Establish effective coordination or partnerships between agencies with different priorities and cultures across different levels of government
- Find the resources for packages that can be expensive
- Establish new roles like counselling and mentoring
- Involve employers more
- Involve civil society organisations more





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