

Boosting VET attractiveness – a European impetus

Dr. Joachim James Calleja, Director Cedefop

Vocational education and training has a double objective, to contribute to excellence and inclusion. Permeability between different sectors of education aims at achieving both aims. In many countries, VET, and in particular apprenticeship, is still perceived as second rate and the reputation of VET institutions in various countries falls short of attractiveness. VET systems in Europe are heterogeneous and member states are at different levels of developing an attractive VET system. Whether VET is considered attractive or not by learners, employers and generally by society, depends on a complex interplay between socio-economic and labour market features, education authorities, perceptions, traditions, reputation and factors inherent in the education and training system as such. While the focus on VET, in particular apprenticeship-type programmes and work-based learning, within countries' youth guarantees emphasises the inclusion aspect and permeability, countries increasingly realise their potential at post-secondary and tertiary levels. Within the European alliance for apprenticeship, the EU supports initiatives to set up or expand apprenticeship-type programmes at different levels. One of the main internal features that help make VET attractive is the chance for people to progress to higher level qualifications. Structurally, in Europe there are only few barriers to progression. Where dead ends exist, they tend to be in apprenticeship-type programmes. Germany and Austria (as well as Switzerland) exemplifies that apprenticeships can lead to high level qualifications. The European qualification framework that focuses on the outcomes of learning rather than the institutions where people acquire qualifications, the Recommendation to validate the skills and competences that people have acquired at work and in other situations outside formal education, and the credit system for VET support this endeavour at EU level. The role that guidance and counsellors play in schools is vital for making VET more attractive to high flyers as well as to low achievers. But it is not enough to amend structures and provide tools, we also need to ensure that the expected outcomes are achieved, as PIAAC results suggest. We need to analyse positive and negative data carefully, understand them in their specific contexts so as to be able to provide evidence and convince people of VET's benefits to change their mind-sets.