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## INITIAL VET IN SPAIN

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### Abstract

Initial vocational education in Spain was created within the formal education system in 1970. During the reform process, in 1990, it has been acquired modern architecture. During the period from 1990 to 2002, a series of reforms took place in the country, the most important of which was the adoption in 2002 of the national law on education, the main provisions of which were agreed upon with all stakeholders - the main political parties, social agents, employers and trade unions. The law introduced the following key features of the vocational education system in Spain: a mandatory curriculum module for all students of vocational education institutions that is implemented directly at the workplace; the same requirements for entry into higher education institutions for all searchers; active involvement of employers, representatives of trade unions, administrations in the process of developing of professional qualifications and vocational education curricula. The article provides a general overview of Spain's vocational education system in social and historical contexts. The institutional and legislative mechanisms, which ensure functioning of the corresponding system (functions of which are, in particular, the legislation of the management of the system of vocational education and training) are described. A general overview of the major reforms in the VET system in Spain is presented, which gives the reader a certain idea of the trends that have taken place over the years and indicate an increase in the prestige of vocational education and training. The current state of VET sphere development and some negative tendencies of recent years that are likely to endanger the consensus achieved over the past decades are described. The peculiarities of the training of teachers of vocational training in Spain and the institutional features of professional standards training and accreditation of professional qualifications have been identified.

1. Main features of the initial VET system. The current initial VET system of Spain took its shape as a school-based VET system in 1970 (MEC, 1970), when it was defined as a post-compulsory educational choice for students offered within the system. VET centers were built all throughout the country and a body of VET teachers was also established, with two different categories: teachers, with university degrees, and workshop assistants, to take charge of practical training and who were not required university studies. At those

times, VET did not enjoy good prestige, and it was considered as a second choice for pupils with no academic orientation.

In 1990 (MEC, 1990) a large reform was introduced in the education system with three major changes regarding VET: First, to increase the access requirements, which were equaled to those of the post-compulsory academic pathway, in order for VET to earn prestige through the access of good students while not letting the non-successful students to take a course in VET.

Second, to introduce a compulsory module in all VET courses consisting of real on-the-job practice, to be taken in the premises of companies not schools, in order for VET to be aware of the situation and demands of the productive system and to stop being accused of lacking practical training. Third, to involve all stakeholders, namely the educational administration, employers and union representatives, in sectoral committees to define and devise the curricula to be developed for each vocational qualification, in order for VET being responsive to the changes and demands of the labor market.

Therefore, nowadays VET students have a choice of Intermediate VET, a one-year course right after compulsory schooling. For those willing to achieve a Higher VET qualification, the pathway they have to follow is to attend the two-year Baccalaureate of academic nature that there is in the country and to register for VET after it. Thanks to this, Higher VET has a status similar to that of Higher Education. Most Higher VET degrees last between a year and a half and two years and, like in the case of Intermediate VET, the practical on-the-job module lasts between one fourth and one third of the curriculum. These modules are, however, assessed by VET teachers.

There are three kinds of VET schools: First, secondary schools that offer VET qualifications as well as the General Certificate of Secondary Education. Second, National Reference VET schools, highly specialized in an occupational domain and which are responsible to update the corresponding qualifications in it. Third, Integrated VET schools, which are entitled to teach not only formal VET qualifications, but also to train unemployed people with public (European Social Fund, for instance) or private (company owned) funds as well as they are entitled to train within the framework of Continuing Vocational Education, as well as to participate in the accreditation procedure of the accreditation of competences (see section 6 below).

2. Governance and institutional arrangements of VET.

It was in 1986, as part of the preparation for the reform of 1990, that the General Council of Vocational Education and Training was established, as a consultative body in which employers and unions were represented and which would assist the national government in planning VET and taking decisions upon it.

The role of this body has varied along the years,

according to different reforms, and so has its impact, particularly since the decentralization process of the management of the educational system took place, along almost two decades, resulting in regional governments planning the system in their respective territories. Given the particularities of VET, its specialization, its post-compulsory level and the investment needed, however, most regional governments have relied upon decisions taken by the national government.

Since the implementation of the National (and later on regional) Institute of Qualifications, these have turned into the main mechanisms to rule the VET system while the consultative role of the VET Councils has lost most of its capacity to set the guidelines for the development of VET.

Anyhow, it is the Department of Education of the national Government the responsible to define the curriculum standards and occupational qualifications that will be accredited and acknowledge all throughout the country. A large consensus has been growing about this since 1990 and the growth of prestige of the system has increased both firmly though slowly.

The typology of VET schools explained in the previous section receives also different autonomy as well as funding, being the National Reference VET schools the 'jewel of the crown', as well as the Integrated VET schools also enjoy a social recognition that makes them more attractive than ordinary VET and secondary schools.

3. Reforms on VET.

The Spanish VET system is a school one since 1970 and it was modernized and took its current shape in 1990. Two major reforms have happened since then, neither of them altering its substance but rather deepening in the particular features of the system, contributing to its evolution and improvement.

The first one happened in 2002 (MEC, 2002), when a law was passed in order to bring closer the VET system to the two other existing subsystems: the vocational training market, with a wide array of training offer for the unemployed population, and the continuing training system, which was in charge of redistributing the funds for CVET among employers and employees. In order to bring these three subsystems closer, to rationalize the VET offer in the country and to integrate and facilitate recognition of qualifications across the subsystems, this law devised five mechanisms: the first one to deploy a National Qualification System, the second one to preview a National Accreditation

Procedure, the third one the pedagogical translation of Qualifications into Training Modules, a fourth one consisting of a Career Guidance system to navigate across the different possibilities and, finally, the fifth one to introduce the corresponding mechanisms of Quality Assurance. Of all of the previous, the Career Guidance system has hardly been developed along these years and is the main mechanisms pending of deployment.

The second reform has been introduced in two different steps by the Department of Education, first in 2006 (MEC, 2006), when the social democrats passed a new law ruling the Education System was passed which intended to introduce a first level of vocational qualification within compulsory education, named Basic VET or level 1 VET: it has been the first time that vocational education has been offered before finishing compulsory schooling and, as a matter of fact, it has become a segregated measure and has therefore had a negative impact upon the prestige of VET itself. This was continued in the conservative reform of 2012 (MEC, 2012) which consolidated Basic VET within compulsory education and made it the preferred choice for certain populations, while also opening room for the introduction of a modality of the so called Dual VET within the school based system, hence introducing an elite choice for a few VET students.

#### 4. Current status and trends.

Even despite the latter reforms starting in 2006 that have had a troubling impact upon VET, we can say (Marhuenda, 2012) that there has been an increase in its prestige and that the consensus generated around VET since the late 1980s has undoubtedly valuable for the development of the VET system.

As a result of this, there has been an increase in enrolment of young people in VET rising from approx. half a million students a year in the mid 1970s to almost eight hundred thousand students a year in present times. This increase in enrolment is the result of a growing offer but also of a much larger specialized offer than in the 1970s.

Furthermore, as we explain in the following section, there has been a steady increase in the professionalization of VET teachers, who are nowadays finally required a master degree and who find chances in certain public universities to apply for a specialized initial education, while at the same time there have been public efforts in order to provide VET teachers with continuing education.

In the past five years, while the trends already mention keep steady, there have been public and

private impulse in order to introduce the chance for Dual VET for particular students who however hold the status of students and not apprentices. This new move is still to be analyzed and its implementation has been already researched (Marhuenda, Chisvert and Palomares, 2017).

#### 5. Vocational Education teacher training.

There are two requirements to become VET teacher. The first of them is established by article 100 in the Organic Law LOE<sup>1</sup>, indicating the necessity of a Bachelor or Master Degree, Engineering or Architecture. Even if it is acknowledged that it would be good to count on specialist teachers with a professional career even without the degree, the Procedure ruling access to the teaching profession within VET studies (Royal Decree 276/2007) specifies the requirement of a university degree, even a Bachelor previous to the Bologna process, hence a qualification level 5 or 6 according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008).

The second requirement is about the pedagogical education and background that is also established by the LOE. This has been articulated in a Master to become Secondary Education Teacher, even if this is a possibility only for those who already have a qualification level 6, and forbidden for those with an inferior qualification. This Master has a common national framework ruling the 60 ECTS in the following subjects that shape its curriculum in all universities: 8 ECTS for 'educational processes and contexts', a subject which is an introduction to curriculum and school organization. 6 ECTS for 'learning and developmental psychology', and 6 more ECTS for sociology of education under the name of 'society, family and education'. 6 ECTS for 'educational research and innovation'. 6 ECTS devoted to the deepening in the content of the subject area, and 16 ECTS for the 'teaching and learning of the subject matter'. The remaining 12 ECTS are divided between a placement in schools and the writing of the Master Thesis.

An alternative procedure for those professionals already working as teachers and who do not reach a level 6 qualification is developed in the Order EDU/2465/2011, in order to let them remain within the educational system. This has been already implemented in some regions, like is the case of the Valencian Community, where it was offered for the first time in the schoolyear 2016-2017, named 'Pedagogical training course for technical assistant teachers in VET'. Such training entails

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<sup>1</sup> LOE's Title III, on teachers, has not been modified by LOMCE.

both generic and specific modules as well as some practical training. The generic training has three modules, 'learning and personality development', 'educational processes and contexts' and 'society, family and education', lasting between 100 and 160 hours. The specific modules are 'vocational guidance', 'learning and, instruction' and 'innovation and introduction to educational research', consisting of 150 to 220 hours, as well as a practicum of 150 to 220 hours.

That is a similar education, at least in terms of content, if not of length, to that provided in the Master for Secondary Teachers, addressed to those with a Bachelor degree. The curriculum of the Master has been therefore adapted for those who cannot have access to it, as it was an urgent requirement by the Educational Administration in order to allow those trainers within the system to remain in it; in fact, this training has been provided online, funded and planned by the educational administration and where all trainers have found all necessary facilities to pass the course in order to remain.

That initial education, an access (or retention) requirement, is only a first step towards the professionalization of VET teachers (González-Sanmamed, 2009). There is also an offer of Continuing Education for VET teachers that is acknowledged by law as a right but also as an obligation of teachers, for which the educational administration as well as VET schools are responsible to look after. There are all throughout Spain nineteen centers for the continuing education of VET teachers<sup>2</sup>.

These institutions are intended to provide guidance, training, to offer courses and to support and foster innovation in VET training, both online as well as face to face. Let us take the Valencian Community as an example once more: It is the computer platform of the Centres for Training, Innovation and Educational Resources (CEFIREs, which are the Spanish acronym), which supports such training, where only one out of all thirteen CEFIREs<sup>3</sup> in the region is specific for VET teachers (as well as for teachers of Arts and Sports, CEFIRE FPEAE, in its Spanish acronym), while the rest is devoted to secondary teachers of the academic subjects at both compulsory and post-compulsory level.

Teachers have access to continuing training in courses, in-service training, workshops, conferences, working groups, exchange of good

practice and even short in-company visits and permits. These later choices are particularly interesting for VET teachers who have not been in touch with the productive system for a longer period of time, in order for them to become familiar with the changes and demands of the system, a chance funded by the educational administration (*Consell Escolar de la Comunitat Valenciana*, 2017), which facilitates the hiring of substitute staff while the teachers are in the companies.

VET teachers are therefore encouraged to look after their double vocational identity, as professionals in a specific vocational domain and as teachers with a pedagogical background. The domain of the content together with a sufficient pedagogical knowledge is supported for the first time in decades for all teachers and trainers within the system, through both initial and continuing education.

6. Curriculum standards, validation and accreditation of qualifications.

There are currently in Spain 26 vocational occupational families, each of which comprises different occupational standards at levels 2 to 5 of the EQF, and which sum up more than 150 different VET qualifications offered within the educational system, that are being constantly (even if slowly) updated in order to satisfy the demands of the changing labor market.

Along Western Europe, occupational rates are often shaped by a majority of the workforce with a vocational qualification of intermediate level, beyond compulsory secondary education and below university degrees. Nevertheless, in Spain there is a clearly identified lack of equilibrium among the levels of qualification of the workforce: there is a huge amount of people with no vocational qualification (more than one third) while there is also another third of the workforce with a university qualification, resulting in an overqualified population for the chances offered by the Spanish labor market (Homs, 2008). Data from 2016 show that Spanish workforce between 15 and 64 years of age with low levels of qualification is around 42.6%, while the European average is of 26,5% (Eurostat, 2017). Nevertheless, the productive system does not suffer given that Spain has a higher level of competence than of accredited qualification.

In order to revert this situation and to facilitate an effective recognition of available professional competencies, the National System of Qualifications introduced in 2009 a procedure

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion/mc/convivencia-escolar/formacion/centros-formacion-profesorado.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ceice.gva.es/es/web/formacion-profesorado>

to acknowledge competencies addressed to the evaluation and accreditation of knowledge (Royal Decree 1224/2009, of July 17<sup>th</sup>).

This procedure is advertised by the institutional authorities as an assessment proposal to address inequalities in relation to training and employment. To validate the 'know-how' of those who do not have an official recognition that gives proof of it represents, *a priori*, an impulse towards social justice. Nevertheless, lights and shadows cohabit in the implementation of such a procedure in Spain.

Among the virtues of the system, we have to note that such a procedure makes visible the knowledge that has been produced in different contexts. The important thing is what has been learned, not where nor how one has had access to knowledge. This is something that undoubtedly favors second chance opportunities among people who left the educational system at an early age, who now have the chance to certify what they learned in non-school contexts. Such an evaluation rationale pays no attention to where the learning has taken place and it minimizes the commodification in access to knowledge, hence benefiting those who cannot pay for training in a prestigious training center. In the case of Spain, the effort to articulate vocational education and its adaptation to the needs of the labor market has resulted in the creation of a National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications. This is a unique referent including all vocational qualifications required in whatever training or occupational contexts.

But we can also identify some problems in the implementation of the procedure, among which the wide area of marginalization around access to the process: Without doubt, the financial resources allocated by the regional governments to launch the calls for certification and accreditation are very scarce. As a result of this, in order to avoid high expectations among the population, the advertising of the calls has been very limited, resulting in the lack of knowledge about the system itself of validation and accreditation.

Given the limitations explained here, qualifications offered obey to criteria of urgency rather than relevance. In most cases, they are qualifications that have been recently approved or occupations newly ruled, which require an immediate certification of workers in order to guarantee the keeping of the job, as was the case of ambulance drivers. All of this has been surrounded by an access to the procedure where the technical language predominates above the need of the

applicants who approach the procedure with the aim to accredit their knowledge and who face administrative obstacles. These circumstances have resulted in an uncertain procedure, in which no one knows when and where will the next call be launched, for which qualifications, nor which opportunities will be available for workers to assess their chances to participate.

Attention must also be paid to the method of assessment. The applicant must gather evidence from the very beginning of the application process in order to guarantee chances to proceed with it. This is a paradox, as the applicant comes to the system precisely for his/her need to accredit knowledge that are hardly visible not only to others but to themselves. This situation has been aggravated in the case of Spain as it is not always easy to demonstrate neither work experience nor training attended, given the economic circumstances, the structure of the labor market, and the training market itself. Employment as it is understood in the current procedures tends to exclude activities and work performed by a relevant part of the population, like all what has been produced in the domain of the private sphere, the home and the family, work mostly carried out by women. This also applies for the hidden economy, that has been employed by companies and has contributed to the GDP of the country. In order to address such imbalances, an exception was introduced in the norm ruling the procedure so that workers over 25 with no documentary evidence could also apply: the exception consisted in the possibility to provide any kind of 'legal evidence' of work experience or non-formal learning. Nevertheless, such a possibility has been hard to take into account given that the system is unable to certify the competences of a large majority of people who possess them, given the limited number of calls and the reduced number of qualifications subject to accreditation so far.

If we consider all of the difficulties of the Spanish procedure of validation and accreditation yet to be faced, the most affected population is that under most vulnerable circumstances. Unless this situation is reversed, the system, which was born in order to facilitate access, could lose its credit for closing such access.

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## Реферат

## Початкова професійна освіта в Іспанії

## КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:

Іспанія,  
початкова професійна  
освіта,  
педагогі професійного  
навчання,  
професійні стандарти,  
акредитація  
професійних  
стандартів

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У статті обґрунтовується консультування з професійної кар'єри як дієвий психолого-педагогічний чинник забезпечення якості професійної підготовки майбутніх фахівців у закладах освіти, що конкретизується алгоритмами дій та механізмами проектування (планування, розроблення) кар'єри і побудови кар'єрної траєкторії, визначення оптимальних способів (шляхів, рішень) професійного і кар'єрного розвитку, коригування кар'єрної траєкторії задля підвищення ефективності фахової діяльності. Кар'єру позиціоновано як складне соціально-психологічне явище, що детермінує життєдіяльність особи і передбачає постійні зміни (підйоми і спади) в її професійному й особистісному розвитку. Обґрунтовано, що професійна кар'єра є процесом реалізації людиною себе, своїх можливостей в межах виконання професійної діяльності й успішно спланувати професійну кар'єру спроможні особи зі сформованими стійкими кар'єрними орієнтаціями. Проаналізовано основні суперечності, що зумовлюють виникнення невідповідностей між індивідуально-особистісними уявленнями майбутніх фахівців та їхнім реальним потенціалом, а саме: між розумінням індивідом суті кар'єри і середовищем, в якому він може професійно зростати, розраховуючи на власні сили; між кар'єрою й іншими сферами життєдіяльності особи, обставинами, в яких такі розходження посилюються; соціальними стереотипами щодо кар'єри та їхнім впливом на кар'єрні орієнтації окремих індивідів; між недостатнім рівнем смислових зв'язків щодо якості професійної підготовки та перспективами життєдіяльності і професійної самореалізації. На думку авторів, на подолання цих суперечностей необхідно спрямовувати заходи щодо консультування з професійної кар'єри майбутніх фахівців. У статті розглянуто методичні аспекти організації консультативних заходів для окремої особи (індивідуальне консультування), кількох індивідів (групове консультування) або кількох груп (циклове консультування) на основі застосування діагностичних методів і методик самооцінки індивідуальних якостей, оцінки професійної діяльності, методів інформування й аналізу тенденцій ринкової економіки з урахуванням специфіки фаху.