THE 7EU VET RESEARCH PROJECT

The main purpose of the project “7EU VET Detailed Methodological Approach to Understanding Vocational Education and Training” is to explore in a country-comparative fashion the perceptions of VET students’ in relation to their transition into VET, their motivation and experience of learning, their satisfaction levels and the development and fulfilment of their career and further learning aspirations. These perceptions are explored in relation to types of programme and institution, key demographic variables and levels of achievement. The interpretation of the data has been informed by research into national and European policy and by an exploration of the institutional and practical context of VET in each of the 7 countries. In this way, the project generates a knowledge platform about the comparability, flexibility and development of VET systems across seven EU countries, and follows recent policy and educational challenges such as, for example, the learning outcomes approach.

On the basis of a large-scale survey analysis among 17,631 mainly 17- and 18-year-old VET students, the project looks at differences and similarities in seven EU countries: Austria, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and the UK (England). The survey was accompanied by extensive secondary research and interviews with more than 100 informants as well as focus groups with learners.

The research was carried out by the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), CEI at the University of Warwick (UK), the Technical Universities of Darmstadt (Germany), Riga (Latvia) and Kauno (Lithuania), the Technological Educational Institute of Crete (Greece), CFE Consulting (UK) and 3S Research Laboratory (Austria). The research was supported through the lifelong learning programme of the European Union.

The report and the dataset offer valuable resources of interest to policy makers, practitioners and researchers. The full report can be downloaded from the 7EU VET website where there is further information about the research: http://www.7eu-vet.org/. In addition, data from all 7 countries can be downloaded by country and by variable to permit independent analysis.

SELECTED INTERNATIONAL FINDINGS
The research found that learner perceptions of quality and learner satisfaction were closely associated and that there was a marked difference between Austria, Germany and England, on the one hand, which exhibited relatively high levels of satisfaction/quality and Slovenia, Greece, Latvia and Lithuania, on the other, which exhibited lower levels of satisfaction/quality.

In general, more motivated learners are more satisfied and perceive themselves as achieving relatively well. High motivation is associated with learner perception that classes are interesting, teachers are responsive and learning materials are appropriate.

**Summary** and **detailed conclusions** and comparative analysis are available.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM 7EU VET FOR ENGLAND**

From 2001–2011 there was an increase from 367,000 to 493,000 in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds following vocational programmes in general further education colleges, tertiary and specialist colleges in England. At the same time, there was considerable change in the offer and take up of different types of vocational programmes, for example many GNVQ qualifications were phased out and replaced with other types of qualifications. Work-based learning for 16- to 18-year-olds declined over this period.

The survey found that, when choosing programmes, most students are seeking both an attractive occupation and a good foundation for further education. The influence of parents, former teachers and friends was important or very important for only a minority of students, but it was greater for students in one-year programmes than it was for those in two-year programmes.

Choosing to study at a college is associated with a commitment to a vocation: 83 per cent of students identified the appeal of an occupation as at least important to their choice. Only 51 per cent of trainees learning with a training provider rated the appeal of an occupation as important and 25 per cent of trainees reported that learning with a training provider was an option that they did not at first consider. 66 per cent of college students believed that their programme would guide them to their ‘dream job’, but only 41 per cent of those in sixth forms and just 24 per cent of those in training organisations. The decision making of 17- to 18-year-old students in sixth forms and training providers seems to be more provisional and experimental than that of their contemporaries in colleges.

Teachers were rated as important (or very important) information sources by a large minority of students in sixth forms (46 per cent) and colleges (42 per cent) but only by 20 per
cent of students with training providers. This provides some confirmation of the view that some teachers are not knowledgeable about progression options, such as apprenticeship, which take place outside of schools and colleges. Students currently with training providers rated family (35 per cent) and friends (36 per cent) as relatively important information sources.

English vocational students are less likely to consider alternative programmes than students in the other six countries: only 50 per cent of them considered at least one other alternative. A relatively high proportion confirmed they would choose the same programme if they could choose again, but a significant minority stated that they would not. Broken down by institution type: 35 per cent of those in sixth-form colleges, 22 per cent of those in colleges and 42 per cent of those in training organisations said they would not choose the same programme again.

In general, satisfaction levels are high in the English VET system and compare favourably with the other countries in the survey. Satisfaction levels of all kinds were relatively strong in colleges. Satisfaction with practical training and learning was better in colleges and training organisations than in sixth forms and better in one-year and three-year programmes than in two-year programmes.

Satisfaction levels were higher for those students who believed they are achieving well: those students who reported relatively high grades were more likely to express satisfaction with different elements of their programmes. Perceived higher grades were associated with students reporting higher levels of identified competencies, such as being able to manage occupational tasks independently. This provides confirmation of students’ judgement about their own relative performance because this judgement was linked to judgements about particular competencies. Learners in colleges were more likely to judge that their programmes were helping them to develop these competencies than learners in sixth forms or training providers.

According to some of the experts, the low status of vocational England impacts upon choices and motivation of learners. However, the survey found that 60 per cent of students in colleges, 41 per cent of students in sixth forms and 43 per cent of students in training providers judged that their programmes had a good reputation in society. We can conclude that many students do not share the view that vocational education has a low status, although this view is more widespread in some institutions than others.

According to the survey, student satisfaction levels with respect to the availability of information on careers and training and with respect to the helpfulness of advisors were lower than general levels of satisfaction. This was particularly marked for sixth-form students: 60 per cent were not satisfied with information and 61 per cent were not satisfied
with the service provided by careers advisors. This data supports the view of the experts we
interviewed that careers advice and information is a weakness of the English VET system.

Students in sixth forms were more likely (59 per cent) to report that they were likely to
continue their education beyond their current programme than those in colleges (49 per
cent) or in training organisations (34 per cent). This may be partly as a result of different
intentions (see below) but it may also be connected with the kinds of programmes that
students are taking. Students with high levels of perceived achievement were more likely to
plan to continue their education.

Students in sixth forms were more likely to be aiming for employment in business, finance or
public administration whilst employment in production/industry was more popular for
students in colleges and training organisations. This reflects the programme offer and take
up by different institutions: none of the sixth-form students in the survey reported that they
were taking programmes related to industry. The survey revealed that some students intend
to work in sectors other than the sector related to the programme they are currently taking.
Some 20–30 per cent of students, depending on institution, who are in industry-related
programmes say that they do not want to work in industry. This suggests that a substantial
minority of students aged 17–18 are not committed even to very broad employment sectors
and may be changing their plans during their studies.

Over half of those who intend to continue their education (57 per cent) intend to take
further programmes related to what they are currently doing, while 45 per cent intend to
progress to university of some kind. Non-university, higher level vocational programmes
were not very attractive to English 17- to 18-year-old students – or perhaps simply less well
understood.

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