



SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

111/2023

PUBLICATION DATE:

05/12/2023

Review of the Skills System in Wales: Initial and continuing vocational education and training programmes

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Digital ISBN 978-1-83577-103-7

Title: Review of the Skills System in Wales: Initial and continuing vocational education and training programmes
Subtitle: Final Report

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Full Research Report: Ravenhall, M. and Woodhouse, J. (2023). *Review of the Skills System in Wales: Initial and continuing vocational education and training programmes*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 111/2023.
Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/review-skills-system-wales-initial-and-continuing-vocational-education-and-training-programmes>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CTER	Commission for Tertiary Education and Research
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
Microcredentials	Short and targeted training products
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
PLA	Personal Learning Account
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSPs	Regional Skills Partnerships
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Learning and Work Institute was commissioned by Welsh Government, in February 2023, to undertake a review of the skills system in Wales. This research was designed to be a thought piece to explore different visions for vocational education and training. The review focused on differentiation between Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) programmes, usually carried out in the initial education system and when making the transition into working life, and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) programmes, which generally take place after initial education training and after entry into working life for adults to gain or enhance their knowledge and skills and continue their professional development. This is the final report of the review which took place between March 2023 and September 2023.

Background

- 1.2 The impact of the pandemic and Brexit, high levels of economic inactivity, changes to UK migration policy, and wider societal change, including the development of new technologies, digitalisation, and transformation to net-zero have created new challenges, and opportunities for the economy, labour market and skills system. In this context, it is appropriate to look at the skills system, to identify how skills programmes can effectively prepare individuals for working life, and support lifelong learning, including career change, upskilling, and reskilling in addition to supporting the economy, employers and wider society.
- 1.3 Existing skills programmes in Wales do not differentiate between young people, typically aged 16-24, entering the workforce for the first time and those aged over 25, who typically have existing workplace skills and life experiences. The skills offer is largely uniform, aiming to provide a comprehensive offer for both employers and learners. Skills programmes cover both initial and continuing vocational education and training, particularly the apprenticeship programme which is aimed at all post-16 learners in work.

- 1.4 A uniform offer may not be best placed to meet the different needs of both learners and employers. There is potential to consider how a non-uniform offer in the form of differentiation between IVET and CVET could provide more responsive options to meet these needs. Similarly, there is a need to understand if the vocational offer for younger adults at the start of their working lives could be better tailored to meet their specific needs.
- 1.5 Alongside the need to understand the potential value of a differentiated skills system, there is also a need to consider how any changes to the vocational system would align with other employment, skills and learning programmes. This includes apprenticeships, Personal Learning Accounts (PLAs), the ReAct+ and Jobs Growth Wales+ employment programmes, vocational elements of the new Curriculum for Wales (particularly in relation to any IVET offer) and adult learning programmes, which play a valuable role in ensuring that adults develop essential and digital skills, employability and confidence to progress to further learning and work.
- 1.6 Wider considerations may also include the [Vocational Qualifications Review](#), which will be important in shaping vocational qualifications that meet the future needs of the Welsh economy; Welsh Government's vision to establish Wales as a 'second chance nation' for lifelong learning; and the impact of the newly formed [Commission for Tertiary Education and Research](#) (CTER) on VET reform. Further considerations include any cross-border implications of current developments in VET in England, such as the ongoing introduction of new T Level qualifications, and other adult upskilling and retraining programmes.

Aim of the research

- 1.7 The overall aim of the review was to provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates IVET and CVET, and to then test the evidence base with experts and sector representatives.

1.8 The key research questions driving the research fall broadly within the following four areas:

- **What criteria determine whether programmes should be included in IVET/CVET?** Specifically:
 - Should school-based programmes be included as IVET?
 - Should pre-vocational courses, such as foundation courses, be excluded from IVET?
 - What are the implications for apprenticeships and employability programmes that are both IVET and CVET?
 - Whether skill programmes and other short courses should be purely the domain of CVET?
- **What is the value of using age criteria to differentiate IVET from CVET?** Specifically:
 - Should there be an age range to distinguish between IVET and CVET?
 - Should the definition of IVET be restricted to those aged 16-24 years?
 - Is it reasonable and appropriate for over 25s (e.g., mature age workers with no previous experience of VET) to be considered CVET learners?
- **What are the broader implications of adopting an IVET/CVET distinction in Wales?** Specifically, to investigate:
 - the implications of moving from vocational to academic routes (e.g. a path into vocational higher education for those following the vocational route at 16-19)
 - the implications of changes for learners from different demographic groups and wide range of backgrounds, especially people with protected characteristics and multiple and complex needs
 - the implications for a bilingual nation and supporting learner choice in their preferred language of study

- the implications of reforms to the post-compulsory education and training sector with the formation of CTER.
- **What are the overall benefits and challenges of establishing an IVET/CVET-based skills system**, including:
 - Are there differences by delivery model or funding arrangements?
 - Are there differences by employer size/sector?
 - Are there differences by learner demographic groups and needs?

Structure of the report

1.9 The report contains the following sections:

- Section 2 sets out the research methodology.
- Sections 3, 4 and 5 examine the key findings from the research, focusing on the three themes emerging from the evidence review - strategic and systemic aspects of developing VET policy, delivery and curriculum considerations, and benefits and impacts of VET.
- Section 6 draws together conclusions from the evidence across the three themes and considers the implications (risks, benefits, challenges and dependencies of IVET/CVET differentiation).
- Section 7 makes a series of recommendations for Welsh Government to inform policy thinking and development.
- Section 8 provides a list of references from the desktop evidence review
- The annex includes the research protocol for the desktop evidence review, topic guides and privacy notices for the research.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The research used a mixed methods approach and was conducted in two phases.
- 2.2 Phase 1 involved a desktop review of both grey and academic international evidence available on establishing a skills system which differentiates IVET / CVET and the impact this has on learners and employers.
- 2.3 Phase 2 involved primary research (qualitative interviews and focus groups) to test and build on the key learning identified from the desk review and to better understand different perspectives on the skills implications of a move to IVET/CVET in Wales.

Phase 1: Desktop review

Sampling

- 2.4 A research protocol, agreed with Welsh Government, set out the research questions, the search strategy and the eligibility criteria used to select studies to be included in the evidence review. A detailed copy of the protocol is shown in Annex A.
- 2.5 The search for evidence was guided by two overarching questions and sub-questions, as follows.

Q1. What lessons can be learned from the implementation of IVET/CVET model in Europe over the past 12 years? Especially, in relation to;

- a) What are the drivers of implementing differentiated IVET/CVET systems?
- b) Which programmes and courses have proven to be better suited for IVET or CVET?
 - i. Does skill and other short-cycle, modular and flexible programmes pertain solely to CVET? Conversely, has bite-sized learning proven suitable for IVET?
 - ii. Should school-based programmes be included in and pre-vocational courses (e.g., foundation courses, junior apprenticeships) excluded from IVET?

- iii. What is best practice on apprenticeships and employability programmes that are both IVET and CVET?
- c) What is the merit and pitfalls of using age criteria to differentiate IVET from CVET?
 - i. Has IVET been restricted to those aged 14—24 years?
 - ii. In dual skill systems, do people 25+ who undertake VET for the first time fall under CVET? Has this proven effective?
- d) How has the content and delivery of IVET/CVET been tailored to the needs, ages, and experiences of different learner groups? Has it impacted learners differently?
- e) Have cohesive IVET/CVET skills systems allowed for permeability (e.g., moving between a vocational and academic route)?

Q2. Which approaches appear to be the most and least successful in establishing an IVET/CVET-based skills system in Europe?

- f) Are there differences by delivery model or funding arrangements?
- g) Are there differences by employer size/sector?
- h) Are there differences by learner demographic groups and needs?

2.6 In addition to systematic literature searches, an additional 23 sources of grey literature and other studies were added using forward and backward citation chaining (snowballing). To cover a large range of material, the review also included a targeted search on a number of websites for relevant material, including: specialist policy and research institutes, the websites and publications of European VET providers and associations, policy organisations and think tanks.

2.7 A resulting long list of 130 sources (e.g. research studies, evaluations and grey literature) returned through the searches, were sifted based on the research protocol inclusion and exclusion criteria. These were then quality assessed to identify a short list of 60 sources which qualified for more comprehensive examination. Assessment was based on (i) validity of findings (the extent to which the study assesses the quality of the data/studies

included), (ii) methodological rigour, and (iii) relevance of the study to the research questions. Further sources were added in response to queries from Welsh Government on areas of interest following the interim presentations on the desk review and stakeholder interviews, and to fill identified gaps in evidence (88 sources in total). An additional 28 sources came from re-visiting the long list of sources returned through the searches, signposting from interview participants and further snowballing from sources in the shortlist. A list of retrieved references is shown in Section 8.

Phase 2: Primary research – qualitative interviews and focus groups

2.8 Phase 2 involved primary research to test and build on the key learning identified from the desk review and to better understand different perspectives on the skills implications of a move to IVET/CVET in Wales. Fieldwork was conducted with a range of stakeholders and learners including:

- Twenty-one online, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, lasting 1 hour, with 24 sector stakeholders and experts (target:20) from a range of settings across Wales including national, regional, education sector and industrial sector stakeholders, as well as agencies outside Wales, in the UK and overseas. Interviewees held senior positions across all Welsh post-16 educational settings (adult community learning, further education, work-based learning, and higher education), a regional agency, experts on qualifications, industrial sector bodies, trades union and student representative bodies, and five interviewees from outside Wales (an international agency and VET experts in neighbouring countries). No Welsh Government officials were approached for interview.

Interviews explored three main themes emerging from the evidence review including: the strategic and systemic aspects of developing VET policy; delivery and curriculum considerations; and the benefits and impact of VET. In addition, specific questions were tailored to the expertise and background of interviewees, to gain further insights on the implications of adopting an IVET/CVET distinction in Wales.

- Online focus groups with seven learners in Wales who were undertaking or had recently completed vocational training. The original target was to recruit 20 learners for the focus groups, however due to challenges with recruitment and drop out on the day, 16 were recruited, and further nine dropped out on the day. Thus, a total of seven learners participated. One focus group, lasting one hour, was undertaken with three learners, aged between 17 and 21, each of whom was on a Level 2 Apprenticeship. Of these, one young person was training to be a Technical Assistant, and the remaining learners were undertaking apprenticeships in Hairdressing and Administration respectively.

A second focus group, lasting 90 minutes, was undertaken with four learners aged 25+, who were already in work when they took part in VET. One had recently completed a Level 3 apprenticeship in Media, and the remaining learners were working towards or had recently completed Level 4 qualifications across Learning and Development and Management.

The focus groups explored participants' learning needs and aspirations from VET; their experiences of VET; the role of VET in meeting future career goals; their understanding of different vocational pathways and experience of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG); what they like/dislike about vocational learning and views on what is working well/less well about the current VET system.

2.9 Topic guides for the stakeholder/expert interviews and focus groups were informed by emerging findings/key learning from the desktop evidence review. The project timescale did not allow for piloting but topics guides were discussed and agreed with Welsh Government. Topic guides for learners were also discussed and shared in advance with the training provider supporting engagement of young people for the focus groups. Both topic guides are shown at Annex B.

Sampling

- 2.10 L&W worked closely with Welsh Government to identify and agree priority stakeholders to invite for interview. Additional participants were targeted as required to further explore specific areas of interest/gaps in evidence identified from early interviews.
- 2.11 L&W approached a training provider, ACT, for support in recruiting learners for the focus groups. ACT identified suitable young people and older adults taking part in vocational learning who might be interested in taking part in a focus group and hosted each of the groups. A £20 shopping voucher was offered to learners taking part in the 60-minute focus group, as a thank you for taking part in the research. Participants in the focus group for learners 25+ were offered a £25 voucher to reflect the longer, 90-minute duration.

Analysis

- 2.12 Qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups was analysed thematically based on the key themes/research questions explored in the topic guides.

Limitations

- 2.13 The stakeholder interviews provide rich detail on the perspectives of experts and sector stakeholders on key learning identified from the evidence review. However, due to the small sample size, findings from the interviews cannot be generalised.
- 2.14 Similarly, while ACT successfully recruited 16 participants in total (target: 20) for the focus groups, less than half (7) attended, due to drop out on the day. This allowed for more detailed discussion with each of the participants but again, findings from the focus groups cannot be generalised.

3. Findings: Strategic and systemic aspects of VET

3.1 Findings in this section and sections 4 and 5 are drawn from the desktop evidence review and the primary research with experts, sector stakeholders and learners across the three key themes emerging from the evidence review:

- strategic and systemic aspects of VET
- curriculum and delivery aspects of VET
- benefits and impact of VET.

Strategic and systemic aspects of VET

Introduction

3.2 This theme explores strategic and systemic aspects of VET based on sub-themes that emerged from the evidence review: the priorities and intended purposes of VET; stakeholders involved; employer responsiveness; the role of qualifications and assessment; and, the components of effective systems. Given the future-focused nature of policy making, we also asked stakeholders about the role of the Commission on Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) in future VET development from April 2024.

The priorities and intended purposes of VET

3.3 The evidence review set out to investigate the drivers for implementing differentiated IVET and CVET systems. Looking at international evidence sources it was clear that there was a dependency on the society, culture, and economy of the country concerned¹. The evolution of VET systems is a combination of economic, social and educational aims. Stakeholders raised questions about transferability of approaches found to be successful in other countries. It was acknowledged that policy is often shaped by consideration of

¹ For example, see: CEDEFOP (2022) [The future of vocational education and training in Europe: volume 2: delivering IVET: institutional diversification and/or expansion?](#) Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 84. (Accessed 31/7/2023)

Bonoli, Lorenzo; Gonon, Philipp (2022) [The evolution of VET systems as a combination of economic, social and educational aims. The case of Swiss VET.](#) *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 12(3), 305-316. (accessed 31/07/2023).

a wide range of issues such as sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and economic resilience. Other policy drivers cited were addressing skills needs through reskilling, upskilling, and activating current skills in the labour market. Sectoral differences are often shaped by policy perceptions of skills needs, emerging markets and developing areas (such as digital / new technologies). The influence of rapidly changing skills needs in response to disruptive technologies, green skills, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis often emerged as crucial considerations.

3.4 The evidence review revealed instances of skills priorities defined at regional and local levels. Decentralisation in the Netherlands, for example, enabled the establishment of Regional Training Centres² for publicly-funded secondary VET and brought a considerable degree of autonomy. The centres provide IVET for young people and adults and more general education courses for adults.

3.5 While acknowledging the importance of devolution, stakeholders stressed the UK-wide context of policy making: particularly cross-border ('across the bridge') in relation to VET funding and qualifications. Stakeholders felt there was a danger that qualifications end up driving policy rather than policy determining which qualifications the system demands:

'[Welsh Government] needs a statement of [its] skills strategy and vocational education training strategy. Then we [can] make a distinction between VET and VQ [vocational qualifications].' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

3.6 UK government and UK-wide agencies such as awarding bodies have an influence on how policy in Wales is developed and implemented. Lack of alignment (with UK policy) has meant a twin-track approach that UK-wide businesses can find confusing. UK policy consultations are often unclear on whether proposals apply to Wales or not (for example, linked to the UK budget or Treasury reviews). One industry stakeholder said that this often leads to

²CEDEFOP; ECBO – Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (2019) [Vocational education and training in Europe: Netherlands](#) (accessed 31/7/2023)

confusion for businesses and makes the skills system more difficult to navigate.

3.7 Within Welsh Government, two cabinet ministers (Economy, and Education and the Welsh Language) have key roles in VET policy. In addition, there are regional bodies (Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs), City Regions) and local authorities (e.g. linked to schools and sixth forms) with key roles at the subnational level. Whatever the spatial level, stakeholders felt VET policy is not clearly articulated.

3.8 However, most stakeholders based in Wales felt there was a close policy alignment between educational and skills policy and other Welsh Government plans and strategies such as the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)³, [The Digital Strategy for Wales](#)⁴, [the Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#), [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers](#)⁵, and the [Social Partnership and Public Procurement \(Wales\) Act 2023](#)⁶.

3.9 Regional bodies also need to better reflect national policy priorities of Welsh Government. For some, RSPs had a too narrow skills focus that neglected the need to invest in 'fair' or 'good' work. This could be due to the positioning of RSPs within 'Economy' in Welsh Government when their role is seen as broader than economic success by some stakeholders:

'RSPs meet needs of employers who have capacity to engage but they run the risk of supplying to a labour market or a sector that, perhaps, has relatively exploitative practices.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

'So, they're just quite narrowly-focused on skills and not thinking about the wider employment conditions that are linked to the state's role, in terms of supporting skill supply.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

³ Welsh Government (2015) [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials](#) (accessed 31/07/23)

⁴ Welsh Government (2021) [Digital strategy for Wales](#) (accessed 31/07/23)

⁵ Welsh Government (2017) [Welsh language Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy](#) (accessed 31/07/23)

⁶ Welsh Government (2023) [Social Partnership and Public Procurement \(Wales\) Act](#) (accessed 31/07/23)

- 3.10 The importance of policy alignment was picked up by stakeholders, not solely in relation to the positive impact VET can have on social policy objectives. But also, in terms of the negative impact other aspects of policy can have on the VET system. An example given was transport policy and its effect on VET in some parts of Wales, particularly rural areas. As one stakeholder put it, 'it's no use having cheap buses if the bus never comes.'
- 3.11 Differences in societal priorities for young people and older adults were seen as a reason for differentiating approaches to VET according to age, which is most often used for IVET/CVET policy differentiation. For example, one issue for the 16-24 age group has been linked to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (disrupted education, mental health and wellbeing issues, work-readiness and resilience needs) affecting young people's employment priorities.
- 3.12 In terms of industrial and business sectors, sectoral priorities were divided into two general types: underpinning other industries ('green' / net zero and digital); and emerging (such as FinTech⁷ and off-shore power generation).
- 3.13 A common theme was that policy priorities should be 'future focussed'—at whatever level, spatial and sectoral, as the Welsh economy changes. Although the primary focus should be on the current and future needs of the Welsh economy, it was recognised that VET has strong social purposes such as enabling integration, social mobility, and the positive impact 'good' work has on health outcomes for individuals. This narrative also underpinned much of the evidence review.⁸ IVET in particular was often cited as having a strong social purpose around inclusion, engagement, preparation for working life, and avoiding the negative effects of 'being NEET (not in education, employment or

⁷ FinTech companies provide financial services through the use of technology. See, for example: [FinTech Conference](#) – "FinTech Conference in London is FinTech World Forum 2023 based in London UK Europe as one of leading FinTech events 2023 for global financial, payments, lending, blockchain and banking technology industry."

⁸ See, for example: EEA (2022) [Vocational education and training initiatives](#) (accessed 31/07/2023)

training)⁹. However, CVET was linked to ideas of ‘lifelong learning’ in Wales and other elements of social policy.

- 3.14 Prioritising skills levels was mentioned in relation to the needs of emerging business sectors. It was also emphasised that skills needs are differentiated by sector and therefore have to be prioritised differently by sector. However, there was agreement that lower level skills should be prioritised across all sectors to enable learners to take the first steps on a skills pathway, and to contribute to positive social outcomes (IVET).
- 3.15 Stakeholders also prioritised skill types, such as ‘Essential’ (basic skills and digital)¹⁰; higher level skills (business and IT operations, leadership and management); and transferable skills such as ‘work readiness, reliability’ (see *Transferable and transversal skills*, para 5.10 for more detail).
- 3.16 Alongside VET priorities, stakeholders stressed that there should be a clear articulation of the purpose of VET from Welsh Government. This would enable a better understanding of the impact VET has on a range of policy areas. One international stakeholder, for example, emphasised the importance of analysing returns on investment (ROI) over a person’s working life. ROI needs to be explored in both economic and social contexts to analyse the overall societal impact of VET.

Effective VET systems

- 3.17 The evidence review provided very broad perspectives about what constitutes an effective VET system. Independent evaluations were rare in the literature,

⁹ Importance cases studies included: Cerda-Navarro, Antoni; Salva-Mut, Francesca; Comas Forgas, Ruben (2019) [A typology of students in intermediate vocational education and training programmes based on student engagement factors, sociodemographic characteristics and intentions of dropping out](#). *European Journal of Education*, 54(4), 635–650. and Schels, Brigitte; Wöhrer, Veronika (2022) [Challenges in School-To-Work Transition in Germany and Austria: Perspectives on Individual, Institutional, and Structural Inequalities](#). *Social Inclusion*, 10(2), 221-225. (accessed on 31/07/2023)

¹⁰ For example, see also recent German based research: Yang, Chengming; Kaiser, Franz; Tang, Hui; Chen, Pujun; Diao, Junfeng (2023) [Sustaining the Quality Development of German Vocational Education and Training in the Age of Digitalization: Challenges and Strategies](#). *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3845. (accessed 31/07/2023)

however several contemporary studies were relevant, for example in defining criteria relating to ‘effectiveness’¹¹.

- 3.18 One aspect picked up by stakeholders was that having an effective system currently, is no guarantee of future success. Therefore, there is a risk in emulating a system that may not have sufficient agility to address the changing global economy post-pandemic.
- 3.19 Dual systems (that combine vocational learning across education and workplace settings) have been actively promoted and supported by the EU and there was strong evidence in the literature of the efficacy of such approaches^{12,13}. Dual systems dominate IVET in many European countries. There are a range of ‘dual’ approaches, with a number of common features: two sites of learning (education and workplace with time split across settings according to the stage of the course); common theoretical and technical knowledge; close partnership arrangements between stakeholders, including employers, careers agencies, education organisations, regional skills partnerships and the participants themselves.
- 3.20 Although stakeholders concurred that dual systems are effective, they also gave examples of effective VET that was entirely on-the-job or off-the-job. An example was in the construction industry where GCSE and A level in Construction had been well received. It was viewed as providing a good introduction to the industry and was also felt to ‘add status’ to the sector. Personal Learning Account (PLA) funded courses were also cited as a good

¹¹ Examples included: Hoidn, Sabine; Šťastný, Vít (2023) [Labour Market Success of Initial Vocational Education and Training Graduates: A Comparative Study of Three Education Systems in Central Europe](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 75(4), 629-653. (accessed 31/07/2023)

Mora, Toni; Escardíbul, Josep-Oriol; Pineda-Herrero, Pilar (2022) [The effect of dual vocational education and training on grades and graduation in Catalonia, Spain](#). *Educational Review*. (accessed 31/07/2023)

Wołodźko, Elżbieta; Grochalska, Monika; Wasilewska, Emilia (2023) [The advantages and disadvantages of Polish dual vocational education from the perspective of students, school representatives and employers](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 75(5), 929-948. (accessed 31/07/2023)

¹²Martínez-Izquierdo, Luis; Torres Sánchez, Mónica (2022) [Dual Vocational Education and Training Systems’ Governance Model and Policy Transfer: The Role of the European Union in Its Diffusion](#). *Social Sciences*. 11(9):403. (accessed 31/07/2023)

¹³Kirchknopf, Sebastian (2020) [Career Adaptability and Vocational Identity of Commercial Apprentices in the German Dual System](#). *Vocations and Learning* 13, 503–526. (accessed 31/07/2023)

example of off-the-job VET for those adults who met the eligibility criteria. Although it was pointed out that PLAs could be workplace based and/or online. The key issue was flexibility, although concern was expressed about the future of the PLA policy (regarding an anticipated reduction in qualifications funded.)

- 3.21 Participants in our focus group with learners aged 25+ identified funding as a key barrier to accessing VET to support their development. This included issues around eligibility, for example if in part-time employment, as well as awareness of and access to information around funding options.

One participant had only become aware of PLA for example, after their partner accessed this funding to retrain for a change of career: 'There needs to be some sort of advertising, I suppose, or some sort of catalogue or some website, or something where you can go.' (Learner, female 25+)

'...I think maybe the options are there. They're there. It's just getting to them...' (Learner, female, 25+)

'The funding is obviously there from Welsh Government, but it doesn't seem to be directed well enough to develop people.' (Learner, male, 25+)

Another learner said they were prepared to undertake further vocational learning outside of work, to help their development, but the financial cost, particularly in the current cost of living crisis, was prohibitive:

'I suppose, fresh out of school I could apply for a student loan, perhaps, to cover the cost. I may be wrong, but when you're 50 plus that doesn't seem to be an option that's open to you' (Learner, male, 25+)

- 3.22 The evidence review indicated that the CVET aspects of dual systems take place almost entirely in the workplace. However, it is acknowledged the dual system model as a whole is complex and relies on high levels of coordination between the key stakeholders if learners are to navigate the education/workspaces effectively¹⁴.

¹⁴ Šćepanović, Vera; Martin Artiles, Antonio (2020) [Dual training in Europe: a policy fad or a policy turn? Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research](#), 26(1), 15-26. (accessed 31/7/2023)

- 3.23 In many parts of Europe, apprenticeships are the dominant model or ‘branding’ for dual systems and were seen as a key element of many effective systems.¹⁵ In the context of the shaping of successful CVET, the evidence review revealed few studies exploring dual VET models. However more recent research¹⁶ examines how apprenticeships specifically can be updated for the reskilling and upskilling of adults. This research draws attention to the different positioning of adult participation in apprenticeships in European countries. For example, in Finland and Ireland apprenticeships are predominantly followed by adults older than 25. In Denmark and England, both young people and adults are engaged in apprenticeship training and the share of adult apprentices has tended to grow over the last two decades. In Austria, Germany and Switzerland apprenticeships are dominated by young people.
- 3.24 This research suggests that the architecture of apprenticeships for adults needs to give precedence to many of the features of high-quality wider lifelong learning including: recognition of prior learning (RPL), short duration programmes, flexible and personalised accreditation and delivery models, distance learning and learning approaches amenable to adults. Access to appropriate financial support for adults with family commitments is also important. The evidence review includes a case study from Finland which examines in detail the transformation of apprenticeships into upskilling pathways underpinning lifelong learning. Crucially this evolution has seen the strengthening of multiple entry and exit points, defining a range of learning pathways and greater recognition of learning achievements.

¹⁵ See, for example: Schmid, Evi; Scharnhorst, Ursula; Kammermann, Marlise (2021) [Developing Two-Year Apprenticeships in Norway and Switzerland](#). *Vocations and Learning* 14, 55–74. (accessed 31/7/2023)
Pitz, Matthias; Wiemann, Kristina (2021) [Does Dual Training Make the World Go Round? Training Models in German Companies in China, India and Mexico](#). *Vocations and Learning* 14, 95–114. (accessed 31/07/2023)
Bonoli, Lorenzo; Gonon, Philipp (2022) [The evolution of VET systems as a combination of economic, social and educational aims. The case of Swiss VET](#). *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 12(3), 305-316. (accessed 31/07/2023)

¹⁶ Markowitsch, Jörg; Hefler, Günter (2018) [Staying in the Loop: Formal Feedback Mechanisms Connecting Vocational Training to the World of Work in Europe](#). *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 5(4), 285–306. (accessed 31/07/2023)

- 3.25 Such attention to tailoring CVET for adult participants has also been noted by other researchers¹⁷, especially in the context of the design of CVET programmes that foster adults' empowerment and motivation. It was seen as important that CVET provision provides opportunities for individuals to shape their professional careers through training and education if motivation is to be enhanced. Further research from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) revealed the significance of well-functioning and coordinated CVET systems in empowering people to manage ever more complex and unpredictable working lives.
- 3.26 Key attributes of such systems include the need for business to require employees to keep up to date, in the context of both technical and general vocational skills. Stakeholders felt learners and employers also recognise the importance of CVET in career progression and reducing unemployment. Learners we spoke to, who were already in-work when they started their current or recent vocational training, echoed this finding:
- ‘I was hoping that it was going to be a progression, and something that would push my boundaries, upskill me. And then if it didn't stay as it was or it wasn't increasing in banding or any opportunities, I would hopefully then have skills and confidence to move somewhere else’ (Learner, female, 25+)
- ‘I've always [in any job role] wanted to learn something new. Develop myself, so personal development. Get new skills, upskill yourself.’ (Learner, male, 25+)
- 3.27 Another CVET learner had changed role within the same employer and was undertaking an apprenticeship to reskill, to gain a qualification to demonstrate competence in their new job and to support their progression towards a higher level qualification aligned with their new career path.

¹⁷ Mara, Liviu-Catalin; Cascón-Pereira, Rosalía; Brunet Icart, Ignasi (2022) [Perceptions of empowerment and motivation as outcomes of a continuing vocational education and training \(CVET\) programme for adults](#). *Education + Training*, 64(3), 433-444. (accessed 31/07/23)

3.28 Engagement with CVET is seen to be enhanced through flexible working hours, financial support, certification of learning, support with childcare and caring responsibilities, more information and guidance, personalising learning to individual needs and high-quality training. ¹⁸ Many of these factors were confirmed by adults in our 25+ learner focus group (see para 3.32). Reasons for not engaging with CVET include the perception of learners that it is unnecessary or 'other commitments' take priority.

3.29 The opportunity and flexibility to learn and gain a qualification while working, was an important factor in motivating older adults in our focus group, to engage with CVET. This was also a key consideration in the decision-making of learners entering work through their apprenticeship (see para 3.65):

'I think once you move up to this sort of level, to try and do this in your own time when you're working, perhaps, 50 hours a week. There's only so many hours in the week available to you. To try and input any hours outside work for training, it's difficult to find the time.' (Learner, male, 25+)

The funding to support this was also valued by this group of learners:

'I suppose the biggest barriers for learning for me would've been (1) funding, (2) learning while I'm working. Because I wouldn't be able to afford to give up work to just go and do something. So I have been able to achieve that from where I am now, so that's been a good thing' (Learner male, 25+)

'The flexibility that a vocational qualification gives you while you're in the workplace is great. The funding side of it, as well, you know, from the Welsh Government ...that's great. I can see that they're trying to develop people's skills, which is fantastic.' (Learner, male, 25+)

3.30 While these learners recognised the funding from Welsh Government as a real benefit, there was a view that that this could be better targeted to ensure the focus is on supporting progression (see para 3.37).

¹⁸ CEDEFOP (2020d) [Adult Learning and Continuing Vocational Education and Training Valued by Europeans](#). Cedefop briefing note, November 2020. (accessed 31/07/23)

3.31 Learners 25+ would welcome more information on funding options as well as on VET learning options/pathways more generally. Some were confident that their employer could support with this. However, there was a shared uncertainty about where to go for advice outside of work and the experience of those that had accessed careers services, e.g. Careers Wales, was that there was limited support for older adults:

‘I would imagine it's self-directed. I don't know of a service that would offer somebody, again of my age group, that would provide specific career advice and tell me how to develop and go from where I am now to somewhere where I could be in the future’ (Learner, male, 25+)

‘I don't really know where to go, if I'm honest. I've looked at colleges, but I wouldn't know where else...But yes, I've seen courses that I'd like to do...I wouldn't know now...once I complete this one if I wanted to carry on my personal development I wouldn't know where to go.’ (Learner, female, 25+)

3.32 Learners 25+ valued the flexibility their employers gave them to complete training activities/coursework during their usual working hours, but the job role took priority so the amount of time they could spend on this depended on workload. The level of support from employers varied, although it was recognised that staff capacity challenges sometimes impacted on this:

‘...if my workload is that little bit lighter, they're not opposed to me doing my learning in that time...But it is difficult. Like there's been some months when I've had work set, and I haven't been able to complete them because work's been busy. Home life is busy.’ (Learner, female, 25+)

‘...[the employer will] give you the time to attend workshops. But you're also expected to do 100% of your current role and fit this in as and when you can. So, like I said, I was given plenty of time to sit the workshops but to actually submit any of this other paperwork from those workshops or my submissions, my exams. It's pretty much a lot of them I was doing on weekends, I was doing in mornings before work, when I was managing to find an hour. Because there was no let-up in the workload from the

employer.’ (Learner, male, 25+)’...[I work for] a training company, so they want everyone to be doing something. So yes, they’re really flexible and supportive of everyone doing it.’ (Learner, female, 25+).

- 3.33 Stakeholders emphasised that all-age apprenticeships were an important part of the system but require a differentiated approach for adults (25+). Key features of an apprenticeship system that effectively meets those adults’ needs should include recognition of prior learning; flexible and personalised delivery; and adequate financial support. While apprenticeships can play an important role in upskilling, lower level apprenticeships¹⁹ are typically perceived as IVET, rather than CVET. Alongside this, apprenticeships are considered too long to feature as CVET, although specific modules are important (for example to enable moving within a trade to off-shore working). Stakeholders saw apprenticeship wages as a disincentive for older adults or those made redundant from well-paid jobs with qualifications at level 2 or below (for example, at the Ford engine plant in Bridgend). However, in terms of higher level skills, degree apprenticeships were seen as IVET even at Level 6, as they often enabled workplace entry for the first time.
- 3.34 Apprenticeships were seen by stakeholders as the major vehicle for delivering dual VET in Wales. However, it was noted that apprenticeships are still based on the framework model²⁰ instead of moving to the standards model that England has adopted. This dynamic emerged as important in stakeholder interviews. The majority of Welsh apprenticeships still retain qualifications (e.g. NVQs) within their delivery rather than incorporating external end-point assessments. But UK-wide awarding organisations are ceasing to offer such qualifications as the (larger) English market no longer exists.

¹⁹ See for a discussion on low skills: CEDEFOP (2017) [Investing in skills pays off: The economic and social cost of low-skilled adults in the EU](#). Cedefop research paper; No 60. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

²⁰ Frameworks are competency-based apprenticeships assessed by qualifications. Standards are occupation focussed and incorporate Knowledge Skills and Behaviours for specific occupations. (Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education [2017] [Apprenticeship frameworks and standards: the main differences](#))

- 3.35 The main driver for policy is around apprenticeships and the divergence of policies across UK borders. There was some concern that employers prefer the English system and therefore Welsh employers lose out: ‘Employers are saying, “If we've got a choice of making an apprenticeship in Wales or in England I might run the English scheme, not the Welsh scheme”.’
(Expert/sector stakeholder)
- 3.36 In one industrial sector, apprenticeship funding in Wales was regarded as not as ‘responsive’ (i.e. easy to access) as in England. There was not enough provision at Level 2 to meet demand:

‘The Levy dominates everything as [employers] feel they've already paid for training. They use about 30 per cent of what they pay. So not very efficient system.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)
- 3.37 In general, participants in our 25+ focus group were frustrated by what they perceived to be an employer focus on VET to improve individuals’ skills/performance in their current role, rather than to look forward and support their future progression/next steps. A participant undertaking a Level 4 Leadership and Management qualification within a local authority reflected that this approach was especially typical of the public sector (in part due to underfunding/capacity challenges) compared to their experience of working in the private sector:

‘... [in the private sector] you'll see employees that have something to offer, and you'll develop them for roles that you see coming 2 years down the road. Whereas in the public sector none of that happens...There's no 3 year career progression. It's you've landed into the role, they'll train you how to do it, but nobody trains you for what could potentially be coming.’ (Learner, male, 25+)
- 3.38 With the exception of one participant, learners in the 25+ group expressed the view that the content/level of their current or recent VET meant they were being taught ‘what they already knew’. One participant went further describing it as a ‘rubber stamping’ exercise designed to instruct them how to pass the qualification without any new learning. Participants outlined what they saw as

the benefit of going directly into a higher qualification level to support their progression and were frustrated that they were deemed ineligible, as their current role did not include some of the elements required to pass at this level:

‘So, if I said that I wanted to retrain or go into another role further down the line, there doesn't seem to be any support with that. So one of the things I would like to do is go into [is the] management sort of area. But because it's not applicable to my role I'm not supported into the learning.’ (Learner, female, 25+)

- 3.39 Another focus group participant shared the view, and understood, that relevance to their job role was the most important consideration for their employer. Their employer had given them the flexibility to choose and ‘build’ their own learning route, or vocational learning package. For example, the employer had incorporated an assessor qualification and a managing learning qualification alongside Level 4 Learning and Development.
- 3.40 Developing an understanding of education-work transition is essential for effective policy development. Congruence in values, expectations, support, self-efficacy, and persistence are all important considerations²¹. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of off-the-job IVET as preparation for ‘the world of work’ such as searching and applying for jobs, and interview practice. For example, some college-based IVET explicitly allowed time for young people to develop holistically. This was seen as particularly important for the 16-19 age group, but not exclusively so.
- 3.41 The effectiveness of dual systems was seen as dependent upon cooperation between educational settings and employers. This included strong communication, understanding of the priorities of the different settings,

²¹ Scharnhorst, Ursula; Kammermann, Marlise (2020) ["Who is included in VET, who not?"](#) *Education + Training*, 62(6), 645-658. (accessed 31/07/2023)

Schels, Brigitte; Wöhrer, Veronika (2022) [Challenges in School-To-Work Transition in Germany and Austria: Perspectives on Individual, Institutional, and Structural Inequalities](#). *Social Inclusion*, 10(2), 221-225. (accessed 31/07/2023).

ownership of learning outcomes by all parties, and access to contemporary vocational resources²².

- 3.42 In some countries dual VET has been seen as less successful²³. For example, the Portuguese model piloted in 2012 was rejected by key stakeholders such as trades unions, who were sceptical about the influence of employers in shaping the structure of apprenticeships. Employers' priorities focussed on promoting qualifications of employees rather than the wider development of individuals.
- 3.43 Stakeholders stressed that the engagement of businesses in providing training was key and likely to need incentives, particularly for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to take a full part:
- ‘We're seeing a big drop-off in the number of SMEs engaging with apprenticeships, for example, and skills, because they're too complicated for them.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)
- 3.44 The need for effective collaboration between all social partners involved in VET delivery came through strongly from the evidence review. The engagement of businesses in providing training was key and was likely to need incentives to maximise its benefits. Challenges were likely to be particularly acute when SMEs dominate the employment landscape as is the case in Wales.²⁴ Some stakeholders pointed out the effectiveness of training across a number of employers such as ‘shared’ apprenticeships organised with a collective of SMEs, for example, in the construction industry.
- 3.45 Stakeholders also felt regional approaches have the potential to enable effective collaboration by bringing together spatial and sectoral views. This allowed the delivery of VET to support industrial sectors that are growing

²² CEDEFOP; ETF (2021) [The importance of being vocational: challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade](#). Cedefop and ETF discussion paper. Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 31/07/2023)

²³ Peliz, Marina; Boavida, Nuno; Moniz, António Brandão; Kuznetsova, Yuliya (2021) [The role of social partners in the governance of Dual Vocational Education and Training System: The Portuguese case](#). *Forum Sociológico*, 39, 67-79. (accessed 31/7/2023)

²⁴ See, for example, the case of Finland. CEDEFOP (2019) [Vocational education and training in Finland: short description](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 31/07/2023)

locally. However, regional approaches have been hindered by the inconsistent development of RSPs, which were described variously as ‘underdeveloped, underpowered, not proactive, and lack[ing] capacity,’ and with variable representation and effectiveness. The regional element of the Welsh system was described as ‘fragmented’ and not reaching out to all business sectors.

‘The [regional] landscape has been very messy for a number of years, and I think the groups are called different things in different parts of Wales. It is hard for employers to get involved because the language within training more generally is loaded with acronyms. The conversation gets bogged down in process rather than delivery. I think that frustrates employers as well. So, I think the employer voice isn't as strong as it could or should be. I sometimes feel as if [this] almost that sinks the system.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

3.46 In terms of engaging business sectors, regional ‘sector cluster groups’ were seen as important. Local hubs for employers and learners were raised by one stakeholder as possible building blocks for an effective system. Once again it was stressed SMEs do not have time to engage with regional groups:

‘As an SME owner you’re effectively chief exec, HR director and finance director, you haven't got time to go and sit in RSPs and articulate for a day your skills needs.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

3.47 Employer responsiveness was seen as a key component of effective VET systems.²⁵ Some interviewees stressed there was an ‘employer engagement continuum’ (from consultation response to curriculum design), which is dependent on sector, employer size, and local infrastructure. Again, it was stressed employers (such as SMEs) often need incentives to be involved and employer representative bodies might not have sufficient resource compared to other countries. In Germany, employer involvement is aligned to business development and the VET system. The governance of the German VET

²⁵ Bolli, Thomas; Caves, Katherine Marie; Renold, Ursula; Buergi, Jutta (2018) [Beyond employer engagement: measuring education-employment linkage in vocational education and training programmes](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 70(4), 524-563. (accessed 31/07/2023)

system is defined by a strong partnership between the federation, federal states, employers and trade unions; any VET regulation is issued in consensus with the social partner (employers, sector organisations, trades unions). Other CEDEFOP country reports include detailed information on funding for employers to engage with VET. Much of this narrative related to VET in securing the success of individual companies. The German system also acknowledges financial challenges experienced by SMEs and the need for collaboration between SMEs:^{26 27}

‘There is no point in training people for a career that doesn’t exist, but you must make sure that the interests and the welfare of the individual is taken into account.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 3.48 Personal Learning Accounts (PLAs) in Wales were seen as enabling employers to articulate demand and allow providers to respond in a flexible manner. The evidence review identified examples of the importance of flexibility in response to need and flexibility of delivery.²⁸
- 3.49 Stakeholders felt employer demand was for generically skilled and adaptable staff—whether this be through IVET or CVET— and thus broad generic skills were important to be developed alongside technical skills. This view was linked to concerns that present demand for technical skills could quickly become redundant in the future as the Welsh economy changes:

²⁶ CEDEFOP (2021) [Vocational education and training in Germany: short description](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 31/07/2023)

²⁷ CEDEFOP (2021) [Vocational education and training in Germany: short description](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 31/07/2023)

²⁸ For example: Niittylahti, Satu; Annala, Johanna; Mäkinen, Marita (2019) [Student engagement at the beginning of vocational studies](#). *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 9(1), 21–42. (available at 31/07/2023)

Borbély-Pecze, Tibor Bors; Hutchinson, Jo (2014) [Work-based learning and lifelong guidance policies](#). European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. (accessed 31/07/2023)

Lischewski, Julia; Seeber, Susan; Wuttke, Eveline; Rosemann, Therese (2020) [What Influences Participation in Non-formal and Informal Modes of Continuous Vocational Education and Training? An Analysis of Individual and Institutional Influencing Factors](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11:534485. (accessed 31/07/2023)

Muhrman, Karolina; Andersson, Per (2022) [Adult education in Sweden in the wake of marketisation](#). *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 54(1), 25-42. (accessed 31/07/2023)

‘There are so many jobs that are actually training people in advance for specific jobs is probably not terribly fruitful.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 3.50 Effective VET systems include plans for VET workforce development such as teacher training, trainer development, dual professionalism, leadership / management training, and collaborative policy development. These are covered in *VET workforce development*, para 3.92 below.

Role of stakeholders in effective systems

- 3.51 The literature identified the need for well-developed networks of stakeholders to support VET in Europe²⁹. Such networks involved social partners (such as employers and trade unions) and other bodies like chambers of commerce and local councils. Participants in VET were also regarded as key stakeholders. The influence and contributions of stakeholders impacts at national, federal or state, and local levels. Stakeholder engagement in VET was often shaped by funding and the case in Germany³⁰ included a range of funding incentives for learners.^{31 32 33}
- 3.52 For IVET, parents of potential participants were seen as critical stakeholders, particularly as enabling financial support for students and apprentices, and influencers.^{34 35} Stakeholders concurred schools were seen as an important

²⁹ EEA (2022) [Vocational education and training initiatives](#) (accessed 31/07/2023)

³⁰ CEDEFOP (2020) [Spotlight on VET: Germany 2020](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³¹ Niittyalahti, Satu; Annala, Johanna; Mäkinen, Marita (2019) [Student engagement at the beginning of vocational studies](#). *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 9(1), 21–42. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³² Cerda-Navarro, Antoni; Salva-Mut, Francesca; Comas Forgas, Ruben (2019) [A typology of students in intermediate vocational education and training programmes based on student engagement factors, sociodemographic characteristics and intentions of dropping out](#). *European Journal of Education*, 54(4), 635–650. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³³ Hofmann, Claudia; Häfeli, Kurt; Müller, Xenia; Krauss, Annette (2021) [Transition From Low-Threshold Vocational Education and Training to Work in Switzerland: Factors Influencing Objective and Subjective Career Success](#). *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 8(2), 136–159. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³⁴ Papadopoulos, Orestis; Jones, Katy (2023) [Training in the age of liberalization and crisis: Understanding the learning experiences of young Active Labour Market Programme Participants](#). *Social Policy & Administration*, 57(2), 219–234. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³⁵ Schels, Brigitte; Wöhrer, Veronika (2022) [Challenges in School-To-Work Transition in Germany and Austria: Perspectives on Individual, Institutional, and Structural Inequalities](#). *Social Inclusion*, 10(2), 221-225. (accessed 31/07/2023)

but underused part of the system. The school curriculum has greater potential for the exploration of VET options post-16 and the organisation of information sessions on apprenticeships was of variably quality. One issue is the perceived competition between schools with sixth forms and other opportunities for young people.

- 3.53 Parental and peer influence was key for apprentices in our 16-19 focus group, and participants echoed the views of wider stakeholders on the role of schools. Learners identified insufficient information about VET, and a corresponding over-focus on higher education, as a key barrier to facilitating opportunities for young people to improve their vocational skills. This view reflected their experience both in-school and on leaving school.

'...in school, it's more like "you go to uni", that's it. There are apprenticeships, that was never talked about. That's something I knew from family members, really. And college didn't really give that to you either, it's always going to uni.' (Learner, female, 16-19)

'When I was in Sixth Form, they were telling us we needed to start writing cover letters to uni and start to plan out what we're going to do. But most of that planning was just uni-based. One of the reasons I knew about apprenticeships was my friend, he left Sixth Form to do an electrician apprenticeship and he said it's the best thing he ever did. So that was another reason apprenticeships, sort of, stuck with me as something to do.' (Learner, male, 16-19)

'...back in high school, they did a day...and they got loads of people from different jobs coming in and they'll discuss what the options are, like, going into nursing or going into engineering, but they weren't apprenticeships. So, "You can go into an apprenticeship with hairdressing," for example, I didn't have that. Or there were none saying, "You can go into an apprenticeship in this," it was all college and then a job, or whatever' (Learner, female, 16-19)

- 3.54 The importance of collaborative planning between providers at the IVET stage was raised by several stakeholders. Where a single tertiary education

approach has been adopted locally this is seen as more effective in the promotion of VET options.

- 3.55 Qualification awarding bodies and regulators were seen as key stakeholders. Collaboration between sector specific organisations and awarding bodies was seen as crucial to success. Qualifications Wales, the body responsible for qualifications in Wales and the regulator, has learner advisory groups to advise when new qualifications are introduced.
- 3.56 A wide range of other stakeholders were cited as involved in VET policy development, indicative of a collaborative approach within Wales. Although stakeholders work collaboratively, the approach is variable locally and by business sector. RSPs and careers services were seen as having an important brokerage role ('enablers') and 'sense making' (such as the application of labour market information and intelligence). Both were seen as having a role in building knowledge and expertise on growth sectors such as the 'Green Economy', and articulating demand in the 'foundational economy', particularly in terms of health and social care.
- 3.57 In terms of 'employers', it was recognised by most interviewees that this was an all-encompassing term for a range of organisations differentiated by size, industrial sector, organisational sector (public, private, not-for-profit, co-operative, charitable or 'third' sector), and representative bodies that represent these configurations. It was recognised that employers are often in competition for talent, not just within Wales but across the UK—with larger companies such as BAE Systems, Hinkley Point, Jaguar Land Rover and Airbus having a 'pull' for Welsh talent across the border with England.
- 3.58 Within this context—and the broad economic and social purposes of VET—there was clear recognition of the primacy of employer engagement in VET in Wales. 'Engagement' was primarily seen in terms of articulation of skills demand rather than a desire or requirement for employers to contribute to qualifications design, for example, which is an element where employers are perceived by skills providers as lacking competence.

- 3.59 A 'tripartite approach' (such as those in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands, Norway³⁶ and Denmark) includes the involvement of employers, trades unions and learners in effective systems. Employers can be motivated to engage by the acquisition of required job-specific skills among the labour force, whereas trades unions are motivated by transferable skills. This helps create a 'balance' that makes the system more effective. Through the technical side of vocational qualifications, transferable skills help workers transition into future roles.
- 3.60 VET participants were seen as important stakeholders in a way that went 'beyond customer feedback'. One stakeholder told us apprentices in Austria, Finland, and the Netherlands were seen as happy with their systems, but each system was different. The key point was they all involved a range of stakeholders in decision-making. Other stakeholders reiterated the importance of student, learner and apprentice 'voice' either through national bodies (such as the National Union of Students and Apprentices' Forum) or local college forums. Such engagement is seen as representing and delivering broad perspectives. Learner views were particularly valued on assessment methodologies and how they link to vocational competences.

Differentiation between IVET and CVET in effective VET systems

- 3.61 The literature indicated the IVET / CVET distinction was not a simple dichotomy based on age. It was also shaped by career stages (starting work, returning to work after a career break, upskilling, reskilling) as well as qualification levels and the 'purpose' of the learning. Internationally, IVET programmes focused on pathways leading to higher-level education or employment. CVET focused on those currently in the labour market (or

³⁶ Aspøy, Tove Mogstad; Tønder, Anna Hagen (2022) [Case study Norway](#). The future of vocational education and training in Europe volume 2. Delivering IVET: institutional diversification and/or expansion. Thessaloniki: Cedefop. (accessed 31/7/2023)

considering a return to it) and needed to be more flexible in delivery and assessment products.^{37 38 39}

3.62 In some countries the IVET phase starts at the upper secondary stage (from age 14) and therefore has a formal link with schools. Others focus on 16-19 to mirror academic pathways and the pre-higher education phase. However, the most common age grouping—and that used by CEDEFOP for its internationally comparative work—is 16-24 years. CVET therefore starts from age 25 and continues to whatever the ‘working age’ definition is in the country concerned. In other words, CVET is learning throughout working life; whereas IVET is about initial entry to the labour market as a career (as opposed to part-time or seasonal work as a student for example).

3.63 Most stakeholders recognised the 16-24 age group as the focus of IVET in Wales. They highlighted the role of IVET as focussing on initial pathways leading to higher education or initial employment, which are closely linked to sectors and labour market needs. However, some stakeholders regarded IVET as being relevant for older adults (25 years and over). An example was providing IVET for adults who have had poor educational experiences (due to ill health, poverty, homelessness etc.) or having additional learning needs such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD:

‘We are essentially providing the IVET route for [disadvantaged adults] at the age of 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 50 and it's important to recognise that there is a vast population out there that is reliant on this support, predominantly around essential skills, literacy, numeracy, [and] digital literacy in a digital world.’(Expert/sector stakeholder)

³⁷ Borbély-Pecze, Tibor Bors; Hutchinson, Jo (2014) [Work-based learning and lifelong guidance policies](#). European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³⁸ Lischewski, Julia; Seeber, Susan; Wuttke, Eveline; Rosemann, Therese (2020) [What Influences Participation in Non-formal and Informal Modes of Continuous Vocational Education and Training? An Analysis of Individual and Institutional Influencing Factors](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11:534485. (accessed 31/07/2023)

³⁹ Cedefop (2020) [Adult Learning and Continuing Vocational Education and Training Valued by Europeans](#). Cedefop briefing note, November 2020. (accessed 31/07/2023)

‘There is a danger to putting an age on the Initial Vocational and Educational Training element. What we want to see in place is a very different language which is a “lifelong learning” path. So whatever your circumstances, whatever your age, you can tap into IVET or CVET.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

3.64 Others felt age was a useful means of differentiation. The needs of the two age cohorts were perceived as different. For younger people, the predominately full-time nature of IVET provided a better foundation for working life. Parts of IVET can itself be differentiated by the skills students have on entry—whether they have the essential skills to be able to take the course or do the apprenticeship—or not, as is the case with the Danish system.⁴⁰ In some systems, learners spend the first 20 weeks of the course learning generic vocational skills that also provides ‘tasters’ into the requirements and processes of vocational and workplace practices.

3.65 For participants in our 16-19 focus group, an apprenticeship provided practical hands-on experience of work and the opportunity to earn while learning:

‘When I was at college, it's a bit like school, sitting there just writing all the time. That wasn't really me and then going ...here and researching a bit about apprenticeships made me realise I'm more of a hands-on person.’
(Learner, female, 16-19)

3.66 The opportunity to earn while learning was also important, particularly for a young person who had been in low-paid work in the retail sector having left sixth-form post-pandemic:

‘...probably the main one for me was also being able to earn because I was under 21 working in retail, I was on £6.50 an hour and I'm getting married at the end of this year, so being able to earn and work towards saving and

⁴⁰ Louw, Arnt; Katznelson, Noemi (2019) [Transfer and reflection in the Danish dual model: Findings from development projects in the Danish vocational education and training programmes](#). *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 9(2), 51–70. (accessed 31/07/23)

looking at doing big life events like a wedding and putting a deposit on a house, it's important to earn some sort of good money while also furthering what I want to do in a career' (Learner, male, 16-19)

3.67 While these were important considerations, the main need from VET for each of the participants was that the apprenticeship they selected supported them to develop in their chosen career:

'I just thought, "Is it something I wanted to do?" An apprenticeship obviously can be quite low pay for someone the age of 18, so it was more like I get experience out of it, it can lead me to where I want to be when I'm older maybe, so the cost of it didn't really bother me.' (Learner, female, 16-19)

3.68 For organisational stakeholders, most of the older cohort (over 25 years) would have already been in work so their needs clustered around CVET concepts of upskilling, reskilling and returning to the labour market (after redundancy or family commitments). This finding was reflected in the needs of older adults in our 25+ focus group (see para 3.32). Such adults generally need flexible, part-time provision that fitted around childcare or elder care, part-time work, or the requirements of the benefits system (such as the number of hours training permitted per week):

'For this age group it's about upskilling to enable them to retain a job or get a new job. This affects big sectors with large vacancies. The IVET model is not a solution for [economically inactive] or long term unemployed. There are other factors that affect this group such as the benefits system and the 16-hour rule in particular.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

'The challenges [between age groups] will invariably be different, so it's useful to recognise and develop policy based on the challenges for those two groups. However, an overarching policy [needs] an understanding of both as they are delivered in practice.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

3.69 Other stakeholders felt that, for the 16-19 age group, age differentiation could be useful in mirroring 'sixth-form' or general education college provision. Some

stakeholders put forward the view that post-pandemic many young people have been struggling with resilience issues and the ability to progress post-16. It was felt whatever model was adopted needed to address this issue in the 16-19 phase:

‘[The] Curriculum for Wales is leaning towards IVET model, so for next stage at 16-19 it's probably good to continue with that model.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 3.70 One stakeholder pointed out that a degree apprenticeship could be regarded as IVET despite the age of the participant always being over 20 and often over 25. An apprentice starting at Level 6 can be a young person, at the first point in their employment, or an adult who's reskilling or upskilling and making a career change.
- 3.71 Several organisational stakeholders raised the importance of adult apprenticeships, which embrace both IVET and CVET. It was also noted, however, that many employers favoured using specific elements of adult apprenticeships for upskilling rather than the full apprenticeship. The training, therefore, followed the funding rather than being designed to address skills gaps or skills needs. A number of stakeholders advocated for ‘the PLA model’ for older cohorts and as one put it: ‘they want to learn in different way, they want to learn at a different time, [not] feel they're back in school. ...It's about what the individual learns and how they want it delivered.’ This reflected the findings of the evidence review that effective systems were often characterised by flexible approaches.⁴¹
- 3.72 The issue of how adults learn was raised by some organisational stakeholders. One mentioned ‘classroom dynamics, generational gaps in approach, and 'mature' adults wanting a more 'intensive' programme.’ Another drew on the distinction between ‘pedagogy’ and ‘andragogy’ in educational thought, in particular how andragogical approaches built on the life/work

⁴¹ Muhrman, Karolina; Andersson, Per (2022) [Adult education in Sweden in the wake of marketisation](#). *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 54(1), 25-42. (accessed 31/07/2023)

experiences of adults. Having a defined pedagogy was seen as too directive for adult learners (and adult apprentices).

- 3.73 For many organisational stakeholders, the benefits of differentiating IVET and CVET by age were unclear. For one interviewee it was a case where 'professionals and experts like to create distinct areas of practice rather than say, 'How do we create a lifelong learning continuum on-the-job that ordinary people recognise?'
- 3.74 Other organisational stakeholders were concerned the differentiation would be a means of exacerbating the funding divide where the vast majority of educational resources are allocated to those under 25 years. Some pointed out the age demography of Wales and the need to focus resources on CVET to support the current and future workforce. Colleges, it was argued, will be reluctant to be labelled 16-19 organisations as the future market will be 'lifelong learning' (international stakeholder response). Others were concerned that disability issues would not be helped by 'age distinctions' over funding.
- 3.75 There was also concern expressed over unintended consequences such as the IVET/CVET divide being mirrored by the qualifications system:
- 'It doesn't make any sense to label qualifications IVET or CVET.... How can you call apprenticeships anything other than IVET? Some qualifications could fall neatly into IVET or CVET, but large numbers don't fit into a neat description whether you use the age or purpose definition.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)
- 3.76 For some stakeholders, IVET/CVET differentiation was based on the distinction between where the learning takes place (college, workplace, or a combination). One pointed to Finland which uses an individualised learning plan (ILP) approach. The ILP approach means planning is based on need (individual and employer), so young people have a more holistic education (including foundation skills), and older workers have more on-the-job support and tailored occupationally focussed learning. (It was noted adults also needed access to basic / essential skills and digital skills). However, from this

perspective, any age distinction is 'arbitrary', except that age is the traditional approach to designing a skills funding system.

- 3.77 Others advocated for rebalancing the system, '[which] needs to be more balanced towards, in the CVET side or in the IVET, to what the employer wants or what [they] recognise, what he appreciates, what they recognise, what they appreciate, what they value.'
- 3.78 Another stakeholder referenced the Finnish system as supporting effective transition from classroom to workplace. This is important because 'often the motivation for VET learners is dissatisfaction with school' and 'the recognition that they want to learn in a different way'.

This was certainly the case for learners in our 16-19 focus group:

'The most important for me, the hands-on aspect of it. One thing for me was I didn't really get on with just doing exams and sitting in classrooms. Being able to have that hands-on experience is very helpful and was a big part of why I thought an apprenticeship might be for me.' (Learner, male, 16-19)

'In Finland: the '2+2' programme can slide into an apprenticeship at any stage. The transition [is] from 4+1 days a week to 1+4. The context was the same, the delivery setting changed. The mode of study was the difference.'(Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 3.79 However, most stakeholders highlighted IVET/CVET differentiation was a whole system issue. In this regard, it is something that would need to be taken forward as part of a future-facing skills system. One international respondent pointed out that current high-quality systems that differentiate IVET and CVET may be effective now but not be future-ready.

Qualifications, accreditation and learning pathways

- 3.80 One of the gaps in the literature was the role of qualification frameworks in effective VET systems. Stakeholder interviews, however, revisited the issue of how Apprenticeship Frameworks articulate across the UK and within Wales. This was seen as critical for employers that work across UK borders. As noted

earlier, apprenticeships are the major vehicle for delivering dual VET in Wales. However, they are based on the framework model rather than the standards model (as in England).

- 3.81 The evidence review indicated a range of approaches to recognising attainment, achievement, competence, and enabling progression pathways. For example, in Finland's VET system national qualification requirements are well-established based on a centralised competence-based approach linking to skills priorities⁴². This model incorporates considerable flexibility for individuals to build their own learning through incorporating modules from a range of vocational occupations.
- 3.82 Permeability and flexibility between academic and vocational pathways are illustrated well in the Finnish VET system⁴³. Students can choose compulsory or optional vocational units alongside modules such as communication and interaction, maths and science and citizen and working life. It is also possible to study across institutions between general upper secondary and vocational upper secondary education institutions. Vocational students can gain access to higher education by choosing general upper secondary subjects. General students can complete IVET vocational units (also known as 'modules'). This model is seen as having potential to reduce divisions between academic and vocational routes⁴⁴.
- 3.83 The effect of the 'academic/vocational divide' was raised by almost all stakeholders. The Welsh Baccalaureate was seen as important in creating breadth and delaying choice until learners were sure of their desired career route. This approach could also play into evidence of the importance of pre-

⁴² CEDEFOP (2019) [Vocational education and training in Finland: short description](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁴³ Rintala, Heta; Nokelainen, Petri (2020) [Standing and attractiveness of vocational education and training in Finland: focus on learning environments](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 72(2), 250-269. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁴⁴ Ferm, Lisa (2021) [Vocational Students' Ways of Handling the Academic/Vocational Divide](#). *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*. 8(1), 1–20. (accessed 31/07/2023)

vocational provision and inclusion.^{45 46} The literature indicated individualisation and coordination of learning is further supported in Finland through the construction of an individual learning plan for each IVET or CVET learner. Such a personalised approach considers identification and recognition of prior learning (RPL), the learner's starting point on skills and knowledge and how competence will be demonstrated on areas for further development. There is potential for support needs including maths, literacy, language, and digital skills. Modules can be certified separately and there is no fixed duration of study which is determined by when the student is ready for assessment. Competency is demonstrated in real work settings and involves both the teacher and work-based assessor.

3.84 This potential for flexibility is also reflected in responding to rapid changes in the supply side for skills. The potential in Germany exists for studying additional qualifications within IVET or CVET. This enhances the approach to respond quickly to changing skills needs. Flexibility of VET provision is attracting increased interest in many European settings. The potential to develop the agility to underpin rapid reskilling and upskilling has resulted in research into short courses, certification, microcredentials, and the increased use of credits to support flexible VET pathways.^{47 48}

3.85 Microcredentials are characterised as short and targeted training products. Very recent research identified in the evidence review explores the positioning of microcredentials⁴⁹ in VET specifically and their interplay with VET

⁴⁵ Simões, Francisco; Meneses, Ana; Luís, Rui; Drumonde, Rui (2017) [NEETs in a rural region of Southern Europe: perceived self-efficacy, perceived barriers, educational expectations, and vocational expectations](#). *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(9), 1109-1126. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁴⁶ Tsatsaroni, Anna; Sarakinioti, Antigone (2018) [Thinking flexibility, rethinking boundaries: Students' educational choices in contemporary societies](#). *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(4), 507-527. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁴⁷ CEDEFOP (2022) [Are microcredentials becoming a big deal?](#) Cedefop briefing note, June 2022. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁴⁸ CEDEFOP (2023) [Microcredentials for labour market education and training: microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 89. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁴⁹ CEDEFOP (2023) [The Future of vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) (accessed 31/07/23)

qualifications as devices that sit within wider social, economic and historical contexts within which skills recognition takes place.

- 3.86 Stakeholders talked about the role of microcredentials and use of credits within the qualifications system to support flexible VET pathways and recognise transferable skills. Such skills combine competencies across vocational routes (e.g. business and digital), allow for highly bespoke upskilling for employees, enhance student-centred learning, increase visibility of non-formal learning and reduce barriers to learning.
- 3.87 In addition to the potential for increasing flexibility for both learners and employers, other possible advantages to the introduction of microcredentials have been identified. Disadvantages to the use of microcredentials have also been highlighted in some contexts⁵⁰. Important considerations include increased bureaucracy, impacts on staff retention where microcredentials can lead to increased mobility, and poor links to full qualifications.
- 3.88 A review of skills mismatches in Europe⁵¹ highlighted that increasing the permeability of VET systems is key to reducing the potential for pathways to become 'dead ends' and increase the options for CVET to mitigate the tensions between general and vocational pathways. The modular system in Norway⁵² is seen as a strong example of personalised CVET, co-constructed between the learner and employer based on the individual's competences, prerequisites, and needs. Provision at different education levels can be incorporated.
- 3.89 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is an important feature of CVET. RPL enables CVET participants to build on previous experience and knowledge rather than starting afresh. The significance of RPL has potential to influence

⁵⁰ ETUCE (2020) [Could micro-credentials undermine VET and higher education qualifications?](#) (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁵¹ Brunello, Giorgio; Wruuck, Patricia (2019) [Skill Shortages and Skill Mismatch in Europe: A Review of the Literature](#). IZA Discussion Paper No 12346. (accessed 31/7/2023)

⁵² CEDEFOP (2021) [European inventory of NQFs 2020 - Norway](#). (accessed 31/07/23)

teaching approaches, particularly in adopting principles more closely aligned with andragogy⁵³ than traditional VET pedagogies.

- 3.90 The evidence review indicated microcredentials as important in introducing flexibility between and within learning pathways⁵⁴. As modularisation can encourage early leaving, individual learning plans (and learning coaches) are seen as important in mitigating this:

‘[Wales] need[s] a balance between vocational qualifications that are labour market designed and those which are designed to help somebody restore their confidence or improve their wellbeing.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 3.91 Organisational stakeholders also stressed that there is a tension between rigour and responsiveness in the current Welsh system. In particular, the long development time for qualifications was seen as stifling responsiveness. Another barrier to innovation is institutional interest (or power relations) in the qualification system. Awarding organisations are commercial entities and as such have an imperative to develop scalable products. At Level 4 and above, some suggest that universities see themselves as custodians of quality in higher level skills and are reluctant to cede control to colleges.

VET workforce development

- 3.92 The evidence review provided some insights into how the professional development needs of the VET workforce linked with VET strategy. Examples included the conscious development of dual professionalism in England, mastery in Germany and Austria, and education-business leadership collaboration in various countries.
- 3.93 A CEDEFOP project⁵⁵ focussing on teachers’ and trainers’ professional development highlighted the wide range of roles that teachers and trainers adopt in delivering VET programmes with implications for their professional

⁵³ [The Andragogy Approach](#)

⁵⁴ CEDEFOP (2022) [Microcredentials for labour market education and training: first look at mapping microcredentials in European labour-market-related education, training and learning: take-up, characteristics and functions](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 87. (accessed 31/07/23)

⁵⁵ CEDEFOP (2022) [Teachers’ and trainers’ professional development](#) (accessed 31/7/2023)

development. These roles, however, are not static and further CEDEFOP research identified that professional development needs to build capacity for teachers and trainers to evolve their practice and manage change.⁵⁶

- 3.94 In England, the Department for Education (the responsible ministry for VET) and the Education and Training Foundation (an independent skills ‘sector-led’ organisation) have developed an extensive suite of professional development resources for vocational teachers and trainers. These include initiatives such as Teach Too, Taking Teaching Further and Industry Insights. Central to these developments is the concept of the ‘Dual Professional’: a teacher or trainer with both pedagogical and vocational expertise.⁵⁷
- 3.95 Stakeholders pointed out the challenge was staff having current (or up-to-date) occupational skills. Providers often take people with current vocational skills and give them pedagogical skills. Once teacher-trained, the challenge changes to maintaining occupational updating and further upskilling. The section on operational aspects of workforce development (see para 4.47) provides some examples of operational approaches such as staff placements in the cyber security industry (enabled by Welsh Government funding). But as workforce development requirements were growing, it was felt there should be a more formalised approach to enabling dual professionalism.
- 3.96 In addition to developing the current workforce, the recruitment of high-quality vocational teachers is seen as a challenge in some European settings. In many countries, the status of VET teachers is low and salary differentials can mitigate against recruiting vocational specialists into teaching in some industrial sectors.
- 3.97 Stakeholders agreed that both the recruitment and development of VET staff was both a strategic and operational issue. As with other parts of the education system, workforce analysis and planning is a role for policy-makers.

⁵⁶CEDEFOP (2022) [Teachers and trainers in a changing world: building up competences for inclusive, green and digitalised vocational education and training \(VET\): synthesis report](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 86. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁵⁷ See: Education and Training Foundation website (2023) [Technical Education](#) (accessed 06/08/2023)

There were some positive comments about how this issue had been addressed in Wales, particularly around moves towards parity of esteem and pay with school teachers. In this regard, the development of Initial Teacher Training was seen as important, especially in supporting parity of esteem.

- 3.98 Other stakeholders were keen to stress that currently effective workforce development depends on leaders and managers who do not have a VET background or ‘understand’ it. Therefore, leaders and managers need to be developed as well as frontline staff. Workforce standards need to align with changing industry standards, for example around the development of electric vehicles.

The bilingual nation

- 3.99 The issue of bilingualism did not arise in the literature review apart from a recent analysis of the migration context in Europe.⁵⁸ International stakeholders stressed the importance of learning English as a transferable vocational skill for non-native speakers of English.
- 3.100 Other stakeholders suggested Welsh medium schools favoured academic pathways as these were more commonly available in Welsh. This point is not conclusive (due to our small sample size) and could be more of an issue about schools in general protecting their sixth forms than to do with bilingualism. A more common view was that upper-secondary students coming from Welsh medium schools face challenges in learning new technical language in the medium of English (e.g. in mathematics) as part of their transition to tertiary education.
- 3.101 Supply and demand relating to VET in the medium of Welsh were seen as interrelated. Demand for qualifications in the medium of Welsh was often a commercial consideration for awarding organisations based on ‘scalability’. However, demand differed between industrial sectors. For example, levels of

⁵⁸ Aerne, Annatina; Bonoli, Giuliano (2023) [Integration through vocational training. Promoting refugees' access to apprenticeships in a collective skill formation system](#). *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 75:3, 419-438. (accessed 31/07/2023)

demand for Welsh vocational qualifications were higher for healthcare and other customer facing roles in some regions.

- 3.102 On the supply-side, there is a perceived shortage of teachers who speak Welsh and also teach using its technical vocabulary. However, pastoral and careers support in the medium of Welsh was seen as implementable and critical to student success and progression. Even if the delivery of the VET curriculum is in English, it was felt pastoral support needs to be in the student's or apprentice's language of choice.

The role of the Commission on Tertiary Education and Research

- 3.103 Stakeholders were largely positive about the future role of CTER to help develop VET in Wales. However, given the Commission's wide brief, there was concern CETER will have 'to focus on the day job' and neglect its reform role. In the longer term, CTER is seen as an opportunity to enable greater parity of esteem to VET alongside academic pathways.
- 3.104 It was recognised that the merger of funding systems presents challenges and the need to maintain processes while developing new ones. Some resource has to be put into working differently and more inclusively across sectors and age ranges. Explaining what works already and what needs to change, employer stakeholders raised the issue of apprenticeship funding being 'easier to access in England' and felt this should be addressed by CTER as matter of urgency.
- 3.105 It was felt important to have one organisation 'holding the ring'. An example given was the better use of destinations data (collection and 'showcasing'). To have one point of contact with the pre-16 system should help enable smoother transitions. CTER was regarded as having a greater role in providing 'foresight' of future skills needs:
- 'CTER should give vocational education a stronger voice. The danger is it gets crowded out by the louder voices of the universities.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

3.106 It was hoped CTER should speed up employer responsiveness and the current lag between identifying sectoral need and any policy response. Within this, it was hoped the ‘voice of the economy’ would include both the private and public sectors. But CTER needs to engage with industrial sectors to establish what sector needs are in each region:

‘The Commission has the opportunity to prioritise different things. How the CTER reforms VET across all levels—particularly the level 3/4 boundary—needs more flexibility. The character of VET changes over time.’

(Expert/sector stakeholder)

Conclusions

3.107 The thematic analysis of strategies and systems provided some important perspectives on how VET policy could be taken forward in relation to IVET-CVET differentiation.

3.108 The first was a clear message about how any proposed changes (around differentiation by age) fit into current VET policy and align with Welsh Government’s wider policies and strategies. The literature showed that a clear articulation of VET policy with defined roles and responsibilities for all partners in supporting VET was essential. There was a concern that this was not fully in place in Wales. An important priority would be to work with all stakeholders on a wider VET strategy that could encompass discussions of IVET and CVET and their respective roles in the future.

3.109 Many positive features are already in place: high-level systems for matching local supply and demand for skills; and Welsh Government initiatives such as Personal Learning Accounts and supporting participation in international, national and regional skills competitions. However, some parts of the system do not articulate well, such as:

- In relation to the school/FE/HE interfaces in some localities, where more could be done to ensure coherence.

- Collaboration—especially between employers and learning provider— is essential for developing a multi-dimensional VET system. This is currently inconsistent across Wales, for example, with subnational partnerships better resourced in some regions than others.
- 3.110 There was consensus among organisational stakeholders of the relevance of the debate based on the perceived educational and social needs of different age groups. For school-leavers and young people under the age of 25, there was a clear role for IVET in addressing issues of engagement and preparation for working life. However, the 16-24 age group is not homogenous in its needs and consideration needs to be given to cohorts within it (such as those at risk of becoming 'NEET'). The link between IVET and upper secondary education needs to be carefully articulated as schools are a key partner in any VET system. It was felt the Curriculum for Wales provides a useful entry point for discussions and this should be a priority for CTER. Work on broad foundations and notions of 'readiness' (as in the Curriculum for Wales) should be a key part of the IVET stage to address the resilience and mental wellbeing needs of young people post-pandemic.
- 3.111 At the upper end of the IVET range, it was noted that degree apprenticeships provide a useful link with higher education that indicates potential for establishing a clear line of sight for young people to higher level skills. Providing meaningful alternatives to academic pathways will help to address concerns around parity of esteem between the academic/vocational divide.
- 3.112 The needs of the CVET cohort (25 years and over) were seen as largely different to IVET learners and apprentices. This group was likely to have workplace experience but could need reskilling (to undertake new roles), upskilling (to do their current role more effectively) or enabling re-entry to the workforce after a career break (through ill-health, caring responsibilities, or redundancy). Given this range of requirements and expectations for CVET and the wide age range it covers (about 40 years of working life), there are a number of approaches that governments adopt. Strategically, it is critical that

CVET aligns with lifelong learning policies that recognise the diversity of the adult population and their contributions to skills needs. Such policies often link closely with addressing issues of health and wellbeing as a means of enabling workforce re-entry (particularly for economically inactive adults over 50 years).

- 3.113 Dual systems (those that combine learning on- and off-the-job) are an integral part of effective VET systems but look different across the IVET-CVET divide. In IVET, the balance is weighted towards off-the-job training and preparation for workplace entry, especially at the early stages of programmes. In CVET, the balance is more likely to be towards on-the-job training. Apprenticeships, as the dominant dual approach, are all-age with one 'brand'. The branding is perceived as more suited to IVET and the size of the qualification may be seen as too large to address CVET needs (topping up skills or adapting them to new contexts). Flexible delivery is critical to effective CVET, including modular accreditation through microcredentials and both synchronous and asynchronous approaches to learning that fits around other adult commitments.
- 3.114 Some reform is needed to the vocational qualifications system in Wales as has already been highlighted by findings from the Lusher Review.⁵⁹ These include initiatives to enhance responsiveness to employers' needs and increased agility to reflect rapidly changing skills priorities.
- 3.115 Any future VET strategy for Wales requires a clear plan for the workforce that delivers and supports it. Although the workforce includes managers, brokers and advisers, the priority is a plan for the recruitment and upskilling of teachers, trainers and assessors. Skills development of staff in delivering and supporting VET through the medium of Welsh is important. There is a clear role for CTER in working with Welsh Government to take this forward, learning from VET workforce initiatives that have been successful elsewhere.

⁵⁹ Welsh Government (2023) [Review of vocational qualifications in Wales](#) (accessed 19/07/23)

- 3.116 The Commission's role in leading a single tertiary education and research system is an opportunity to address some historical inequalities that affect both IVET and CVET. CTER activities would include: ensuring parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways; systematically engaging employers of all sizes and in all sectors; and, ensuring any planning is future-focussed by foresight reviews.
- 3.117 There was a strong message throughout both stages of the research about the need to be future-focussed. Some of this need was expressed through ensuring strategy that addressed changes to the economy and labour market, such as the move towards net zero, digital industries, and the ageing demography of Wales. Another aspect was how it was important to design a system agile enough to respond to such changes. The pace of change is such that what has worked in the past in previously effective VET systems might not be future-ready.

4. Findings: Curriculum and delivery aspects of VET

Introduction

- 4.1 Curriculum and delivery aspects are closely linked to the findings of the strategic and systemic theme. However, the focus in this section is on operational considerations highlighted in the literature and stakeholder responses.

Curriculum development and design

- 4.2 The evidence review indicated that some learning programmes were better suited for IVET or CVET. As we have seen (in *Effective VET Systems*, para 3.17), dual systems dominate the IVET landscape in many European countries. IVET most commonly starts at age 16, but some programmes are designed to start at the upper secondary stage such as Norway's school-based VET.⁶⁰ In this case, key challenges have emerged for curriculum design in ensuring vocational relevance and coherence between vocational qualifications. The notion of vocational competence is a crucial area for consideration. The importance of robust collaboration between stakeholders (see *Role of stakeholders in effective systems*, para 3.51) was also highlighted in the literature on school-based VET.⁶¹
- 4.3 Otherwise, the evidence review provided limited insights into the positioning of school-based programmes in pre-vocational courses. Specific country

⁶⁰ Hiim, Hilde (2020) [The quality and standing of school-based Norwegian VET](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*. 72(2), 228-249. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁶¹ Rusten, Grete; Hermelin, Brita (2017) [Cross-sector collaboration in upper secondary school vocational education: experiences from two industrial towns in Sweden and Norway](#). *Journal of Education and Work*, 30(8), 813-826. (accessed 31/07/2023)

examples suggest prevocational programmes are relevant to supporting the development of pathways to apprenticeships or further education.^{62 63 64}

- 4.4 The link between articulating skills needs and curriculum reform is diffuse and difficult to demonstrate. Curriculum design and development are time-consuming activities and associated with qualification reform and regulation. A key consideration therefore is how alignment with skills needs expressed by businesses can be achieved in a responsive fashion. Some countries allow more institutional autonomy to address perceived skills needs than others.
- 4.5 Providing flexibility within curricula to maximise the agility of participants to respond to changing skills environments has important implications. Modularisation, the introduction of short ‘tailored’ courses and the use of microcredentials are all seen to have potential in enhancing curriculum flexibility. However, further concerns arose from stakeholders relating to quality assurance.
- 4.6 The interplay between educational and occupational standards is an important area for consideration. This speaks to how curricula develop knowledge and/or skills and the notion of skills gained and attributes developed through competencies. The notion of a profession and occupational competence is important here and may be defined through different levels of professional status⁶⁵. How transferable skills are positioned in the knowledge and skills landscape is a crucial area for exploration.
- 4.7 Successful approaches to VET curriculum design and delivery are characterised by the facility for continuous evolution and incremental change

⁶² Examples include Simões, Francisco; Meneses, Ana; Luís, Rui; Drumonde, Rui (2017) [NEETs in a rural region of Southern Europe: perceived self-efficacy, perceived barriers, educational expectations, and vocational expectations](#). *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(9), 1109-1126. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁶³ Niittylahti, Satu; Annala, Johanna; Mäkinen, Marita (2019) [Student engagement at the beginning of vocational studies](#). *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 9(1), 21–42. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁶⁴ Hofmann, Claudia; Häfeli, Kurt; Müller, Xenia; Krauss, Annette (2021) [Transition From Low-Threshold Vocational Education and Training to Work in Switzerland: Factors Influencing Objective and Subjective Career Success](#). *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 8(2), 136–159. (accessed 31/7/2023)

⁶⁵ DfE (2017) [Post-16 occupational standards in international education systems](#) (accessed 31/7/2023)

while still maintaining a core vision for the purpose of VET. These central pillars include the notions of ‘the vocational principle’, ‘professional competence’ and ‘learning fields’ (rather than narrower occupational pathways). The introduction of learning fields instead of school subjects, for example in German⁶⁶ and Finnish VET⁶⁷, is not only a boundary-spanning device to blur general and vocational education but aligns with the instrumental approach to designing VET curricula. Competencies relevant to specific occupational areas are clustered with other closely related areas to form core occupational profiles. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of occupational profiles in IVET in Germany with overlapping parts and greater integration of transferable skills. The concept of learning fields has significance in bridging the two sites of learning at the centre of dual systems.

- 4.8 Expert/sector stakeholders stressed the importance of tailoring content to meet the needs of various learner groups. This was best achieved with the participation of learners and employers. Employer involvement in curriculum design and development was seen as particularly important. It was recognised that involving employers in curriculum design was a challenge and presented a risk articulated as providers ‘often end up with, the voices that shout the loudest being the employers you listen to’.
- 4.9 The driver of a successful curriculum was seen as meeting employer and learner need at the same time. This was challenging as occupational standards varied by industrial sector. However, competence in the workplace was seen as the main driver of curriculum design.
- 4.10 Within education, the interfaces between school, college and universities were seen as important. In terms of the FE/HE interface, it was felt effective pathways needed to be planned collaboratively. However, competition

⁶⁶ Wittig, Wolfgang (2022) [Case study Germany](#). The future of vocational education and training in Europe volume 2. Delivering IVET: institutional diversification and/or expansion. Thessaloniki: Cedefop. (accessed 31/07/23)

⁶⁷ Rintala, Heta; Nokelainen, Petri (2020) [Standing and attractiveness of vocational education and training in Finland: focus on learning environments](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 72(2), 250-269. (accessed 31/07/2023)

between institutions often puts a brake on collaboration. This was seen as an issue that cannot be fully addressed at the institutional level.

‘[Government] needs to start forcing place-based discussions between schools, FE and HE. If the apprentice degree is anything to go by, people are still working tactically.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 4.11 One stakeholder expressed the view that it was important to define ‘curriculum’ as ‘everything the learner experiences’. This expansive view of curriculum recognised the importance of provision outside the course of study such as pastoral support, wraparound support, enrichment activities, educational visits, and ongoing careers advice. (One stakeholder called this ‘making sure you have support systems in place.’). Taking a more expansive view of the VET curricula could enhance parity of esteem with academic pathways. Examples were given of employers mirroring the sort of enrichment that could be found at college or universities—such as clubs and societies—for their apprentices. One stakeholder reflected that Germany, Switzerland and Austria include enrichment activities as part of their dual systems.
- 4.12 For colleges, project-based activity was seen as crucial to making the curriculum ‘real’ and providing a bridge to the workplace. An example was local employers setting real life problems for students to solve. Another was of engineering learners taking part in a college motor-racing team alongside staff. Some stakeholders referred to the Finnish system of designing learning around a project in vocational settings; and assessing how to deliver the whole project including the vocational element.
- 4.13 Curriculum design needs to include traversal (or cross-cutting) skills such as problem solving, the ability to analyse, to evaluate, to work in teams, and to communicate effectively. WorldSkills⁶⁸ and other competitions help in technical and vocational benchmarking to demonstrate what best practice and innovation looks like. An international stakeholder highlighted that the success

⁶⁸ [WorldSkills](#) inspire young people to develop a passion for skills and pursuing excellence, through competitions and promotions. (accessed 19/07/2023)

of Welsh providers as medallists in WorldSkills competitions shows these attributes are present in curriculum design. Positioning these attributes as cross curricular skills was also identified in the evidence review.⁶⁹

- 4.14 It was acknowledged that criterion-based assessment is sometimes hard to replicate in an off-site setting, such as a college. Therefore, the college needs to be in a dynamic relationship with local employers, which is dependent on effective partnerships.
- 4.15 The importance of futures thinking in curriculum design was highlighted both in the literature⁷⁰ and stakeholder responses. Stakeholder views broadly reflected national priorities; however the changing local labour market was also seen as a key part of curriculum design. Trends like the move to net-zero affects all vocational areas.

‘Green skills, mechanical electrical actuation in the net zero world is absolutely huge. And it doesn’t matter whether you’re in the food sector, in renewables sector, in communication, in transport.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 4.16 However, as the impact of some trends were hard to predict, it was felt important to prepare students (particularly at the IVET stage) for a rapidly changing world. Some stakeholders argued the curriculum needed to be flexible and realistic in serving future jobs that do not currently exist. It was important not to rely solely on student demand, although some oversubscribed IVET courses were seen as an aspiration for disaffected young people. Although such aspirations should be valued, they could be based on poor

⁶⁹ Eizagirre Sagardia, Ana; Imaz Bengoetxea, Jose Inazio; Rekalde Rodríguez, Itziar (2018) [Characterisation of best practices in the development of cross-curricular competences in Vocational Education and Training: case study in the Basque Country](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 70:1, 47-65. (accessed 31/07/23)

⁷⁰ Examples include: Baumann, Fabienne-Agnes; Vossiek, Janis (2022) [Changing Skill Formation in Greece and Italy – Crisis-Induced Reforms in Light of Common Institutional Legacies](#). *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 9(3), 340–362. (accessed 31/07/2023)
Papadopoulos, Orestis; Jones, Katy (2023) [Training in the age of liberalization and crisis: Understanding the learning experiences of young Active Labour Market Programme Participants](#). *Social Policy & Administration*, 57(2), 219–234. (accessed 31/07/2023)

knowledge of other routes. Therefore, it was felt important to discuss with the learners the wide range of career options available.

- 4.17 Modular curriculum design was seen as important to address demand for top-up courses to enable people to take up 'new' jobs. An example given was building wind turbines at sea. Learners might have an existing skill (such as welding) but need to apply it in a new context (at sea). Modular VET curricula can support agility in responding to changing industrial needs; an example given was of highway engineers converting to UPVC window manufacturers:

‘Sometimes you don’t need a full year apprenticeship [but] ... a skills bootcamp to learn the skills to perform a job.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

Curriculum delivery

- 4.18 The literature flagged the importance of transferable skills (sometimes linked to what are called ‘transversal skills’ in pan European documents). Such skills were seen as key to supporting transition from educational to work contexts (and thus a key element within dual IVET systems). Programmes were likely to include embedded and discrete literacy and numeracy (Essential Skills in Wales) and digital competence (also linked to ‘problem-solving’ by transnational bodies like OECD⁷¹).
- 4.19 Sometimes transferable skills are integrated or embedded into the VET and general education curriculum; at other times they are presented as standalone elements or units (such as ‘common studies’ or ‘core skills’).⁷² Lopez et al (2020) provide a comprehensive analysis of the landscape of transferable

⁷¹ OECD (2019) [Skills Matter: Additional Results from the Survey of Adult Skills](#). OECD Skills Studies. OECD Publishing, Paris (accessed 08/07/2023)

⁷² Kirchknopf, Sebastian (2020) [Career Adaptability and Vocational Identity of Commercial Apprentices in the German Dual System](#). *Vocations and Learning* 13, 503–526. (accessed 31/07/2023)

skills⁷³. Other studies showed the relevance of informal and non-formal learning especially in CVET contexts.⁷⁴

4.20 Stakeholders also addressed the importance of transferable skills within the VET curriculum. (These are summarised in *Transferable and transversal skills*, para 5.10.) However, several stakeholders expressed the importance here of digital capabilities as a sort of underpinning skill across a range of contexts: home, college, and work. The changing workplace post-pandemic with increased hybrid working in some sectors was seen as relevant in understanding the specific digital skills that employers now require. At the same time, digital and blended curriculum delivery has increased for some cohorts:

‘Our partners and [CVET] learners do prefer the face-to-face, particularly when it comes to language skills.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

4.21 For some adults, digital and/or data poverty is seen as a major barrier. Learners have limited access to digital devices and so are less able to engage and participate:

‘Employers tell us they want transferable skills and adaptability, and aptitude for working. Key things that learners will learn [are] disguised as the topics that learners are interested in.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

4.22 Stakeholders raised the balance between on-the-job and off-the-job training, particularly at the IVET stage. The proportion of each was seen as dependent on context, as was the mix of vocational and transferable skills. The ability to ‘flex’ the balance on course was seen as important to curriculum delivery. For some IVET students it is important to practise vocational skills in a ‘safe setting’ (at college).

⁷³ Calero López, Inmaculada; Rodríguez-López, Beatriz (2020) [The relevance of transversal competences in vocational education and training: a bibliometric analysis](#). *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 12(12), 1-19. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁷⁴ Lischewski, Julia; Seeber, Susan; Wuttke, Eveline; Rosemann, Therese (2020) [What Influences Participation in Non-formal and Informal Modes of Continuous Vocational Education and Training? An Analysis of Individual and Institutional Influencing Factors](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11:534485. (accessed 31/07/2023)

4.23 The evidence review highlighted the role of employer involvement in curriculum delivery as well as design.⁷⁵ Stakeholders gave examples of this in off-the-job training developed locally once the course had started through employer engagement activities, such as work placements for students and staff.

4.24 Foundation courses were seen as relevant in both IVET and CVET contexts. For school leavers such courses provide the opportunity to discover which 'trade' best suits their interests and aspirations. Returners to the workforce often want to try options before committing to a full award:

'[In] construction, you might do an all-encompassing level 2 course that teaches you a bit of plumbing, teaches a bit of carpentry, bricklaying, you know, site management. ...A taster [that] gives you the opportunity to have a higher level qualification in a specific area [that] you've got an interest in.'
(Expert/sector stakeholder)

4.25 CVET curriculum delivery needs to be flexible for effective working with people doing shift work, with childcare responsibilities, and access to limited transport. This requires a flexible programme operating at weekends, evenings, and daytime:

'I think we've just got to be a little bit more creative about how we deliver, whether you call it microcredentials is irrelevant. It's a case of what works best.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

Assessment and progression pathways

4.26 The evidence review revealed a wide range of initiatives for the creation of inclusive VET pathways. The significance of taking account of multi-agency

⁷⁵ Bolli, Thomas; Caves, Katherine Marie; Renold, Ursula; Buergi, Jutta (2018) [Beyond employer engagement: measuring education-employment linkage in vocational education and training programmes](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 70(4), 524-563. (accessed 31/07/23)

perspectives and policies is crucial if barriers to VET participation are to be minimised.⁷⁶

- 4.27 The evidence review highlighted that assessment processes can become an obstacle to people being able to evidence competence. Learning outcomes approaches were becoming more important in shaping VET delivery. Learning outcomes represent a shift from curriculum content to specifying what a learner is expected to know, be able to do and understand at the end of a learning process. As such they are intended to bring consistency and transparency to interactions between players in educational and work placed learning settings.^{77 78}
- 4.28 Some stakeholders expressed a concern that qualifications drive the curriculum. That is to say, the development of the means of assessment defines how the subject will be delivered. However, this approach presents issues around responsiveness (to employers) and the recognition of progress within levels (for learners). As noted earlier in the report, learners 25+ argued that VET delivery could be used more effectively as a way of identifying suitability for and supporting progression (see para 3.37).
- 4.29 Assessment processes can become an obstacle to people being able to evidence competence for off-the-job training. Some stakeholders said, for them, the purpose of VET assessment was criterion-based, not normative (as with academic pathways). The purpose is to accredit competence rather than select students for progression:

‘In health and social care you have Level 3 qualifications delivered in the workplace based on competence with practical on the job assessments.

Then there's partner-based Level 3 delivery based on principles and theories

⁷⁶ Simões, Francisco; Meneses, Ana; Luís, Rui; Drumonde, Rui (2017) [NEETs in a rural region of Southern Europe: perceived self-efficacy, perceived barriers, educational expectations, and vocational expectations](#). *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(9), 1109-1126. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁷⁷ CEDEFOP (2021) [VET Themes: learning outcomes](#) (accessed 08/07/2023)

⁷⁸ Rintala, Heta; Nokelainen, Petri (2020) [Standing and attractiveness of vocational education and training in Finland: focus on learning environments](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 72(2), 250-269. (accessed 31/07/2023)

[that] doesn't provide you with the competence [but enables progression to higher education].’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

- 4.30 However, stakeholders recognised that criterion-based assessment is sometimes hard to replicate in an off-the job setting. The role of the college was seen as giving people the basic skills to go out and start to do the job, and then come back to gain theoretical aspects. The work-based elements should be assessed in the workplace, which depends on effective employer partnerships.
- 4.31 For competency-based assessment to be valued, stakeholders felt qualifications need to be designed by people who understand vocational and technical education. Questions were raised about the credibility of industry bodies to create standards that reflect current workplace practice.
- 4.32 For CVET, unit certification was seen as important by stakeholders including within an apprenticeship qualification, ‘particularly for those people who are already in work and have acquired some skills [but] perhaps don't need a full apprenticeship.’
- 4.33 Stakeholders pointed to systems in other countries that could be relevant to the Welsh context. Scotland’s system allows accreditation of learning at all levels using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The approach is based on the development of common standards. This enables providers to adapt provision to the needs of local employers: ‘sit down, negotiate, devise a course, credit rate it, and take it forward’. External recognition enables portability.
- 4.34 The Finnish system of designing learning around a project in vocational settings was also seen as relevant. This approach involved assessing how to deliver the whole project including the vocational element. This was felt to be a closer reflection of workplace practice. In terms of higher level skills, more institutions are moving towards live projects with ‘authentic’ (contextual) assessment. This approach is being adopted in the academic curriculum as well. As one stakeholder put it: ‘contextualisation raises quality’.

Widening participation and inclusion

- 4.35 The evidence review revealed several initiatives to increase participation in VET programmes in Europe.
- 4.36 These can take the form of pre-vocational provision as in the Netherlands⁷⁹. More specific pathways exist for students with additional learning needs. For example, in the Czech Republic, these programmes last one to two years and are designed to prepare students to perform introductory tasks in manual occupations in services or manufacturing and/or to strengthen their manual skills and workplace skills.⁸⁰
- 4.37 Research⁸¹ into the inclusion of vulnerable groups into the VET system in Switzerland provides insights into effective practice and outlines a range of measures to capture impacts. Crucially this research also identifies barriers and challenges for inclusive VET programmes. More recent research⁸² explores these challenges specifically in the context of the German VET model. Key issues to emerge are factors that result in ‘broken’ (or disrupted) pathways and individuals with non-conventional profiles presenting to employers.
- 4.38 Consideration of factors affecting those not in education employment or training (NEET) and at risk of dropout also feature in the evidence review. For example, research into provision in southern Europe⁸³ explores reasons why certain vocational alternatives are progressively restricted among young adults in Spanish VET programmes. The issues are multifactorial and include: the

⁷⁹ Westerhuis, A.F. (2020) [Vocational education and training for the future of work: Netherlands](#). Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series. (accessed 08/07/2023)

⁸⁰ CEDEFOP (2016) [Czech Republic: VET in Europe: country report 2016](#) (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁸¹ Bonoli, Lorenzo; Gonon, Philipp (2022) [The evolution of VET systems as a combination of economic, social and educational aims. The case of Swiss VET](#). *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 12(3), 305-316. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁸² Rusert, Kirsten; Stein, Margit (2023) [Chances and discrimination in dual vocational training of refugees and immigrants in Germany](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 75(1), 109-129. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁸³ Simões, Francisco; Meneses, Ana; Luís, Rui; Drumonde, Rui (2017) [NEETs in a rural region of Southern Europe: perceived self-efficacy, perceived barriers, educational expectations, and vocational expectations](#). *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(9), 1109-1126.

different make up between lower secondary and IVET provision, poor grades, bad behaviour, lack of interest in education, low levels of family cohesion, and a lack of expectations or aspirations. However 'quiet leaving' is also likely to be an issue where good behaviour is coupled with academic failure. A distinction here between 'discouraged-leavers' and 'alienated-leavers' is important.

- 4.39 The Spanish VET system was also the context for a study exploring gender-related decisions to engage with VET⁸⁴. This study revealed that 71 per cent of learners enrolled in Basic Vocational Training were male compared to a 50:50 split in compulsory secondary education. This research highlighted the significance of gender related expectations particularly on choices made by girls, the interplay with early leaving and the importance of delaying choice to reduce drop out.
- 4.40 The evidence review also provided insights into the participation of migrants and refugees^{85,86}. These studies highlighted the impact that vocational education has and can play in integrating refugees into the labour market. Key enablers included flexibility, local autonomy and voluntary participation by partners. The case of Swiss VET provided a positive case study of successful integration in which policy coordination between employers, trades unions and the government was key in creating a 'win-win' system.
- 4.41 The CVET discussion above has hinted at the significance of both formal and informal learning for adults. A recent study of German CVET participation⁸⁷ draws attention to the fact that activities in continuous vocational education

⁸⁴ Obiol-Francés, Sandra; Vergés Bosch, Núria; Almeda Samaranch, Elisabet (2022) [Gender and educational decisions in basic vocational training: discussions and experiences in Spain](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁸⁵ Teräs, Marianne (2018) [Cultural Diversity and Vocational Education and Training](#). In: McGrath, S., Mulder, M., Papier, J., Suart, R. (eds) *Handbook of Vocational Education and Training*. Springer, Cham. (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁸⁶ Aerne, Annatina; Bonoli, Giuliano (2023) [Integration through vocational training. Promoting refugees' access to apprenticeships in a collective skill formation system](#). *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 75:3, 419-438. (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁸⁷ Lischewski, Julia; Seeber, Susan; Wuttke, Eveline; Rosemann, Therese (2020) [What Influences Participation in Non-formal and Informal Modes of Continuous Vocational Education and Training? An Analysis of Individual and Institutional Influencing Factors](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11:534485. (accessed 08/08/2023)

and training are mainly differentiated as formal, non-formal and informal⁸⁸ CVET. The authors argue that further differences between offers of non-formal and informal CVET are seldom elaborated, together with reasons for participation or non-participation rarely articulated. This research highlights the importance of non-formal CVET being strongly influenced by institutional settings. In the case of informal CVET the learning biography of the participant plays a central role.

4.42 Expert/sector stakeholders also pointed to the analysis of participation data as the first step in the identification of under-represented groups in all age cohorts to enable planning to address this. For one stakeholder this included addressing perceptions: 'it is about reaching into more disadvantaged communities and engaging young people and adults and making them realise there are good routes through training into better employment.'

4.43 Some expert/sector stakeholders raised the effect of cultural prejudices that providers have to address, including 'classes where men are refusing to be taught by a female teacher, and men who are refusing to learn with their wives in the same room, because they object to their wives having access to education.'

4.44 In other parts of Wales, it is a challenge to access large enough cohorts of learners to support particular provision. In this case online provision helps reach geographically dispersed groups:

'Utilising digital [learning] means that we can potentially do that to make sure that we've got that equality of opportunity which I know is very close to the heart of Welsh government.' (Expert/sector stakeholder)

⁸⁸ Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, is recognised by relevant national authorities and leads to diplomas and qualifications. Non-formal learning is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning. In some cases, it is also structured according to educational and training arrangements, but more flexible. Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through interests and activities of individuals. Through the recognition, validation and accreditation process, competences gained in informal learning can be made visible, and can contribute to qualifications and other recognitions. In some cases, the term experiential learning is used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience. See Learning and Work Institute (2017) [Healthy, Wealthy and Wise: the impact of adult learning across the UK](#), page 6.

- 4.45 Some organisational stakeholders felt VET itself is a tool for widening participation, particularly for those who dropped out at the upper secondary level. To avoid future drop outs, it was felt important to engage parents in their children's IVET and help young people navigate the system. The work of Careers Wales in schools was seen as important and in particular providing relatable role models for students.
- 4.46 One stakeholder signposted us to research into diversity enabling innovation in STEM⁸⁹. Others highlighted the benefits of enabling greater diversity. For example, Transport for Wales have created a book ('My Mummy the Train Driver') for use in nurseries, to address perceptions that certain roles were 'for men'.

VET workforce development (operational aspects)

- 4.47 *Strategic and systemic aspects of VET* (para 3.2above) outlined the strategic aspects of VET workforce development. The evidence review also highlighted operational aspects such as the (often informal) role of VET trainers in apprentices' transition from 'low threshold' VET to employment.⁹⁰ It concluded that the career development paths of young people were influenced by various background and personality factors, as well as the training situation. It argued that VET trainers should be aware of their crucial role and understand how their interventions affect apprentices' self-perceptions and perceptions of their occupations, which in turn influence motivation and career aspirations. Stakeholders recognised this role, and the need for tutors to be not just 'dual professionals' but to have the ability to enable inclusion as well.
- 4.48 At the operational level stakeholders gave examples of how the VET workforce are being developed at the local and institutional level. However, this was not seen as solely the preserve of teachers and assessors. There

⁸⁹ Howitt, C. (2021). [How Diversity will Drive Future Innovation](#). (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁹⁰ Hofmann, Claudia; Häfeli, Kurt; Müller, Xenia; Krauss, Annette (2021) [Transition From Low-Threshold Vocational Education and Training to Work in Switzerland: Factors Influencing Objective and Subjective Career Success](#). *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 8(2), 136–159. (accessed 31/07/2023)

were challenges for senior managers and leaders who have not come from a VET career pathway themselves.

- 4.49 Professional updating was identified as the primary issue facing off-the job staff. One example was technical upskilling for electric vehicles and the role of diagnostics. This often has to be addressed at the local level by colleges contacting local employers. Another example was the updating of college staff on cybersecurity through working with a local specialist company. In one area, an employer helped provide up-to-date equipment so students could be trained to industry standards. This involved the tutors being trained first. Such examples showed that local leaders and managers were finding creative ways to address the challenge of VET workforce development, despite structural constraints like recruitment and retention issues related to salary structures.

Conclusions

- 4.50 The thematic analysis of curriculum and delivery aspects provided some detailed insights into how VET could be taken forward operationally in relation to IVET-CVET differentiation.
- 4.51 It was apparent that policy decisions influence VET curriculum design and delivery. For example, the approval of qualifications and the funding that they attract often defines the curriculum offer. Such an approach could be more suitable for IVET, where young people undertake longer, full-time courses or apprenticeships. For CVET it can result in the older cohort undertaking provision that is not entirely suited to their or employers' needs. For CVET learners there should be greater use of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and bite-sized upskilling courses such as those available via personal learning accounts (PLA). The flexibility of qualifications is crucial to enable an agile VET system. The time lag to develop new qualifications (two to three years) creates a drag on the system and the product might lack relevance when it finally comes to market.
- 4.52 For IVET learners and apprentices, the enrichment curriculum is important and helps address issues of parity of esteem with academic pathways.

Recognising and recording transversal and transferable skills is essential for both IVET and CVET learners and apprentices. For CVET the positioning of core and additional curriculum content (as epitomised by the 'learning fields' approach) allows more flexible approaches to upskilling or reskilling for Green industries, for example. Both IVET and CVET play key roles in widening participation, access and inclusion. However, the precise ways this develops can be different across age groups and for some groups, such as disabled people, inequalities persist across all ages.

- 4.53 High quality delivery is paramount to both IVET and CVET. This is underpinned by teachers and assessors having contemporary vocational knowledge and having up-to-date resources to deliver. VET workforce development is a key concern of delivery partners, especially in sectors where wage differentials make it hard to recruit vocationally relevant teachers. However, VET providers are taking some innovative approaches to ensure their own skills gaps are being met.
- 4.54 Clear curriculum pathways are essential but may become fractured due to local providers working in competition or not offering lower-level courses to enable progression. The provision of well-informed and impartial information advice and guidance is important for both IVET and CVET learners, but currently the offer is inconsistent and influenced by institutional competition particularly at the 16-19 phase.

5. Findings: Perspectives on the benefits and impact of VET

Introduction

- 5.1 There were few direct references in the evidence review to studies on the benefits and impact of vocational education and training, whether IVET or CVET. However, research on the wider benefits of education were cited which suggested that there was potential for exploring this theme with stakeholders. The Osnabrück Declaration proposed four principles that set the context for assessing the benefits of VET (to 2025)⁹¹. A process of working back from the outcomes and impact of VET helps define strategic and operational approaches that enable impact. For example, CEDEFOP research⁹² gives some insights into the intended benefits of both IVET and CVET. Swedish research argues for scrutiny of what constitutes ‘quality’ in VET and consequently present benefits in the context of workplace/occupational performance⁹³. Well-functioning and coordinated CVET systems accessible to all Europeans are essential to developing such a workforce and to empowering people to manage ever more complex and unpredictable working lives.⁹⁴
- 5.2 Stakeholders agreed that the benefits of an overall VET system were linked to its intended purpose. The lack of a clear statement of this purpose (see *The priorities and intended purposes of VET*, para 3.3) meant there was little immediate consensus on who the beneficiaries were and what was the best means of measuring success.
- 5.3 A range of indicators were put forward by stakeholders: employer satisfaction; learner satisfaction; GVA / productivity gains; skills levels (measured by the

⁹¹ Cedefop; EU20 (2020) [Osnabrück declaration 2020: on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies](#). (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁹² CEDEFOP; ETF (2021) [The importance of being vocational: challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade](#). Cedefop and ETF discussion paper. Luxembourg: Publications Office. (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁹³ Tsagalidis, Helena; Terning, Maria (2018) [A qualitative vocational education and training: Education for quantity or quality?](#) *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 8(1), 114–132. (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁹⁴ Cedefop (2020) [Adult Learning and Continuing Vocational Education and Training Valued by Europeans](#). Cedefop briefing note, November 2020. (accessed 08/08/2023)

proxy of qualifications); average earnings; and social return on investment modelling:

‘[We need] a collective sense what sustains particular industries in Wales, and [which of] those industries generate wealth for certain communities and make those places viable places to live.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

Beneficiaries of the VET system

- 5.4 The evidence review showed analyses of impact are sometimes segmented according to the benefits accruing to employers, individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. A three-country study showed that the positive impacts of dual system IVET decline over time for students in the 25-64 age group⁹⁵ The research showed initial ‘credentials’ have more immediate impact at the early stages of an individual’s career and less as the individual progresses through their working life. This finding reflects those of other studies which attribute that ‘decline’ in positive impacts on career outcomes to highly occupation-specific skills gained at IVET stage. In fact, ‘later-career disadvantage seems most prominent in countries with a strong VET sector.’⁹⁶
- 5.5 When pressed, stakeholders decided individuals were the main beneficiaries of the VET system, and they experience multiple benefits: occupational; progression to employment; better work; sustained work; wellbeing; mental health. What works for the individual will work for employers and wider society. For employers, the benefits were largely economic: increased productivity; filling skills gaps; and upskilling the current workforce:

⁹⁵ Hoidn, Sabine; Šťastný, Vít (2023) [Labour Market Success of Initial Vocational Education and Training Graduates: A Comparative Study of Three Education Systems in Central Europe](#). *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 75(4), 629-653. (accessed 31/7/2023)

⁹⁶ Neyt, Brecht; Omeij, Eddy; Verhaest, Dieter; Baert, Stijn (2017) [Does Student Work Really Affect Educational Outcomes? A Review of the Literature](#), IZA Discussion Papers 11023, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) (accessed 31/07/2023)

‘The whole of society benefits from strong vocational education in creating an educated, mobile workforce who can move around, earn, and contribute to society.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

5.6 One organisational stakeholder put forward the view that IVET in Wales was picking up some of the work that youth services used to do in re-engaging young people. For the benefits that accrue to society, it was felt a counterfactual analysis should be carried out that analysed the cost of *not* engaging underrepresented or disadvantaged groups.

5.7 Another side of the counterfactual argument was expressed as ‘what if we don’t invest? People will leave Wales because there are opportunities elsewhere.’

‘Most of our businesses that have got young apprentices ... see the value of those young people in their business, and they support them through. However the benefits extend beyond the individual, as the impact of people being NEET is wider than the economic.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

‘Vocational learners tend to stay in the local economy.’ (Expert/sector stakeholder)

Measurement of the impact of VET

5.8 Organisational stakeholders gave a number of examples of how the impact of VET could be measured. For employers, productivity measures and the ‘bottom line’ was seen as critical. Another stakeholder suggested that if a good apprenticeship is an education for a career rather than training for a job, a percentage should be allocated for employers to ensure sustainable jobs. Keeping people employed is a measure of success due to wage differentials post apprenticeship.

5.9 For education stakeholders, participation in VET was the starting point. From that position, there could be analyses of ‘added value’ for the individual and employer. Learner voice (surveys, forums, etc.) was seen as critical in terms of

linking so-called 'subjective' measures of impact to the wider societal outcomes of VET.

Transferable and transversal skills

- 5.10 The evidence review highlighted a German analysis of the positioning and impact of transferable skills⁹⁷. The framework that emerged from this research has potential in informing the implementation of VET programmes. Further research⁹⁸ provides detailed insights into the relevance of 'transversal' (or cross-cutting) competences including supporting the interaction between work and education sites of learning.
- 5.11 CEDEFOP has analysed the positioning of transversal skills alongside general and vocational skills. Its research in this area⁹⁹ signposts the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, and Occupations (ESCO) categories of transversal skills as: core skills and competences; thinking skills and competences; self-management skills and competences; social and communication skills and competences; physical and manual skills and competences; and life skills and competences.
- 5.12 As outlined in preceding sections, stakeholders were keen to highlight the importance of transferable skills. In terms of their measurement, one of the challenges was seen as enabling certification to recognise this range of skills, which often differ across sectors and subject. Although skills are often transferable across a sector (such as retail), how different business apply those skills is often based on specific company policies.
- 5.13 Digital badges, as used for example in Australia¹⁰⁰, were seen by one stakeholder as a means of recording transferable skills and retaining them to

⁹⁷ Noack, Martin (2020) [A Common Framework for Transversable Skills](#) (accessed 08/08/2023)

⁹⁸ Calero López, Inmaculada; Rodríguez-López, Beatriz (2020) [The relevance of transversal competences in vocational education and training: a bibliometric analysis](#). *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 12(12), 1-19. (accessed 31/07/2023)

⁹⁹ CEDEFOP (2021) [Transversal skills and competences](#). The future of VET in Europe. Parallel Session 1 – Transversal skills and the VET curriculum (26th November 2020). (accessed 31/7/2023)

¹⁰⁰ And McGovern, Terry M. (2019) [Academic digital badges: industry, employment, and prospects](#). University of South Florida. (accessed 21/09/2023)

enable portability to other employment and learning settings. Such skills are regarded as hard to record easily as they have to be observed in practice.

- 5.14 Apprentices should have the same expectation of learning transferable skills as those on other pathways. One stakeholder pointed to the work of Urdd¹⁰¹ in balancing workplace skills and interpersonal skills and how they link. An international stakeholder pointed to the work on 'meta skills' in Scotland. Skills Development Scotland have created a framework for assessing meta skills.¹⁰²

Conclusions

- 5.15 The thematic analysis of the benefits and impact of VET explored the way vocational education contributes to the Welsh economy and society. The positive impact of VET on the individual is the basis for wider social, employer, and economic impacts.
- 5.16 In terms of IVET-CVET differentiation, the key issue was how vocational education meets the needs of individuals in those age cohorts. Within the strategy and systems theme, we saw how the different needs of age cohorts led to different priorities for each. But within the IVET and CVET cohorts there are subgroups whom VET benefits in different ways. For example, IVET and an effective re-engagement activity helps reduce societal costs of young people at risk of becoming NEET. Flexible tailored CVET also helps re-engage economically inactive adults over the age of 50 when linked to wider lifelong learning approaches. In other words, the precise purpose of the activity should link directly to the expected outcomes and impact, as well as how these are measured.
- 5.17 Employers, and their productivity, are a key beneficiary of both IVET and CVET. However, this could be better explained and nuanced based on the type of employer (by size, sector, region etc.) For example, IVET can help address skills shortages through providing new entrants to the labour market. The main purpose of CVET is in terms of upskilling, reskilling and re-entry to

¹⁰¹ See: [Urdd - Apprenticeships](#) (accessed 08/08/2023)

¹⁰² Skills Development Scotland (2018). [Skills 4.0](#). (accessed 08/08/2023)

the workplace. Therefore, any framework designed to help measure the impact of VET would need to take this range of purposes into consideration.

- 5.18 Whatever the approach to impact measurement taken, transferable or transversal skills are a key element to measure as a mediator of impact. This will require new or commonly adopted approaches to record the attainment of microcredentials, for example, through digital portfolios.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 This review aimed to examine and test the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system in Wales which differentiates IVET and CVET. The research used a thematic approach to seek to answer key research questions on: the criteria to be used to determine if programmes should be included in IVET/CVET; the value of using age as a criterion to differentiate IVET from CVET; the broader implications of adopting an IVET/CVET distinction in Wales; and the overall benefits of establishing an IVET/CVET based skills system.
- 6.2 Central to the question of IVET/CVET differentiation is what a country wishes to achieve from its VET policy and how it is able to implement it. These aspects of the desk research indicated that the first step was to have an overarching VET policy within which the role of IVET and CVET components were defined. The next step was to have addressed issues around the operational delivery of VET policy. The thematic approach provided a format for stakeholders to address these aspects of VET policy and practice, and explore what the impact of VET in Wales.
- 6.3 The first part of this section presents conclusions from a thematic analysis of the research findings, as follows:
- Strategic and systemic aspects of VET.
 - Curriculum and delivery aspects of VET.
 - Benefits and impact of VET.
- 6.4 This is followed by conclusions on the implications for the differentiation of IVET and CVET in Wales, and associated challenges, risks and dependencies.

Strategic and systemic aspects of VET

- 6.5 Both the desk research and fieldwork phases of this project highlighted the importance of an integrated VET system. Any proposed changes (around differentiation by age) need to fit into current VET policy and align with Welsh Government's wider policies and strategies. However, articulation of VET policy needs to be better with defined responsibilities for all partners. The priority is to work with stakeholders on a wider VET strategy (including the respective roles of IVET and CVET).
- 6.6 Stakeholder responses indicated that many positive features are already in place, but some parts of the system do not articulate well and lack coherence. Collaboration between employers and learning providers is essential for a multi-dimensional VET system as seen in the literature. This is currently inconsistent across Wales, for example, with the key role of regional partnerships (bringing together spatial and sectoral aspects) regarded as better resourced in some areas than others.
- 6.7 Young people and mature adults have differing educational and social needs, which is reflected in the type of provision both groups access. However, the age of IVET and CVET cohorts, as defined by CEDEFOP, are not homogenous. The needs of those in the 16-19 age group and those 20-24 years are not the same. Likewise, the needs of everyone over the age of 25 years are not the same. The challenge is to design a system flexible enough to respond to a wide range of needs.
- 6.8 The link between IVET and upper secondary education makes it clear schools are a key partner in any VET system. The Curriculum for Wales provides a strong foundation building on notions of 'readiness' in terms of capabilities and resilience post-pandemic. Degree apprenticeships help provide a clear line of sight for young people to higher level skills and address concerns around parity of esteem between the academic/vocational routes.
- 6.9 CVET covers about 40 years of working life and covers reskilling, upskilling, and enabling re-entry to the labour market. Thus, CVET policy naturally aligns

with lifelong learning in recognising the diversity of the adult population. Such policies often link closely with those around health and wellbeing, particularly for economically inactive adults over 50 years.

- 6.10 Dual systems combining learning in workplace and educational settings are an integral part of effective VET systems across Europe. The IVET dual system is weighted towards off-the-job training and preparation for workplace entry, especially at the early stages of programmes. In CVET, the balance is more likely to be towards on-the-job training. Apprenticeships, as the dominant dual approach, are all-age with one 'brand' which is perceived as targeted towards and more suited to young people. Flexible delivery is critical to effective CVET delivery, which includes modular delivery and accreditation, including both synchronous and asynchronous approaches that fit around other adult commitments. The vocational qualification system is under review to help address concerns around responsiveness and agility.
- 6.11 The development of the VET workforce is critical as seen in both the literature and stakeholder responses. This requires a clear plan linked to emerging policy. Within this plan, the priority is the recruitment and upskilling of vocational teachers, trainers and assessors in Wales.
- 6.12 The future role of CTER in leading a single tertiary education and research system is seen as positive: ensuring parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways; systematically engaging, and building capacity, employers of all sizes and in all sectors; and ensuring any planning is future-focussed by foresight reviews. The pace of change is such that what has worked in the past, in previously effective VET systems, might not be future-ready.

Curriculum and delivery aspects of VET

- 6.13 The approval of qualifications and the funding that they attract often defines the curriculum offer in Wales. Such an approach could be more suitable for IVET, where young people undertake longer, full-time courses or apprenticeships. For CVET it can result in the older cohort undertaking

provision that is not entirely suited to their needs or employers' needs. For CVET learners there should be greater use of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and bite-sized upskilling courses such as those available via personal learning accounts (PLAs). The flexibility of qualifications is crucial to enable an agile VET system. The time lag to develop new qualifications (two to three years) creates a drag on the system and the product might lack relevance when it finally comes to market.

- 6.14 In IVET, the enrichment curriculum is particularly important and helps address issues of parity of esteem with academic pathways. For CVET the positioning of core and additional curriculum content allows more flexible approaches. Both IVET and CVET play key roles in widening participation, access and inclusion.
- 6.15 High quality delivery is paramount in both IVET and CVET. This is underpinned by teachers and assessors having contemporary vocational knowledge and having up-to-date resources to deliver. VET workforce development is a key concern of delivery partners, especially in sectors where wage differentials make it hard to recruit vocationally relevant teachers.
- 6.16 Clear curriculum pathways and the provision of well-informed and impartial information advice and guidance is important in IVET and CVET. The provision of well-informed and impartial information, advice and guidance is currently inconsistent across IVET and CVET, and impartiality is negatively affected by institutional competition in the 16-19 phase.

Benefits and impact of VET

- 6.17 The positive impact of VET on the individual is the basis for wider social, employer, and economic impacts. Within the IVET and CVET cohorts there are subgroups whom VET benefits in different ways. For example, IVET and an effective re-engagement activity helps reduce societal costs of young people at risk of becoming NEET. Flexible tailored CVET also helps re-engage economically inactive adults over the age of 50 when linked to wider lifelong learning approaches.

- 6.18 Employers, and their productivity, are a key beneficiary of both IVET and CVET. However, this could be better explained and nuanced based on the type of employer. Any framework designed to help measure the impact of VET would need to consider a range of purposes and indicators.
- 6.19 Whatever the approach to impact measurement, transferable or transversal skills are a key element to measure as a mediator of impact. This will require new or commonly adopted approaches to record the attainment of microcredentials, for example, through digital portfolios.

Implications for the differentiation of IVET and CVET

- 6.20 Both the desk research and fieldwork phases of this project highlighted implications of a move towards differentiation of IVET and CVET in both policymaking and delivery. It is clear from the evidence review that such differentiation, where it is effective, is part of a clear, overarching (and often well-embedded) VET policy. That clarity does not currently exist among stakeholders in Wales. The overall implication is that differentiation of IVET and CVET needs to be part of a review of VET policy in general. There are some useful pointers that have emerged during this project of areas for consideration in terms of differentiating the offer for IVET and CVET learners (including apprentices). The first of these is 'age' differentiation (as in the CEDEFOP definition of IVET and CVET) and Wales adopts the age of 25 as the point at which policy changes. This has implications for the entitlement of individuals whose needs can change at different 'stages' across the life course.
- 6.21 Some stages (such as the point some women or men return to the workplace after caring responsibilities) do not fall neatly into age groups. Other age-related issues (such as the likelihood of poorer health affecting the ability to do manual work, typically in mid-life) could result in the need for a total retraining offer more akin to IVET than CVET. The message is clear: whatever system is adopted needs to be flexible. Notions of flexibility and agility also extend to the concept of 'future readiness' expressed by stakeholders in Wales and

internationally. Thus 'age', 'stage', and 'mode of study' (full-time, part-time, online, hybrid and blended approaches) need to be considered in combination as part of one policy and not as separate initiatives.

- 6.22 The effectiveness of dual systems (that combine on- and off-the-job learning) has some implications for the differentiation of IVET and CVET. Some effective IVET is undertaken entirely off-the-job and most CVET is in the workplace. The differentiation of IVET and CVET should not be the basis for establishing effective dual systems. Approaches to VET such as apprenticeships are part of a range of approaches to support initial training, upskilling and reskilling in Wales. However, as we have seen, apprenticeships in Wales are dependent on the wider UK context particularly as regards employer choice of where to invest. Apprenticeship funding should not become the driver for inappropriate programmes of learning being chosen that risk skills duplication or a brand that older workers perceive as solely a route for young people.

Challenges

- 6.23 Whatever system is adopted, one crucial and persistent theme is employer involvement and commitment to VET. Employer engagement (on a continuum from consultation to full involvement) needs to be fully understood in a wide range of contexts: employer size, its sector, and scope of operation.
- 6.24 The positioning of the Welsh language within VET needs consideration on both supply and demand sides. The lack of availability of qualifications in Welsh affects the offer to potential learners, who may consequently choose an academic pathway. The VET workforce and careers advisors also need the Welsh language skills in the technical and vocational context.
- 6.25 Overall, the constant updating of the VET workforce remains a challenge whatever system is adopted due to the fast-changing nature of industrial innovation and the changing needs of the economy.

Risks

- 6.26 The differentiation of IVET and CVET risks becoming a distraction that may be confusing for effective employer engagement. Differentiation can potentially create boundaries that hinder collaboration in VET system and smooth career-based pathways. There are also concerns that differentiation by age could bring increased complexity to a VET system that is already not well-understood and could also bring increased bureaucracy for employers and learning providers. However, it is hard to assess either the likelihood or impact of such a risk without seeing the policy detail. Many of the stakeholder responses were made 'in principle' and not on the basis of predictive analysis (for example, of learner numbers or achievements).

Dependencies

- 6.27 The move to IVET-CVET differentiation cannot be separated from a complete strategic review of VET policy in general. Both the desk research and fieldwork phases of this project provide some useful indications of the foundations for this and how Welsh Government and CTER might approach it. One dependency would be the full and meaningful engagement of all stakeholders - including parents, students and apprentices - as in this research process, but scaled up. The current research team have noted a willingness to engage in this process in the spirit of collaboration that is a characteristic of policymaking in Wales. Policy development needs to move beyond the two responsible ministries (Economy and Education) to embrace all aspects of devolved government.
- 6.28 The establishment of CTER means Wales is well-placed to take this forward across government and across the totality of stakeholders. In doing so, CTER will need to address current imbalances in resources and power, where some parts of the education system are perceived as having a stronger voice than others. Neglecting this reform role risks creating a VET system that reinforces current imbalances and is therefore less future ready. A move to more flexible approaches will require a rebalancing of funding, including for individuals,

across the IVET/CVET age divide. To invest so much of society's resources at that segment of the workforce under the age of 25, is no guarantee that investment will not be necessary in the future.

- 6.29 Some organisational stakeholders expressed the concern that CTER might not have the resources to take forward a reform agenda at the same time as maintaining current (merged) systems. Likewise, reform would be dependent on educational institutions' willingness to share resources.
- 6.30 Whatever future-ready VET system is adopted in Wales, careers information advice and guidance is crucial. To differentiate careers advice based on IVET and CVET might be effective. However, it is clear that the careers promotion of benefits of VET at all ages to individuals and employers is not currently fit-for-purpose and perpetuates what is perceived as the privileging of academic over vocational routes.

7. Key considerations

7.1 **Key consideration 1: Welsh Government should develop an overarching vocational education and training strategy.** Internationally, effective vocational education is based on governments having a clear strategy that engages all partners in co-delivery. Stakeholders told us this was not present in Wales. The differentiation of approaches by age (IVET-CVET) is dependent on the overarching vision of such a strategy, how it aligns with other age-related policies, and its key delivery elements: funding, qualifications¹⁰³, spatial planning (such as regional skills partnerships), sectoral engagement, careers advice, and a workforce that delivers all of these.

7.2 The planning principles should be based on those in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015¹⁰⁴:

- **Collaboration** - to build on current policy development work with all stakeholders to draft and consult on a VET strategy that links with pre-16 education, lifelong learning policy, and other policy areas such as economy and health.
- **Integration** - to ensure the strategy explicitly aligns with the work of other public bodies in Wales and skills policy across the UK (such as apprenticeships funding policies and National Occupational Standards).
- **Involvement** - to fully involve all people with an interest in VET in Wales, such as parents, young people and vulnerable adults through forums, panels and other approaches.
- **Long-term** - to plan for the future as well as delivering on the short-term needs of employers and individuals, by undertaking foresights reviews and involvement in transnational studies such as OECD's international survey of adult skills.
- **Prevention** - to act to ensure that current inequalities around access to skills do not persist to impact on health and wellbeing inequalities in

¹⁰³ Taking into account the recommendations to the forthcoming Lusher Review of VQs

¹⁰⁴ Welsh Government (2015) [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#)

Wales (by developing a VET Impact Framework that shows the wider outcomes of VET on individuals, employers, and communities).

- 7.3 **Key consideration 2: Welsh Government should ensure the remit of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research includes sufficient direction and resource to focus on vocational education reform.** The establishment of CTER is welcomed as an opportunity to develop VET within the post-16 education and research portfolio. CTER can act as a single voice to work with schools, regional stakeholders, employers and local government to ensure a coherent post-16 system, including qualifications.
- 7.4 Within this, CTER's role in determining how apprenticeships are commissioned and funded is crucial, particularly in relation to all-age approaches and how apprenticeships work across the border with England. Its guardianship of apprenticeship frameworks, working with regional, sectoral and other stakeholders should introduce greater flexibility into the system. Likewise, it is important to reach out to schools, parents and older workers to address and reinforce positive perceptions of the apprenticeship brand.
- 7.5 CTER should also undertake analysis of the balance of resources across the life course and determine whether 'age' or 'stage' (or a combination of both) are the best criteria for allocation.
- 7.6 **Key consideration 3: In its response to the Review of Vocational Qualifications in Wales, Welsh Government should consider the findings of this report.**
- 7.7 The Lusher Review reflected the fast-changing external environment which VET in Wales operates in. There is a need for vocational qualifications to articulate better to support clear and flexible vocational pathways, to increase responsiveness to rapidly changing skills needs. Consideration of the extent to which qualifications are 'Made in Wales' or 'Made for Wales' should be explored, particularly in terms of partnerships with other devolved UK nations that use National Occupational Standards.

- 7.8 **Key consideration 4: Welsh Government should enable the Education Workforce Council to take forward a review of the needs of VET ‘dual professionals’ in Wales, to inform the development of future policy.** An up-to-date and competent workforce is critical to effective VET systems and delivery. Despite encouraging local initiatives, stakeholders report concerns in two key areas: recruitment and professional updating. There is much to be learned from approaches in other countries, for example England, where the Education and Training Foundation has implemented initiatives to support dual professionalism and recruitment from industrial sectors with higher salary structures than education.
- 7.9 **Key consideration 5: Welsh Government should ensure intermediary bodies have sufficient resource and plans in place to promote VET regionally and locally.**
- 7.10 Despite examples of proactive work by careers agencies and regional bodies (RSPs, City-Regions etc.) the overall picture lacked consistency, which stakeholders perceived to be due to capacity and capability issues. If regional and local delivery is key to effective VET systems, government needs to ensure it has coherence so that some areas and communities are not disadvantaged. To this end:
- Each Regional Skills Partnership should develop a ‘VET Action Plan’¹⁰⁵ to a common format, which shows how it prioritises sectors locally, engages employers of all sizes, and allocates flexible funds (such as skills and talent programmes).
 - Careers services should publish plans on how they work with schools, parents, young people, and older workers to promote VET.
 - Local authorities should co-ordinate and monitor how schools promote vocational education opportunities locally and report on this.

¹⁰⁵ This might already exist of course ... but perhaps not in a common format, or in public domain.

- 7.11 **Key consideration 6: Welsh Government should continue to test and evaluate innovative VET policies that encourage responsiveness and flexible delivery.**
- 7.12 Stakeholders welcomed innovative approaches developed and funded by Welsh Government, such as Personal Learning Accounts and grants to support the development of vocational qualifications in the medium of Welsh. Such initiatives should be continued and evaluated to inform future policy development.
- 7.13 Another area for consideration (if not raised as part of 5.3) is the way the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is operationalised consistently in Wales. The RPL of certificated learning should be extended to informal and non-formal learning to enable greater responsiveness to sectoral needs (for example in health and social care).
- 7.14 **Key consideration 7: Education providers and employers should offer enrichment opportunities for vocational learners and apprentices in the 16-24 cohort.**
- 7.15 Enrichment is a key element of academic pathways and there are no reasons why such opportunities should not be consistently offered to vocational learners and apprentices. This should reflect the holistic approach of the Curriculum for Wales and encourage 'readiness' in a number of ways: for fair work, community involvement, wellbeing, and active citizenship. Such an approach should include involvement with the Taith international exchange programme.

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Annex A – Research Protocol

Rapid Evidence Review Research Protocol

This document sets out the research questions, the search strategy and the eligibility criteria used to decide if retrieved studies will be included in the literature review in the interim/final reports.

1. Research questions

This research project aims to offer an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) in Wales. The research questions driving the search of evidence:

2. What lessons can be learned from the implementation of IVET/CVET model in Europe over the past 12 years? Especially, in relation to
 - a) What are the drivers of implementing differentiated IVET/CVET systems?
 - i. Are there examples of EU countries who considered moving to a differentiated system but decided not to?
 - b) Which programmes and courses have proven to be better suited for IVET or CVET?
 - i. Does skill and other short-cycle, modular and flexible programmes pertain solely to CVET? Conversely, has bite-sized learning proven suitable for IVET?
 - ii. Should school-based programmes be included in and pre-vocational courses (e.g., foundation courses, junior apprenticeships) excluded from IVET?
 - iii. What is best practice on apprenticeships and employability programmes that are both IVET and CVET?
 - c) What is the merit and pitfalls of using age criteria to differentiate IVET from CVET?
 - i. Has IVET been restricted to those aged 14—24 years?
 - ii. In dual skill systems, do people 25+ who undertake VET for the first time fall under CVET? Has this proven effective?
 - d) How has the content and delivery of IVET/CVET been tailored to the needs, ages, and experiences of different learner groups? Has it impacted learners differently?
 - e) Have cohesive IVET/CVET skills systems allowed for permeability (e.g., moving between a vocational and academic route)?
3. Which approaches appear to be the most and least successful in establishing an IVET/CVET-based skills system in Europe?
 - a) Are there differences by delivery model or funding arrangements?
 - b) Are there differences by employer size/sector?

c) Are there differences by learner demographic groups and needs?

Note: In the evidence synthesis phase, we anticipate being able to break down these research questions into a number of sub-themes.

2. Searching for evidence

To obtain the most relevant pieces of evidence for the research questions outlined above, our search strategy will involve targeting keywords present in the title and the abstract. We will search the following databases, libraries and directories: Core, DOAJ, EconPapers, Labordoc, ERIC, CLEAR, Scopus, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and VOCEDplus

2.1. Search terms

The following table outlines the suggested keywords to be used to identify relevant sources of evidence. During the review, we will test different combinations of keywords. Depending on initial results, we will refine the keywords.

Group	keywords
Main subject	Dual VET, IVET, CVET, dual vocational education and training, dual training,
Target population	Adult, post-16, post-18, lifelong, life-long, work, workplace
Intervention type	skills, education, training, course*, learn*, teach*, intervention*, programme*, project*, curriculum, policy, policies, approach*, practice, provision, apprenticeship*, traineeship*, placement*, work experience, upskilling, reskilling

Search terms will be combined into search strings using Boolean operators (AND/OR) and other database-specific search operators. The literature searches and databases accessed will be fully documented in a Research Extraction Sheet (RES) and outlined in our final report to WG.

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We will screen the titles and abstracts (or summaries) of evidence retrieved returned through the searches based on the following criteria to decide whether (i) they appropriately answer the core research questions and (ii) will be reviewed in full:

Theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population characteristics or context	Learners aged 16 and over	Learners under 16
Target skills	Targeted fully or at least partly at vocational and occupational skills	

Geographical scope of the study	UK, EU Member States OECD countries where this is relevant and there is potential for transferability	Non-UK, Non-EU Member States; Unless relevant and useful information is found for OECD countries
Language of publication	English and Welsh	Any other language
Methods	All (experimental, quasi-experimental, descriptive, mixed-methods, qualitative/quantitative etc.)	No quantitative or qualitative methods used
Publication date	After 2010	Before 2010
Study type	Peer reviewed journal articles; non-peer reviewed academic outputs (reports, working papers, evaluation studies etc.); government documents and reports; book chapters and publications by other research organisations; conference papers and proceedings	Whole books or other work of equivalent length. Newspaper articles, blog posts, editorials/opinion pieces, magazine articles. Theses and dissertations.

2.3. Targeted search

In addition to our systematic literature searches, we will seek to add other studies and grey literature through forward and backward citation chaining, noting in the Research Extraction Sheet whether sources were identified via snowballing or a structured search.

To cover a large range of material, we will also carry out a targeted search on a number of websites for relevant material, including:

- Specialist policy and research institute: e.g., The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, CEDEFOP, Institute of Employment Research,
- The websites and publications of European VET providers and associations: EfVET (European Forum for Vocational Education and Training, EVBB (European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training), and EVTA (European Vocational Training Association)
- Policy organisations and think tanks: OECD, ILO, the World Bank

We will then screen evidence retrieved using the inclusion and exclusion criteria described above and review in fully the materials that met those criteria.

We anticipate that these searches will yield sufficient relevant evidence. If not, we will consider issuing a call for evidence through our contacts within the VET sector.

3. Recording and sifting the evidence

We will maintain a list of retrieved references in a reference management software, Zotero. Zotero is a free, open-source reference management programme that can organise, tag, and carry out sophisticated searches while storing citation data (such as author, title, and publisher fields).

To ensure our searches are comprehensive and transparent, we will use a Research Extraction Sheet in MS Excel to record search terms, sources accessed, and date of the search. For each piece of evidence, we will record

- Title
- Author(s)
- Type of publication
- Publication date
- Source
- Country/Region of focus
- Abstract/Executive summary
- Research design/methodology
- Demographic group of interest (e.g. learners 16-24, 25+, 19+, learners with no previous qualifications)
- Summary of findings
- Limitations
- Quality score

4. Assessing the quality of evidence

We suggest using the criteria shown in the table below to assess which evidence qualifies for a comprehensive examination. The evaluation of the evidence's quality will be based on (i) validity of findings, (ii) methodological rigour, and (iii) relevance of the study to the research questions. The highest scoring evidence will be prioritised in the evidence synthesis stage.

Quality appraisal criteria

Principle	Description	Scoring
Relevance	Does the study directly address the research topic?	1–3
	Study is unrelated to and does not address the research questions.	1 No
	Study is partly related to and addresses the research questions.	2 Partly
	Study is immediately related to and addresses the research questions.	3 Yes
Validity of findings	Does the study assess the quality of the studies/data included?	1–3
	Study has not been peer-reviewed, with conclusions drawn from limited data or theoretical discussion. Lack of transparency around data and no discussion of data quality. No discussion around assumptions made.	1 No
	Study is unpublished, or study is informally published as a working paper/research report by a reliable source. Limited discussion around sources, information and data quality, or alternative interpretations of research findings. Study focuses on an ongoing intervention with adequate discussion around assumptions made.	2 Partly
	Study is published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Study discusses alternative causes of impact and limitations. Study focuses on a completed initiative. Findings can be generalised to other contexts and populations.	3 Yes
Methodological rigour	Does the study appropriately describe where and how studies/data were selected for inclusion?	1–3
	Methodology is not fit-for-purpose and relies on before-and-after or cross-sectional comparisons with no use of control variables. This score will also be given to qualitative studies with unclear/inadequate	1 No

	sampling strategies. No discussion of why the chosen design and method are well-suited to answering the research question.	
	Methodology is fit-for-purpose and relies on adequate control variables, though important unobserved differences may be remaining. This score will also be given to high-quality qualitative studies (surveys, focus groups, case studies) with robust sampling strategies. Some discussion of why the chosen design and method are well-suited to answering the research question.	2 Partly
	Methodology exploits quasi-randomness in treatment or explicit randomisation into treatment and control groups ³⁸ . The study provides clear evidence on comparability of treatment and control groups. Extensive discussion of why the chosen design and method are well-suited to answering the research question. Literature reviews and meta-analyses will also receive this score.	3 Yes
Score (Sum)	Considering the above categories, what is the total score?	3 - 9

Scoring: 0-3 Low [Excluded] 4-6 Medium 7-9 High

At the end of the retrieval process the scores will be compared by the researchers to check the consistency of the way evidence has been rated. Evidence scoring below 3 will be excluded from analysis.

Annex B – Topic Guides



Review of Skills System in Wales

Stakeholder Topic Guide

Information for researcher

Aim of the project

To provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) in Wales and test the evidence identified with experts and sector representatives.

Purpose of the stakeholder interviews:

- To discuss the evidence gathered from the desktop review to gain further insight from the stakeholders.
- To focus on the skills implications of a move to IVET/CVET.

Our approach:

The first section of the topic guides will be used for all interviews. The second section will be adjusted to the expertise and background of the interviewee to gain further insights on the potential benefits and challenges of re-focusing the skills system in Wales into initial (16-24) and continuing (25+) education.

Introductory statement

“First of all, thank you for taking the time to speak to me today. I’m MR / CF working as an associate for L&W on this project.

The aim of this project is to provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training IVET (16-24) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training CVET (25+) in Wales and then to test the evidence identified, with experts and sector representatives such as yourselves. Findings from the review will feed into both the Welsh Government’s and the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research’s policy thinking/considerations.

The project has been divided into two phases:

- a rigorous review which explored the evidence for establishing a skills system which differentiates IVET / CVET
- engagement with experts and representatives of the sectors of interest, to test the practical implications of the desktop review and gain further insight.

The evidence review (now completed) explored the respective roles of (IVET) and (CVET).

Across Europe, IVET is generally for 16-24 year olds and CVET for those aged 25+. Under the IVET model, people gain skills and/or competences to enter into a specific occupation/sector. Nonetheless, IVET is an evolving concept in many countries and could be considered to include alternative pathways to the academic routes that contain elements of an academic education at a tertiary level, or university education.”

CVET is broadly defined as ‘education or training after initial education and training — or after entry into working life’ (CEDEFOP), where the aim is to help people to acquire or further their knowledge and skills, and/or to continue their personal or professional development. As such, its parameters are variable but include on-the-job training, retraining and upskilling.

In the interview I shall be referring to both IVET, CVET and so-called ‘dual systems’ that combine education and workplace settings.”

Purpose of interview: *“We are now in the second phase of the project and the purpose of this interview is for me to build on the understanding gained through our evidence review. We hope you have had the opportunity to refer to our briefing on emerging findings. Please feel free to ask us about any points of interest.*

There are two stages to this interview:

- *The first focuses on general questions related to the evidence review*
- *The second is where I hope to explore specific areas of interest based on your work with [add organisation/ sector]*

“There will be time at the end to revisit any areas you think have not been covered sufficiently.

Confidentiality and consent

“Everything you say today will remain confidential. Findings from the interviews will be included in a report to the Welsh government. This report will be published, however, direct quotes used in reports will be anonymous and all identifying details will be removed.

“Finally, do you mind if I audio record our interview today? This means I can concentrate on what you are saying now and can make more detailed notes later. The recording will be

made on an encrypted recorder and uploaded onto our secure sever, and only the project team will have access to it. Recordings will be transcribed, then analysed by the L&W project team and deleted three months after the project ends.

“You can change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time by contacting us and we will delete the recording and transcript of your interview and remove any direct (anonymised) quotes from any drafts of the final report.

“Do you have any questions before we begin?”

Interview Questions

Part One: General Questions

“The evidence review identified three broad themes that will be explored in this interview:

- strategic and systemic aspects of developing VET policy*
- delivery and curriculum considerations*
- benefits and impact of the VET*

“I’ll take each of these in turn, but there will be an opportunity to return to any point at the end.

1. Strategic and systemic aspects of developing VET policy

- a. The evidence review found that VET priorities were often country-specific, what would you say are the priorities for VET in Wales?*
- b. How closely aligned would you say VET policy is to general social and economic policy in Wales?*
- c. To what extent do you think VET policy in Wales is responsive to employers’ skills needs?*
- d. What would you say are the key features of an effective VET system in Wales? Why do you say that? [Prompt: dual systems]*
- e. Who are the key stakeholders in developing VET policy in Wales? Which of these have a critical role? Why do you say that?*
- f. Are there any countries you think have an effective VET system? Why?*
- g. What do you think should be the key differences between IVET and CVET in Wales?*
- h. Do you think it is effective to differentiate between IVET and CVET going forward? Why do you say that?*
- i. One aspect of the evidence review was the importance of flexible and permeable pathways that cross the so-called academic/vocational divide. How could this work in Wales?*
- j. What do you think should be the role of qualifications and accreditation in effective VET policy?*

2. Delivery and curriculum considerations

- a. *What are (or should be) the main operational drivers behind the development of the VET curriculum in Wales? Why do you say that?*
- b. *What are the components / ingredients of an effective VET curriculum? [Prompt: dual systems]*
- c. *What is the role of VET in developing general and transferable skills alongside sectoral vocational skills? Are there any good examples?*
- d. *How should VET teachers, trainers and managers be developed and supported? Is there any effective practice you could point to—in Wales or farther afield?*
- e. *What is the role of widening participation in effective VET delivery? Any examples?*

3. Benefits and impact of VET

- a. *In your opinion what are the benefits of VET for individuals, employers, and communities? Is there a main beneficiary?*
- b. *How should the impact of VET in Wales be measured? Which agencies would have a role in measurement of success?*
- c. *What is the best way of recognising and recording transversal / transferable skills?*

Part two: Specific Questions

“This is the final part of today’s interview, where we’d like to get a sense of specific issue affecting your colleagues and stakeholders. I know you have raised some of these already, but now is a chance to expand on them”:

National stakeholders (eg. TUC, Qualifications Wales, Careers Wales, HEFCW etc)

- Given your area of expertise [state] is there anything you’d like to add about issues affecting the learners and businesses you serve?
- [Prompt:] I’m thinking of permeability of pathways / access for those at the pre-apprenticeship level/ links with higher levels of study / higher level vocational qualifications
- How does the formation of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CETR) impact on VET reform?
- [Prompt:] I’m thinking about issues of capacity within the skills system to support VET developments.
- What are the implications for a bilingual nation and supporting learner choice in their preferred language of study?

Regional stakeholders (eg. RSPs)

- Are there any specific issues affecting the regions or your region in general regarding the development of VET in Wales?
- [Prompt:] How do you see the role of RSPs in supporting VET? LMI? Sectoral engagement?

- How does the formation of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CETR) impact on VET reform?
- What are the implications for a bilingual nation and supporting learner choice in their preferred language of study?

Education sector providers (eg. colleges, adult learning, ACT)

- How does the formation of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CETR) impact on VET reform?
- What are the implications for a bilingual nation and supporting learner choice in their preferred language of study?
- How do you see the various parts of the education sector working together on VET?

[Prompts:]

- Should there be an age range for distinguishing between IVET/ CVET?
- Should school-based programmes be included as IVET?
- Should programmes and short courses be solely the domain of CVET?
- Are there any issues of transition from educational to workplace settings? If so, how can they be addressed?
- What are the implications for apprenticeships and employability programmes?

Industrial sectors / businesses

- How does the formation of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CETR) impact on VET reform?
- Can you summarise the specific challenges facing employers, businesses and trade associations in your sector?
- [Prompt:] I'm thinking of permeability of pathways / access for those at the pre-apprenticeship level/ links with higher levels of study / higher level vocational qualifications
- Are there any issues of transition from educational to workplace settings? If so, how can they be addressed?

International agencies

[NB. Many of the general questions above will not have been addressed by these stakeholders. However, the value of these interviews will lie in the links between what CEDEFOP calls the multi-dimensional nature of stakeholder engagement in the EU and Europe generally. This involves strong partnerships between government, business, and civil society.]

- For you what have been the most successful / effective models of VET evidence internationally? Why do you say that?
- What specific aspects of this would you like to highlight?

- The review pointed to the importance of adaptive systems, are there any approaches to review and development of VET systems you're aware of?

Closing statement

"That completes our questions. Any areas not covered that you feel are important?"

Thank you for your time. The next steps in the process are:

- *L&W will combine the anonymised feedback from interviews in a report that includes findings from the evidence review and from learner focus groups.*
- *The final report will be submitted to Welsh Government in the autumn.*

[End]

Review of Skills System in Wales

Topic guide for focus group participants (16-19 YEARS)

Reminder for the interviewer of the project objective:

(L&W) has been commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake a review of the skills system in Wales. The project aims to provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) in Wales. The project will test/explore the evidence identified with experts, sector representatives and learners. Findings from the review will feed into the policy thinking of Welsh Government and the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.

Interviewer notes

This document is a guide to the principal themes and issues to be covered. Questions can be amended and followed up in more detail where necessary.

Introducing the research project to participants (3 minutes)

- Introduce self/other researchers. Thank the participants for taking part in the focus group.
- Explain that Learning and Work Institute is an independent research organisation, undertaking this research on behalf of Welsh Government.
- The aim of this research is to gather evidence and get people's views about if and how the skills system in Wales should be changed. The research is focused on Initial Vocational Education and Training - usually undertaken both immediately after school and when making the transition into working life - AND, what is sometimes known as Continuing Vocational Education and Training – vocational learning for adults with experience of work to enhance their skills and job opportunities.
- The aim of this focus group is to explore the needs, views and experiences of young people aged 16-19, in relation to vocational learning.
- The focus group will take no longer than 60 mins.

How participants' information will be used: Findings from the focus group will be used to help write a report for Welsh Government and to inform Welsh Government's thinking and planning on vocational education and training (VET) and the skills system. The report will be

published but all of the findings will be anonymised and the name of your employer or training provider will not be included. This means that anything you say will not be traced back to you.

Consent and ethical considerations: Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Thank participants for giving consent for the focus group and address any questions they have.

Reassurances: No right or wrong answers - we are simply asking for people's views and opinions. If need a break at any time, just let interviewer know. If there's any particular questions you don't want to talk about, that's also fine.

Reminder about audio recording: The discussion will be recorded via a voice recorder so we can accurately capture their views, and so that researchers can listen back when analysing the data. Only the research team will have access to the recordings. The recording will be deleted shortly after the focus group.

Incentive: Participants will receive a £20 Love2Shop voucher as a thank you. A link to access this will be emailed to them afterwards.

Any questions or concerns?

START RECORDING – Voice recorder and remind participants recording

Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Firstly, please could we go round the group so you can introduce yourselves, for example, your age, and to briefly tell us a bit about your current or recent vocational programme/training? This might be for example, an internship, work placement, apprenticeship or a short course to help to gain specific skills for work.

Prompt:

- Programme/training name and level
- Aim of programme/training
- Are they undertaking any Essential Skills qualifications as part of their training?
- When they started their programme and when they expect to finish (or duration of programme/training, if completed)
- Where took part in this (workplace, training centre etc)

A: Participants learning needs and aspirations from VET (15 minutes)

In the next few questions, we'd like to explore what led you to take part and what you wanted to achieve from taking part in your current/recent vocational programme/training.

2. Before starting your current programme, what did you know about vocational education and training (VET), and what were your main reasons for taking part?

Probe:

- How aware would you say you were about different VET routes/options available to you? Did you have any particular views about different VET routes, for example that some might be more valuable than others? Prospects for employment?
- Influences in choosing VET pathways eg family, peers, teachers, role models, own values and interests, careers advice.
- What did you hope to gain from your current programme/training?

Probe:

- Opportunity to gain hands-on experience of work/workplace environment
- Improve employability and gain qualifications
- Opportunity to develop skills relevant to a chosen job/career
- Opportunity to 'earn while you learn'
- Do you think that there are more, or better, vocational education options in some sectors than others? Why did you choose the specific sector you did?

B: Experience and impact of VET (15 minutes)

We would be interested to know more about your experience of VET.

3. Thinking about any vocational learning that you've done since leaving school, could you give some examples of things that you like/d about it and why? And anything you haven't liked? Why?

Probe:

- Experience of requirement to complete Essential Skills qualifications.
- Experience of learning on the job, in particular, have you received training or mentoring from your employer? How did you find this?
- Have they previously considered/had the opportunity to take up vocational learning, and not taken it up? If chose not to take-up/haven't previously done vocational training, what were the reasons for this? Barriers to take up?

4. Thinking about the vocational options available to you when you were finding out about this programme, and your experience of it, do you think that there are sufficient opportunities for young people of your age to improve their vocational skills? Why do you say this?

If no, probe barriers to this, eg. cost, timing, flexibility to combine learning/work, childcare, impact on benefits, employer attitudes, Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) - is there enough, do people know where to go?

C: Future career aspirations (15 minutes)

In the final few questions, we are interested in your future career plans and the role of vocational education in supporting you to meet longer term employment goals. We would

also like to ask your views on what types of information or support would help, to understand vocational routes.

5. Firstly, what are your employment and career aspirations over the next few years? (eg type of job role, sector, type of employer, pay level, opportunities for progression)

Probe:

- Are these the same goals that they had before taking part in VET, or has VET changed their career course/helped form their aspirations? How?

6. If you are considering undertaking further vocational education and training, for example to further develop your skills in a particular job or sector, or to pursue a particular career, how well informed do you feel about vocational pathways, and other pathways, to help you to do this?

Probe:

- Access to careers advice (IAG) to understand different vocational qualifications and pathways
- Experience of careers advice/(IAG) on VET
- Access to employers to talk about vocational training/learning opportunities and experience of this.
- Gaps in IAG on VET – what's missing?
- Anything else that needs to be put in place/any additional support required to improve awareness/understanding

7. Is there any additional support required to improve opportunities for young people, like you, when leaving school and making the transition into work to participate in vocational learning?

Probe:

- Practical support - eg course costs, other financial support
- Other support

Close (2 minutes)

8. Is there anything else you would like to mention that we haven't covered?

- Thank participants for their time
- Remind participants of purpose of research/how findings will be used
- Ask if they have any questions
- Inform how access to vouchers will be emailed

Review of Skills System in Wales

Topic guide for focus group participants (25+ YEARS)

Reminder for the interviewer of the project objective:

(L&W) has been commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake a review of the skills system in Wales. The project aims to provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) in Wales. The project will test/explore the evidence identified with experts, sector representatives and learners. Findings from the review will feed into the policy thinking of Welsh Government and the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.

Interviewer notes

This document is a guide to the principal themes and issues to be covered. Questions can be amended and followed up in more detail where necessary.

Introducing the research project to participants (3 minutes)

- Introduce self/other researchers. Thank the participants for taking part in the focus group.
- Explain that Learning and Work Institute is an independent research organisation, undertaking this research on behalf of Welsh Government.
- The aim of this research is to gather evidence and get people's views about if and how the skills system in Wales should be changed. The research is focused on Initial Vocational Education and Training - usually undertaken both immediately after school and when making the transition into working life - AND, what is sometimes known as, Continuing Vocational Education and Training – vocational learning for adults with experience of work to enhance their skills and job opportunities.
- The aim of this focus group is to explore the needs, views and experiences of adults with experience of work, in relation to vocational learning.
- The focus group will take no longer than 90 mins.

How participants' information will be used: Findings from the focus group will be used to help write a report for Welsh Government and to inform Welsh Government's thinking and planning on vocational education and training (VET) and the skills system. The report will be published but all of the findings will be anonymised and the name of your employer or

training provider will not be included. This means that anything you say will not be traced back to you.

Consent and ethical considerations: Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Thank participants for giving consent for the focus group and address any questions they have.

Reassurances: No right or wrong answers - we are simply asking for people's views and opinions. If need a break at any time, just let interviewer know. If there's any particular questions you don't want to talk about, that's also fine.

Reminder about audio recording: The discussion will be recorded via a voice recorder so we can accurately capture their views, and so that researchers can listen back when analysing the data. Only the research team will have access to the recordings. The recording will be deleted shortly after the focus group.

Incentive: Participants will receive a £25 Love2Shop voucher as a thank you. A link to access this will be emailed to them afterwards.

Any questions or concerns?

START RECORDING – Voice recorder and remind participants recording

Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Firstly, please could we go round the group so you can introduce yourselves, for example, your job role, and briefly tell us a bit about your current or recent vocational education/training programme?

Prompt:

- Are they currently employed/ if so, job role
 - Name of vocational education/training programme/level
 - Are they undertaking any Essential Skills qualifications as part of their training?
 - Where? (workplace, training centre etc)
 - Whether they joined their employer via the programme or whether they were already a member of staff
 - When they started their programme and when they expect to finish (or duration of programme, if completed)
2. Have you taken part in vocational education/training, at any level, before your current programme? This might be for example, an internship, work placement,

apprenticeship or a short course to help to gain specific skills for work. Can you tell me about this?

Probe:

- Programme/training name and level
- Aim of programme/training
- When/where took part in this

A: Participants learning needs and aspirations from CVET (25 minutes)

In the next few questions, we'd like to explore what led you to take part and what you wanted to achieve from taking part in your current/recent vocational programme. Just as a reminder, we are interested here in vocational learning you have done, having moved into work.

3. Before starting your current programme, what did you know about vocational education and what were your main reasons for taking part?

Probe:

- How aware would you say you were about different vocational education routes/options available to you? Did you have any particular views about different routes, for example that some might be more valuable than others?
- What did you hope to gain from your current programme?
 - Opportunity for skills development - upskilling in your current type of work or reskilling for a specific job in a particular vocational area.
 - Opportunity for career progression, linked to specific career aspirations, eg improving employment prospects.
 - Ongoing professional development
- Do you think that there are more, or better, vocational education options in some sectors than others? Why did you choose the specific sector you did?

4. To what extent was the opportunity to learn/train/gain qualifications whilst working an important consideration in making the decision to take part in the programme/training? Can you tell me a bit about this?

- (If employed) Is your employer supporting you to do your programme? How? Financially, time off / flexibility? How important is this?

In addition to this focus group, we are also speaking to a group of younger learners (aged 16-19) about their views on and experiences of vocational training.

5. From your experience, in what ways do you think the needs of learners aged 25 or over, or what learners aged 25+ want from vocational training, differs from what younger learners (aged 16-19) need/want?

Prompts:

- Preparation for the workplace/work experience
- Skills development needs - transferable skills/ occupationally specific skills
- Maintaining and improving skills in-work to support career development
- Importance of reskilling for changing labour market eg we know there are likely to be growing number of opportunities in digital/green skills jobs
- Opportunity/flexibility to combine learning and work

B: Experience and impact of VET (15 minutes)

We would be interested to know more about your experience of VET.

6. Thinking about any vocational learning that you've done (so, both immediately after school and when making the transition into work OR vocational learning, as an adult with experience of work, to enhance skills and job opportunities). Could you give some examples of things that you like/d about it and why? And anything you haven't liked? Why?

Probe:

- Experience of requirement to complete Essential Skills qualifications.
- Experience of learning on the job, in particular, have you received training or mentoring from your employer? How did you find this?
- Have they previously considered/had the opportunity to take up vocational learning, and not taken it up? If chose not to take-up/haven't previously done vocational training, what were/are the reasons for this? Barriers to take up?

7. Thinking about the vocational options available to you when you were finding out about this programme, and your experience of it, do you think that, in general, there are sufficient opportunities for adults aged 25+ to improve their vocational skills?

Probe:

- Opportunities for on/off the job training.
- Flexibility to combine learning/work.
- Support for opportunities from employers
- Barriers to this eg cost, timing, flexibility, childcare, social care, employer attitudes, Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) – is there enough, do people know where to go?

C: Future career aspirations (20 minutes)

In the final few questions, we are interested in your future career plans and the role of vocational education in supporting you to meet longer term employment goals. We would also like to ask your views on what types of information or support would help, to understand vocational routes.

8. Firstly, what are your employment and career aspirations over the next few years? (eg type of job role, sector, type of employer, pay level, opportunities for progression)

Probe:

- Are these the same goals that they had before taking part in VET, or has VET changed their career course/helped form their aspirations? How?

9. If you are considering undertaking further vocational education and training to progress your career, how well informed do you feel about vocational pathways, and other pathways, to help you to do this?

Probe:

- Access to careers advice (IAG) to understand different vocational qualifications and pathways
- Experience of careers advice/(IAG) on CVET
- Access to employer to talk about vocational training/learning opportunities and experience of this.
- Gaps in IAG on CVET – what's missing?
- Anything else that needs to be put in place/any additional support required to improve awareness/understanding

10. Is there any additional support required to improve opportunities to participate in vocational learning?

Probe:

- Practical support from employer, eg – course costs, other financial support, study time/flexibility.
- Other support

11. Finally, from your experience, and thinking about the vocational training and education available to adults in Wales, what do you think works well? What do you think is not so good/working less well?

Probe:

- IAG (opportunities, pathways, benefits)
- Range of different opportunities (eg – types of vocational opportunities and the sectors/job roles they are available in).
- Transition from/flexibility to move from vocational to academic learning. Is this an option currently? Would it be valuable?
- Employer support.

Close (2 minutes)

12. Is there anything else you would like to mention that we haven't covered?

- Thank participants for their time
- Remind participants of purpose of research/how findings will be used
- Ask if they have any questions
- Inform how access to vouchers will be emailed

Annex C – Privacy notices



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Review of the Skills System in Wales – Interviews with experts & sector representatives

The Welsh Government has commissioned Learning & Work Institute to undertake a review of the skills system. The aim of this review is to provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) and then to test the evidence identified with experts, sector representatives and learners.

As part of this review, Learning & Work Institute wish to identify those who can provide an expert or sector representative perspective on the skills system. As a result, Learning & Work Institute will be gathering information through interviews with experts and sector representatives.

The Welsh Government is the data controller for the research. However, Learning & Work Institute will delete any personal data provided through the interviews, and anonymise the raw data, before it is shared with the Welsh Government.

The information collected during the project will be included in a report published on the Welsh Government website and possibly in other publications by Learning & Work Institute and Welsh Government.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. However, your views and experiences are important in order to help inform Welsh Government policies.

The contact for this research at Learning & Work Institute is Jackie Woodhouse

E-mail address: jackie.woodhouse@learningandwork.org.uk

Telephone number: 0116 204 4200

PRIVACY NOTICE

What personal data do we hold and where do we get this information?

Personal data is defined under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) as 'any information relating to an identifiable person who can be directly or indirectly identified by reference to an identifier'.

Learning & Work Institute have your contact details (name and email address) either because:

- your contact details are publicly available professional email addresses; or
- you are part of Learning & Work's network of contacts and have agreed to be contacted for this research project.

Participants will be invited via email to take part in an online or telephone interview. If you wish to undertake an interview over the phone then you will be asked for your telephone number. Your participation is voluntary and if you do not wish to take part or be sent reminders then please reply to the invitation email and you will not be contacted again for this research project.

This research does not require the collection of additional personal data from you.

We may need to audio record interviews for operational reasons. If this is the case, we will make this clear to you before the interview begins, and you will have the opportunity to tell us if you are not happy for the discussion to be recorded. If interviews are recorded, personal data will be removed during the process of transcribing. Recordings will be deleted as soon as this process is completed. If discussions are not recorded, personal data will not be included in written notes prepared during or following the interviews.

If you raise a query or complaint and provide personal data requesting a response, the researcher will forward the request only to the relevant official and subsequently delete it from the research data.

What is the lawful basis for using your data?

The lawful basis for processing information in this data collection exercise is our public task; that is, exercising our official authority to undertake the core role and functions of the Welsh Government.

Participation is completely voluntary. Research studies such as this are important for the Welsh Government to collect information and actionable evidence about its ability to deliver government priorities. The information collected in this research, for example, might be used

to inform the development of the skills system in Wales.

How secure is your personal data?

Personal information provided to Learning & Work Institute is always stored on a secure server. The data can only be accessed by a limited number of researchers working on this project. Learning & Work Institute will only use this data for research purposes. Learning & Work Institute has cyber essentials certification.

Learning & Work Institute has procedures to deal with any suspected data security breaches. If a suspected breach occurs, Learning & Work Institute will report this to the Welsh Government who will notify you and any applicable regulator where we are legally required to do so.

Learning & Work Institute will use the information gathered to produce a report that will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify individual participants.

How long do we keep your personal data?

Learning & Work Institute will hold personal data during the contract period, and any personal data not already removed will be deleted by Learning & Work Institute within three months of the end of the contract. This includes your contact details, unless you are part of the existing Learning & Work network of contacts.

Individual rights

Under UK GDPR, you have the following rights in relation to the personal information you provide as part of this review, specifically you have the right:

- To access a copy of your own data;
- For us to rectify inaccuracies in that data;
- To object to or restrict processing (in certain circumstances);
- For your data to be 'erased' (in certain circumstances); and
- To lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are: Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Phone: 0303 123 1113. Website: www.ico.gov.uk

Further Information

If you have any further questions about how the data provided as part of this study will be used by the Welsh Government or wish to exercise your rights using the UK General Data Protection Regulation, please contact:

Name: Sean Homer

E-mail address: kasemployabilityandskillsresearch@gov.wales

Telephone number: 0300 025 4045

The Welsh Government's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at:

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ, Email:

DataProtectionOfficer@gov.wales.



Review of the Skills System in Wales – Focus groups with learners

The Welsh Government has commissioned Learning & Work Institute to undertake a review of the skills system. The aim of this review is to provide an overview of the evidence on establishing a cohesive skills system which differentiates Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) and then to test the evidence identified with experts, sector representatives and learners.

As part of this review, Learning & Work Institute wish to identify those who can provide a learner perspective on the skills system. As a result, Learning & Work Institute will be gathering information through focus groups with learners.

The Welsh Government is the data controller for the research. However, Learning & Work Institute will delete any personal data provided through the focus groups, and anonymise the raw data, before it is shared with the Welsh Government.

The information collected during the project will be included in a report published on the Welsh Government website and possibly in other publications by Learning & Work Institute and Welsh Government.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. However your views and experiences are important in order to help inform Welsh Government policies.

The contact for this research at Learning & Work Institute is Jackie Woodhouse

E-mail address: jackie.woodhouse@learningandwork.org.uk

Telephone number: 0116 204 4200

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The Welsh Government do not hold your contact details. Your training provider will have informed you about the research.

How you take part in the research will depend on whether it is online or in the location where you have your training:

- **If the focus group is being held in the location of your training:** you will be sent an invitation by your training provider and Learning & Work Institute will attend, either in person or virtually, but will not receive your personal details.
- **If the focus group is being held online:** your training provider asked you if you would be willing to take part and where you agreed have provided your name and email address to Learning & Work Institute. Learning & Work Institute will only use your name and email address for the purposes of this review. You will be invited via email to take part in a focus group. Your participation is voluntary and if you do not wish to take part or be sent reminders then please reply to the invitation and your details will be removed.

This research does not require the collection of additional personal data from you.

We may need to audio record focus groups for operational reasons. If this is the case, we will make this clear to you before the focus group begins, and you will have the opportunity to tell us if you are not happy for the discussion to be recorded. A focus group will only be recorded if all members of the group are happy for this to happen. If focus groups are recorded, personal data will be removed during the process of transcribing. Recordings will be deleted as soon as this process is completed. If discussions are not recorded, personal data will not be included in written notes prepared during or following the focus group.

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How secure is your personal data?

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- To access a copy of your own data;
- For us to rectify inaccuracies in that data;
- To object to or restrict processing (in certain circumstances);
- For your data to be 'erased' (in certain circumstances); and

- To lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are: Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Phone: 0303 123 1113. Website: www.ico.gov.uk

Further Information

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Name: Sean Homer

E-mail address: kasemployabilityandskillsresearch@gov.wales

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