

Problemy edukacji dorosłych w Polsce i na świecie

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The Contribution of Research to Innovation in Vocational Education and training (VET) The Role of VET Institutes¹

Wkład badań na rzecz innowacji w Kształceniu Zawodowym i Szkoleniach
Rola Instytutów Kształcenia Zawodowego

Słowa kluczowe: kształcenie zawodowe, edukacja ustawiczna, współpraca ponadnarodowa instytutów badawczych.

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zaprezentowanie wyników międzynarodowych badań przeprowadzonych w 2020 roku przez naukowców Federalnego Instytutu Kształcenia Zawodowego z Bonn (BIBB) wśród instytucji badawczych zajmujących się kształceniem zawodowym i szkoleniami. Celem badania było przyczynienie się do zwiększenia widoczności zinstytucjonalizowanych badań prowadzonych w tym obszarze, określenie wspólnych wyzwań i nakreślenie możliwości prowadzenia skoordynowanej współpracy ponadnarodowej. Badacze BIBB przeprowadzili ankietę z udziałem blisko trzydziestu instytucji naukowych zajmujących się badaniami nad kształceniem zawodowym i ustawicznym w dwudziestu dwóch krajach.

Instytucje te zatrudniają około 7000 badaczy różnych dyscyplin, w tym 42% z edukacji, 16% socjologii, po 10% z psychologii i ekonomii). W rezultacie przeprowadzonych analiz ustalono, że dla instytucji badających kształcenie zawodowe i ustawiczne główne obszary zainteresowań

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stanowią: początkowe kształcenie zawodowe (IVET) oraz kształcenie w miejscu pracy (WBL). Na kolejnym miejscu plasuje się edukacja ustawiczna oraz przygotowanie zawodowe (apprenticeship). Jako istotne wskazano również zarządzanie i finansowanie systemów kształcenia zawodowego oraz cyfryzację.

Powyższe badania ankietowe dały pogląd na temat wyzwań oraz formatu możliwej współpracy poszczególnych instytucji. Dyskusje i rezultaty badań potwierdzają trend wzmacniania współpracy pomiędzy instytucjami i dążenia do ustanowienia sieci instytucjonalnej pozwalającej zajmować się kwestiami kształcenia zawodowego aktywnie i w sposób bardziej systemowy.

Key words: vocational education, continuing education, international cooperation of research institutes.

Abstract: The main goal of this article is to present results of international research conducted in the year 2020 by scientists from Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) among research institutions dealing with VET. This scientific undertaking was about increasing visibility of institutionalised research in the field of Vocational Education and Trainings (VET), identification of common challenges and drawing possibilities for coordinated international cooperation. BIBB researchers have conducted a survey with the participation of nearly thirty VET scientific institutions operating in twenty two countries.

Those institutions employ nearly 7000 researcher from various disciplines, including: 42% from education, 16% sociology and 10% each in the fields of psychology and economy. Conducted analysis have resulted with indication of the main areas of interest such as: initial vocational education (IVET), work-based learning (WBL), continuing education and apprenticeships. Next important for those institutions issues were covering management & financement of VET systems and digitalisation.

Above mentioned survey research gave an overview on the challenges and forms of possible cooperation of VET institutions. Discussions and research results confirm trends for strengthening cooperation among institutions and aiming for development of the institutional network enabling coping with VET in active and more systemic approach.

Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to present findings from a survey among Vocational Education and Training (VET) Research and Development Institutes across Europe and internationally. The survey was carried out among national institutions of VET research in 2020 at the occasion of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union and was part of a range of activities of BIBB within this context. The participating institutes discussed first findings in an online meeting in November one week before this event. The stocktaking can be the basis for better understanding the contributions that an enhanced cooperation in research could make to a sustainable development of European VET. It will contribute to increasing the visibility of institutionalised VET research in Europe. The survey and the event also aim at identifying future foci of European VET research and the potential of collaboration of research institutes on topics of common interest. Collecting and juxtaposing recent research activities and findings will allow to build on each other's work and develop more co-ordinated future research programmes.

What is institutional VET research?

Institutionalized VET research and development looks back at over 50 years of history. It includes a range of activities and provides a rich experience base for innovation and development in VET on the national and European level. Despite several contextual and organizational changes and dynamics, there is also continuity in many countries in terms designating organizational and budgetary resources and personal capacities to the further development of VET. For a better understanding the term VET will be described: Vocational Education and Training (VET) describes education and training which aims to equip learners with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required occupations or more broadly in the labour market including initial programmes at the beginning of careers and continuing education and training during later phases in life.

Across today's European member states first designated VET institutions were set up in the 1950ies. The earliest example is the predecessor of the Czech NUOV, *Národní ústav odborného vzdělávání* (integrated into NUV in 2016) in 1953. In the meantime, the *Czech National Institute for Education*, the *Education Counselling Centre and Centre for Continuing Education of Teachers* (NÚV) and the *National Institute for Further Education* (NIDV) were merged into one budgetary organization, the *National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic* (facility for further education of pedagogical staff). In the seventies, several western European countries established institutes at a national level. For instance, in Germany the BBF, the *Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training Research*, now BIBB, and the *Centre des études et des recherches sur les qualifications* (Céreq) in France were established in 1970. 2 years later the *Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori*, ISFOL was founded, the Italian institute for VET, today (since 2016) part of the *Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche* (INAPP). As a result of these developments the *European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training* (known as Cedefop) followed in 1975. Some countries that have more recently joined the European Union have founded their own institute, such as the *Centra RS za poklicno izobraževanje*, CPI in Slovenia.

A survey among institutes of VET research and development

34 institutions have actively participated in the survey. These institutions represent the expertise of 6415 Employees² in total. BIBB holds partnership agreements with around 30 institutes from European countries and beyond and carries out co-operation workshops with many of these partner institutions on a regular basis. The understanding of institutionalized VET research in this survey is based on the roles and tasks of BIBB in the environment of the German VET system and the experience-base from this international co-operation. The following table provides an overview of the 34 responding institutions.

² The data from one very large organisation was excluded, in which VET research and development is only a supplementary task beside a series of tasks in labour market administration.

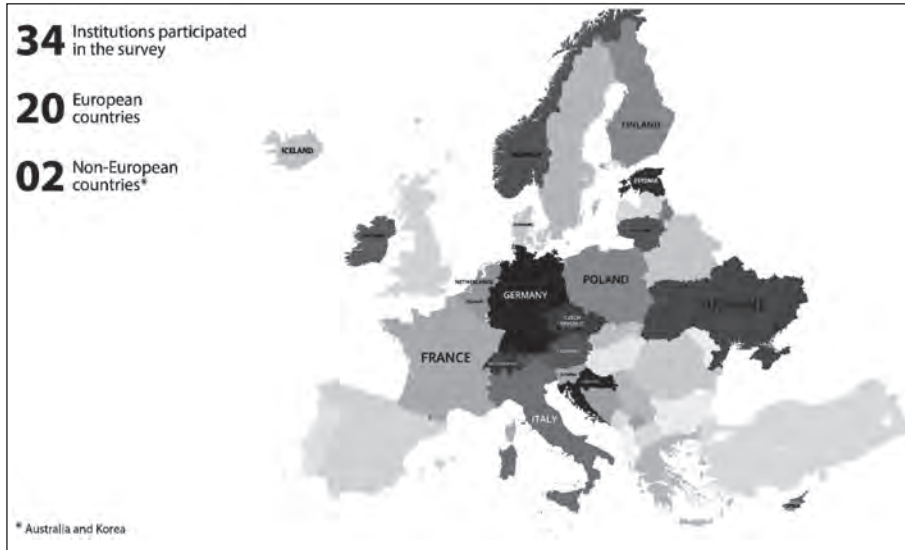


Fig. 1. 34 Institutions in 22 countries

Table 1. Overview of responding institutions

Australia	NCVER
Austria	3s, IBW, ÖiBF
Belgium	Bruxelles Formation, Le Forem
Croatia	AVETAE
Cyprus	CPI; HRDA
Czech Republic	NPICR
Denmark	Aarhus University
Finland	Tartu University, EDUFI, Finnish Institute for Educational Research
France	Cereq
Iceland	University of Iceland
Ireland	SOLAS
Italy	INAPP, INDIRE
Korea	KRIVET
Lithuania	KPMPC
Netherlands	CINOP/ECBO, HAN, UAS Utrecht
Norway	OsloMET, NIFU, FAFO
Poland	Lukasiewicz, IBE
Slovenia	CPI
Switzerland	Leading House – GOVPET, Leading House – Economics of Education, SFIVET
Ukraine	NAES

At the outset of the survey a list of around 60 organizations was collected of which was assumed that they could potentially fulfil the selection criteria (see Box 1). In the accompanying letter to the survey the recipients were asked to get in touch with other organisations, which they thought were relevant for our survey (snowballing approach).

After a pre-test with four institutions with diverse profiles and portfolios, questionnaires were sent out between mid-August and mid-September 2020. A second round based on reminders and some 20 additional contacts that resulted from the snowballing approach is still ongoing.

Box 1. Criteria for the selection of organizations

Criteria to select and address institutes for the survey were:

- The organization is commissioned with tasks in VET research and development either through an institutional basis (e.g., a specific law) or a designated longer-term project-based funding for VET research and development
- The organization is working on a national scale
- Research and development activities take place in one or more fields on the continuum between the level of VET systems and governance to the level of teaching, learning and competence development in VET

The questionnaire

With the questionnaire information about the various tasks and institutional setups, fields of expertise, working methods, and involvement into the strategic discourse on VET on the national, European and international level were gathered.

The questionnaire contains open and closed questions. Especially for the last section of this report several open questions on future topics, challenges and collaboration opportunities in VET research were evaluated. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse and cluster answers. Results of the content analysis and all other data will be presented in frequencies in form of bar and pie charts. In some specific cases, the qualitative content of the answers will also be presented in detail.

In the following chapters the results of the survey will be presented, starting with the different organizational types and the different tasks of the institutions. Afterwards the involvement in policy and practice will be analysed. In a final part the future expectations of the institutions will be described.

Results of the survey

There is a wide variation across Europe of how institutional VET research is organized. Therefore, the responding institutions represent a variety of organizational types. Almost to even parts there are designated governmental institutions, public research

institutes and organizational units of universities (each group constitutes about one quarter) that have participated in the survey. In some cases, respondents ticked multiple answers. The figure also shows that in some cases private organizations are commissioned with research and development tasks.

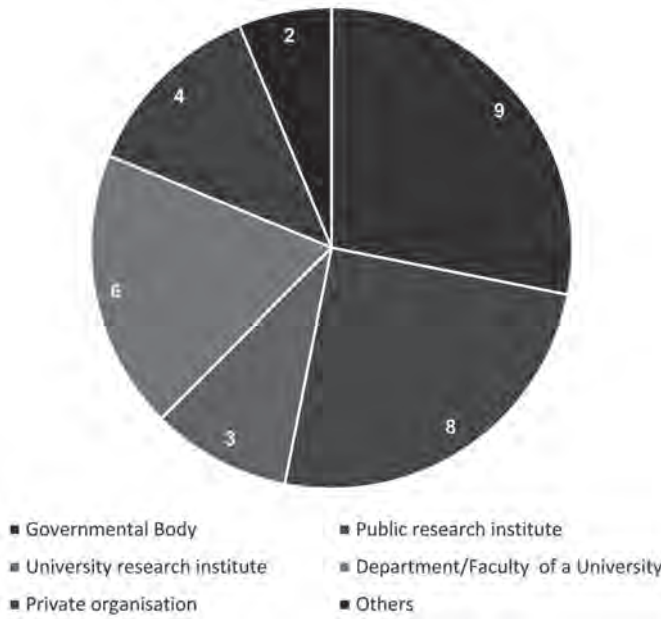


Fig. 2. Type of organization

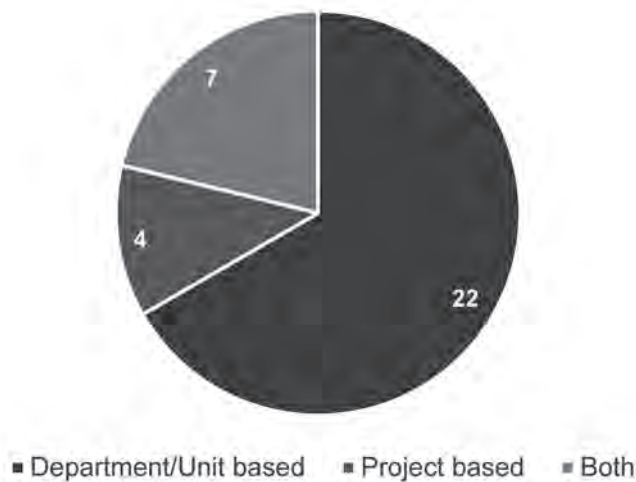


Fig. 3. Organizational structure of the institutions

Some countries do not concentrate VET research and development in designated institutions but distribute different functions of VET research and development across a range of institutions and organizations of teacher education, economic and social research and public support structures. Often, such functions are assumed on a longer-term basis by different institutions, for instance in Denmark with a dedicated unit for labour market and skills analyses within the ministry of education, institutions of vocational teacher education that are also involved into systemic reform and research of university institutes. This mix of institutional types is also reflected in the different ways that organizations apply when carrying out their work. Some institutions mainly work in stable departmental structures whereas others are running in project-based organizational set-ups as Figure 3 shows.

Although the institutions specified that most of them are Department/Unit based, the institutions carry out their research and development work in project based working groups as Figure 4 shows. Often the collaboration with different actors from policy and practice happens in projects: concerning the question, how the institutions maintain a dialogue³, 22 of the 32 institutions named the category "joint projects" as one of the key factors of how to maintain a dialogue. As a result, the organizational structure of project based working groups seems to contribute positively to the collaboration with other actors in VET. Moreover, the institutions were asked what their main objectives are to cooperate with other institutions⁴. 24 institutions named "Joint projects" together with "Policy/Practice work" as one of the main objectives to cooperate with other institutions. The possibility of having joint projects can have a positive impact on the VET research in Europe and the collaboration and cooperation between the different institutions.

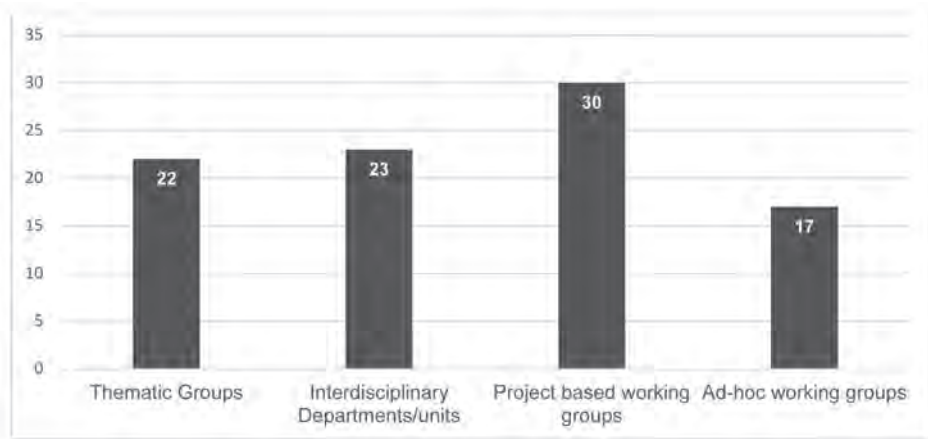


Fig. 4. Organizational structure to carry out research & development work

³ Question 4.1 in the questionnaire.

⁴ Question 3.7c in the questionnaire.

VET research requires the collaboration between different academic disciplines

As already mentioned, round about 7.000 employees contribute with their knowledge to the development of vocational training. The data provided shows, that most of the research and development staff belong to the fields of education and sociology, followed by psychology and economics.

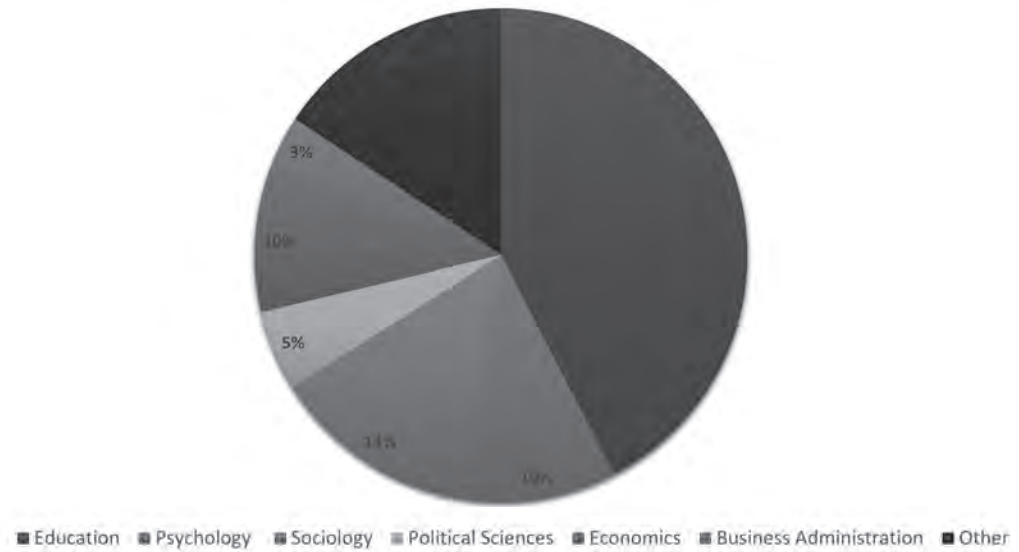


Fig. 5. Academic background disciplines of employees in research and development

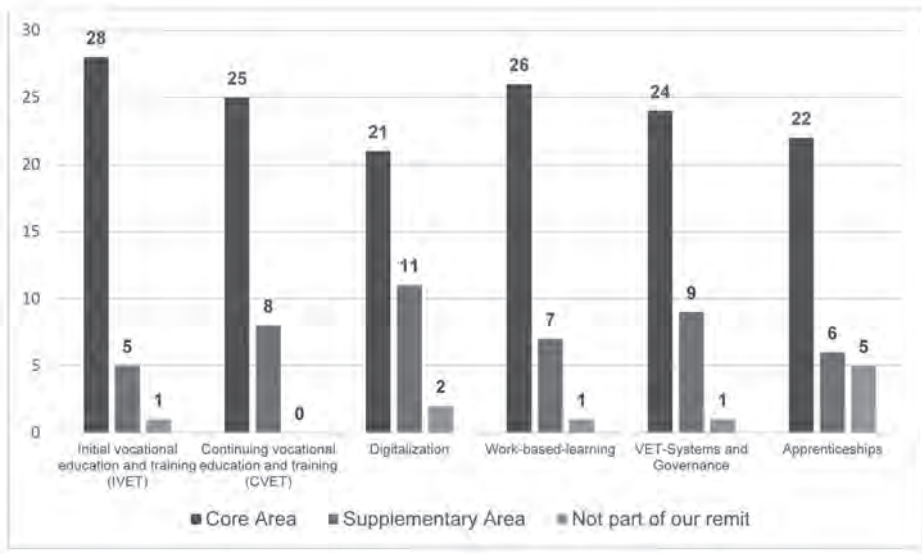


Fig. 6. Core thematic areas

The variation of the academic background disciplines of the employees comes along with a wide variety of topics and tasks that the institutions deal with. The institutes carry out various tasks, ranging from the analysis of the development and impact of occupational training policy at the system level to the identification of contents and the development of the curricular foundations of vocational education and training. In addition, a broad spectrum of thematic areas were identified, in which all institutes are equally interested. Initial programmes at the beginning of careers (IVET) and continuing education (CVET), as well as digitalization, work-based-learning, VET-Systems and governance and Apprenticeships were identified as 'Core Areas' of most of the institutions.

It is important to note that every institute has a different range of tasks and their work is based on different legal and administrative foundations. However, there is also a significant overlap in terms of the remit of institutes' tasks and responsibilities.

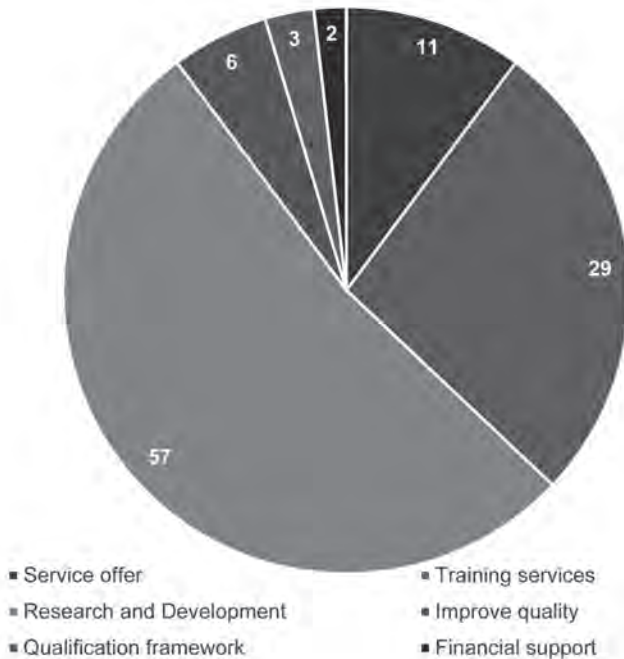


Fig. 7. Three main tasks the institutions have to fulfil (number of mentions)

The institutions were asked to name the three most important main tasks their institution has to fulfil. Figure 7 shows that half of the mentions fall into the category of research and development in VET. In very simple terms, "research" in our survey comprised work that aims at developing new knowledge, whereas "development" focuses on the application of new knowledge in VET practice and policy. Clearly, the two terms are not always fully distinctive and the overlaps between these two areas might be of particular interest. Apart from the research and development

work, one-fourth of the institutions' answers falls into the category of providing training services as a main task.

VET research and practice

Figure 8 shows in how far all the different types of organizations are involved in policy and practice. All responding institutions are somehow involved in the national policy dialogue, whereas only two-thirds of them are involved in the development of conceptual and legal foundations. Typically, the institutes are also carrying out work that accompanies reform projects. The figure shows that almost all the institutions are also involved in the dialogue with actors from practice. Despite the variety of organizational types of institutions to some extent all of them contribute to policy and practice.

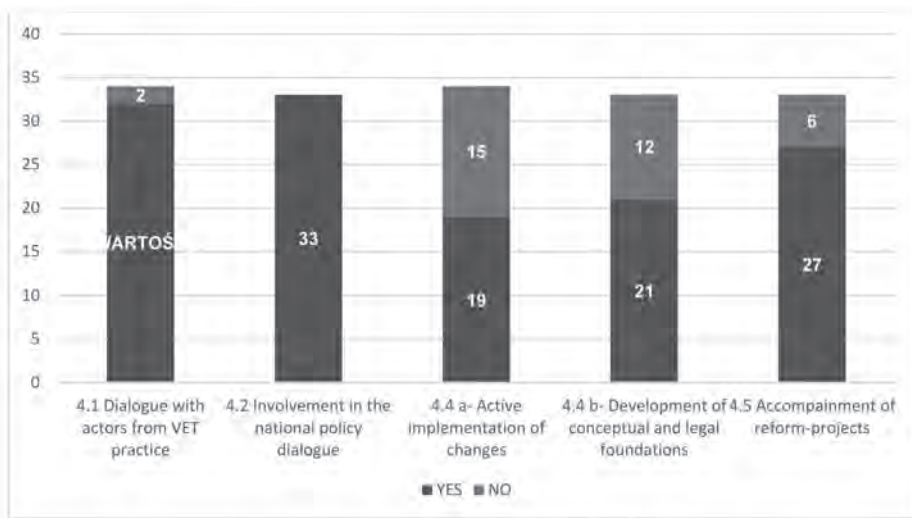


Fig. 8. Involvement in policy and practice

Given the practical relevance of VET research, the questionnaire also asked about the share of employees with practical experience. It is especially the group of teachers and lecturers that is represented in research development. The data indicates that in five of the 33⁵ institutions more than 50% of the research and development staff have practical experience as teachers and lecturers. In addition five institutions employ staff with 25-50% practical experience in this field. Concerning practical experience as Administrators in VET, the data indicates that the institutions' share of research staff, which have experience as administrators is less than 25% in all the 33 institutions.

⁵ Only 33 of the 34 institutions answered this question.

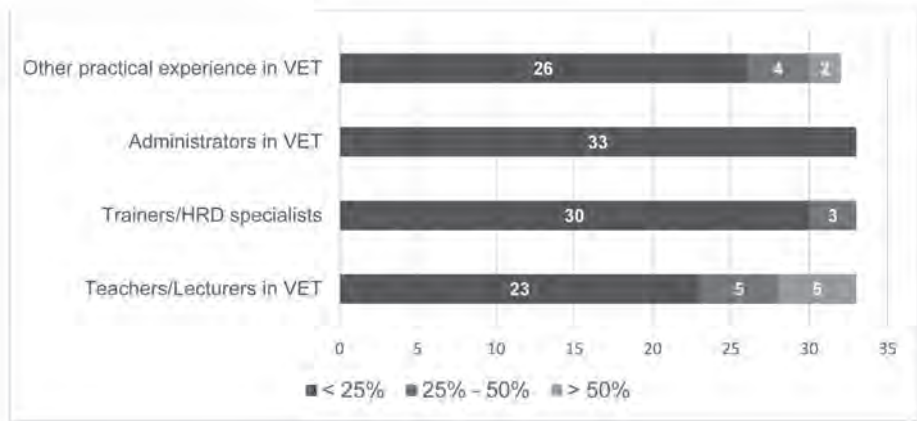


Fig. 9. Practical experiences of employees in research and development

As shown in figure 8, often of the research and development staff has practical experience as teachers or lecturers. Figure 10 shows the number of employees in the institutions, who are also involved in teaching in higher education. A total of 328 employees, from all 31⁶ institutions, work in teacher training programmes. This is 18.5% of the R&D staff. 216 people, out of a total of 1.770 people working in research and development, are involved in teaching in university social science programmes. 12.2% are in teaching in university social science programmes.

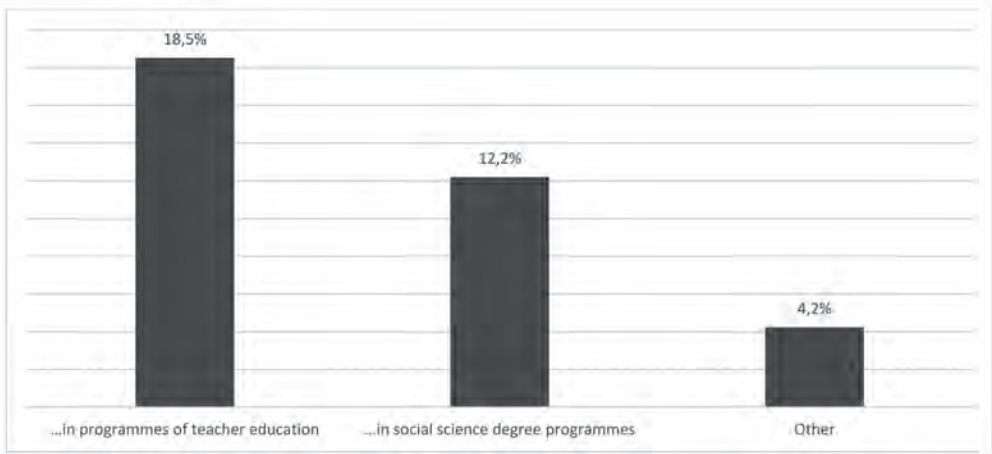


Fig. 10. Research and Development staff involved in teaching in higher education

⁶ Only 31 of 34 institutions answered this question.

Institutes are also involved in tasks with practical relevance as the following figure shows. There is a slight dominance of regulatory tasks as opposed to the direct production of teaching and learning materials as well as a dominance of school-based functions over company-based functions.

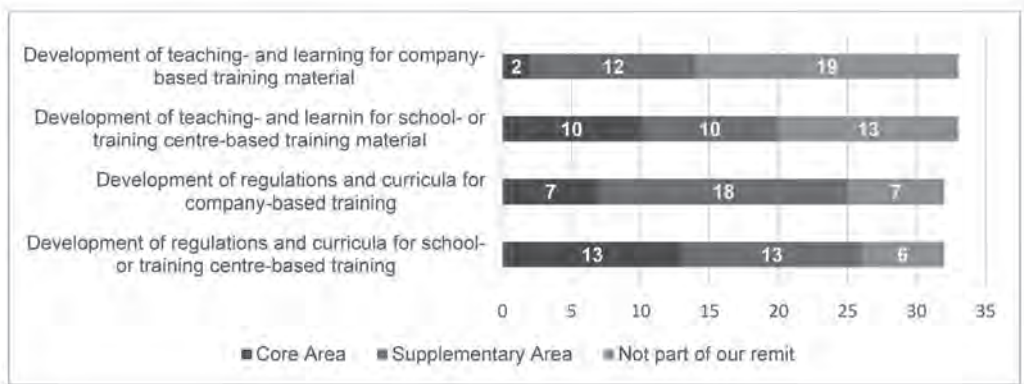


Fig. 11. Development of curricula and teaching/ learning material

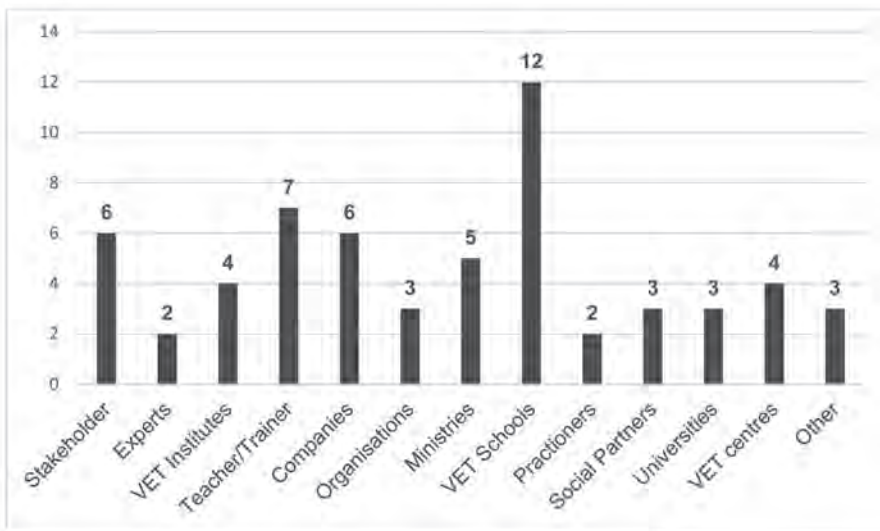


Fig. 12. With whom to maintain a dialogue

How figure 8 already showed, 32 of the 34 institutions maintain a dialogue with actors from VET practice. Moreover, the institutions were asked, with whom they maintain a dialogue. The answers varied from ministries to social partners, VET centres and individual experts and teachers and trainers. Most of the institutions collaborate with VET schools. Regarding the aspect, that most institutions are

involved in the development of teaching and learning material, as well as in the development of regulations and curricula for school- or training centre-based training, the dialogue with VET schools seems to be an important aspect.

Future perspectives

As an important aspect for institutionalized VET research in the future, challenges and perspectives of VET research were identified in the survey. The institutions were asked to name the most important current challenges they must cope with, their involvement in European and international cooperation in Vocational Education as well as possible obstacles for extending the collaboration with other institutions.

Most important current challenges

The institutions were asked to name the most important challenges they have to cope with in their current situation. In total 16 categories were built to cover the variety of answers. The high number of categories shows that the major challenges differ significantly between the institutions. The categories "research staff" and "funding" were both mentioned 13 times. These two aspects seem to be highly relevant for 13 of the 34 institutions regarding the current challenges. "Research staff" covers staff in form of experts, researchers or project managers. Especially recruitment and the development of new VET staff seems to be problematic for a big part of the institutions. "Funding", the other major current challenge, refers to a lack of funding that inhibits research work and projects.

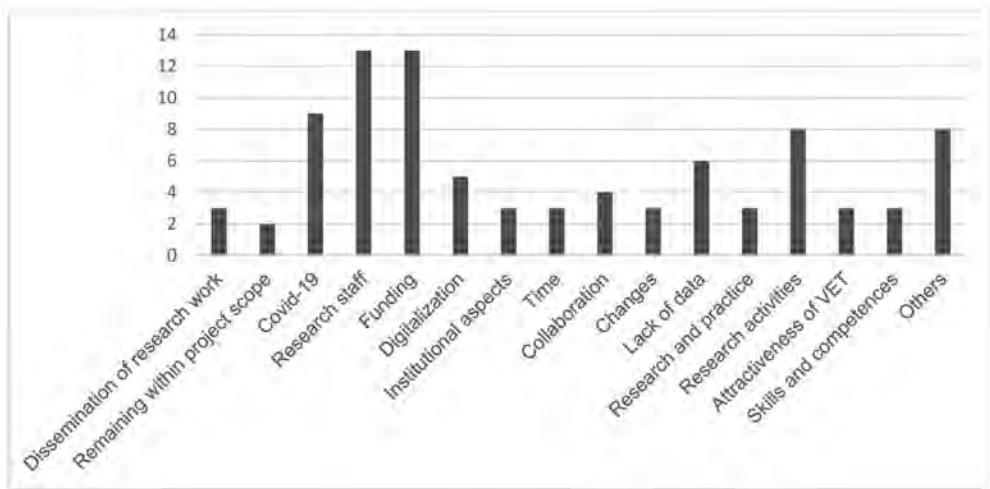


Fig. 13. Most important current challenges

The category "research activities" is the second most frequented. It covers all answers that deal with research activities of the institutions. For example, enlarging

and prioritizing of research or broadening the perspectives on VET research. Seven institutions mentioned challenges due to the “covid-19 pandemic”. They link the pandemic to unpredictable challenges coming up, such as field studies, conferences, funding, economic impacts and employment. As will be seen in the next section, “digitalization” seems not to be a major challenge but more an important research topic for the near future.

The most important research topics for the near future

As mentioned above, 12 of 34 institutions see the topic “digitalization” as one of the most important research topics for the near future. The category “digitalization” includes aspects such as impact of digitalization, digital changes, the digital transformation and the digitalisation of work and education. “Skills and competences” is the second most mentioned category with a frequency of 13. This category includes skills and competences that are accompanied by digitalization, as well as key competences, social skills and upskilling. Even though the institutions have a strong interest in “skills and competences” as an important research topic, this aspect is not mentioned as a current challenge (see Figure 13).

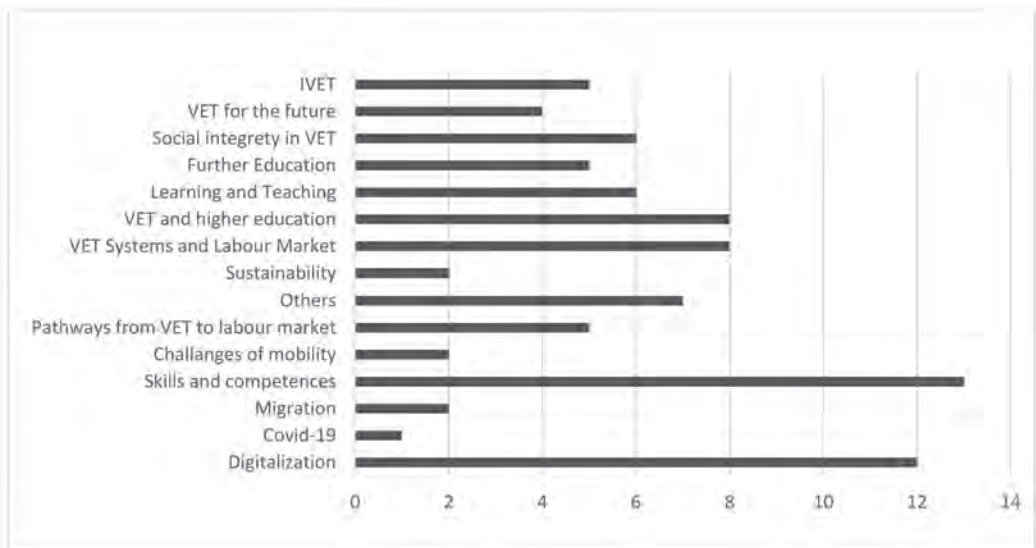


Fig. 14. Most important research topics

Regarding the category “Covid-19” it is the other way round. Although Covid-19 is as an important current challenge, the institutions do not seem to recognise “Covid-19” as an important research topic. In conclusion, just because something is mentioned as a current challenge, it does not mean it is also relevant as an important research topic and other way around. Other important research topics

for the future are “VET and higher education”, “VET systems and labour market”, “social integrity in VET” and “learning and teaching”. In summary, the answers on future research topics are very heterogeneous. After analysing current challenges and future research topics, the next three subchapters deal with the collaboration between the different VET institutions in Europe.

Ways of involvement in European and international cooperation in VET

The first question concerning the collaboration deals with the ways of involvement in European and international cooperation in VET. The answers of the institutions can be summarized into eight categories. Four of these categories have almost the same frequency. The other four categories are mentioned more than five times at least. In contrast to the answers in the questions in the two preceding sections the institutions’ way of involvement seems to be more homogeneous. The category “participation in various EU-settings” was mentioned 18 times and therefore is the category with the highest number of frequencies. It includes participation in and building up networks or being member of various EU-associations or networks such as EVBB, EERA, EPAL and so on. More than half of the institutions take part in European co-operation. The following categories are “International Projects”, “Erasmus+” and “National or International networks”. The former two categories mentioned with a frequency of 16 and the latter 17 times. Although “Erasmus+” could also be seen a programme in which different institutions work together on an international project base. Moreover, the category “International projects” can be defined as the development of joint studies with international colleagues on a project base. On top of the joint projects concerning “Erasmus+”, the institutions mentioned the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme in their own national context as well as Erasmus+ strategic partnerships.

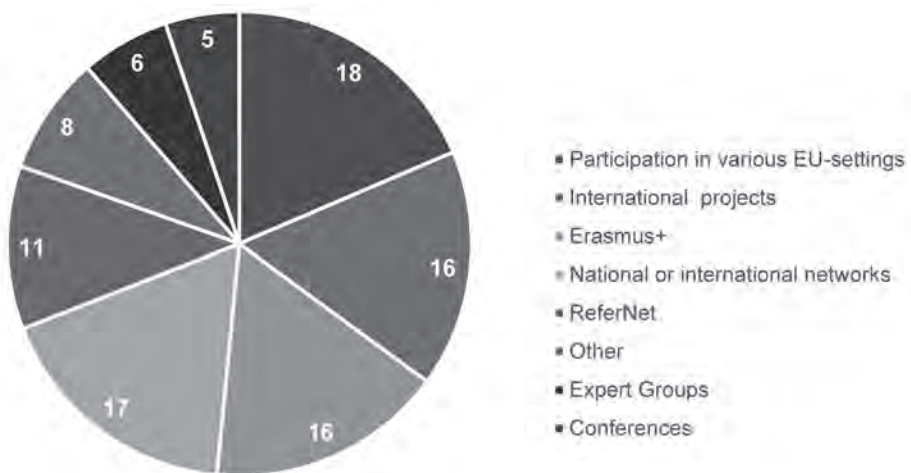


Fig. 15. Involvement in international cooperation in Vocational Education

The category “National or international networks” covers all answers that includes the aspect of being part of a network, as well as partnerships and cooperation’s between VET institutions. Being member of Cedefop’s “ReferNet” was mentioned 11 times. The two categories with the lowest number are, being part of an “expert Group” and participation in “conferences”.

Thematic areas to extend existing collaboration with other VET institutions

In which thematic areas do institutions see room for an extension of their collaboration with other VET institutions? Institutions could especially benefit of collaboration, if they share the same thematic areas that are important for them. In total 10 different categories, describe thematic areas for extending collaboration. The most important thematic area contains the topics “IVET/CVET”. This category was mentioned 20 times. It includes all topics concerning initial and continuing VET as well as issues that concern lifelong learning and individual learning pathways and processes. The categories “skills and competences” and “digitalization” were again mentioned several times. Therefore, some of the most important research topics also seem to be aspects for extending existing collaboration.

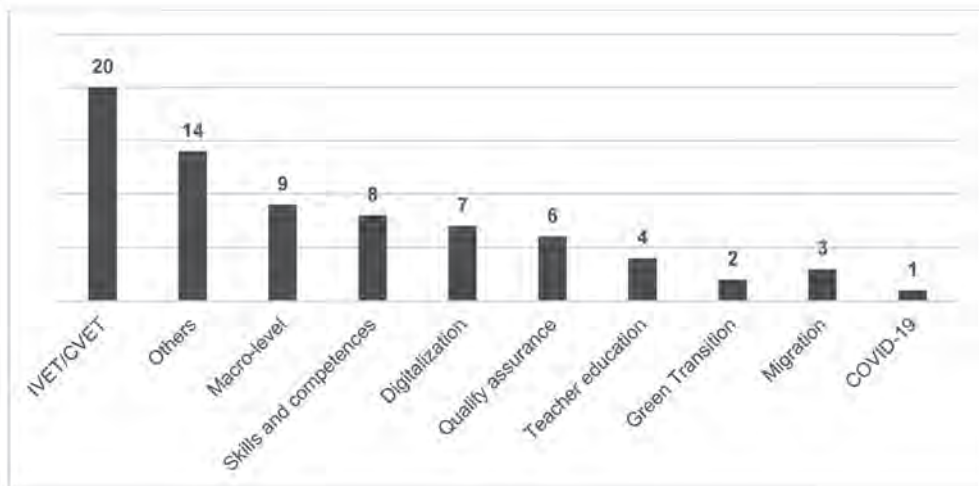


Fig. 16. Thematic areas for extending existing collaboration

Topics related to the system setup including social policies, the labour market or other economic issues concerning VET are summarized in the category “macro-level”. This category was mentioned 9 times. The category “Other” is mentioned 12 times. It includes topics that are just mentioned once. In this case it consists of topics like monitoring, inclusion, reforms and so on. The less interesting fields of extending existing collaboration concern the topics “green transition”, “migration” and “Covid-19”.

Obstacles to an extension of collaboration

In this section obstacles to an increased collaboration are shown. Most of the institutions see the aspect “funding” of common projects as an obstacle to an extension. This category was mentioned 13 times. Most institutions see limited financial support for international cooperation and projects and a low budget for joint projects as an obstacle to more collaboration.

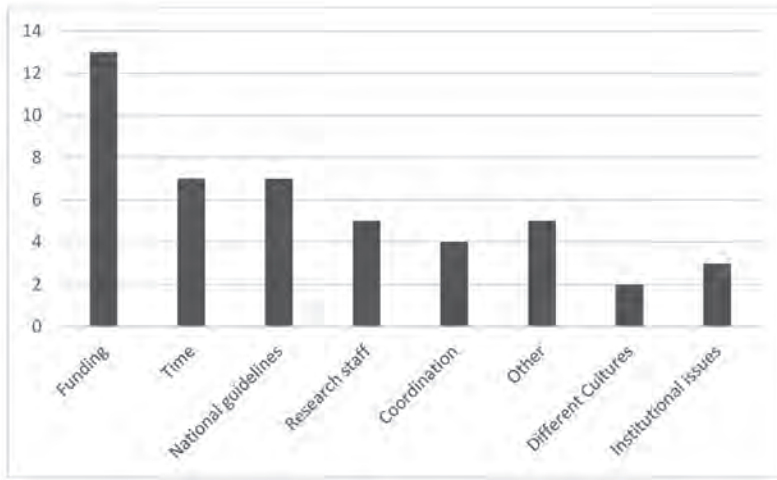


Fig. 17. Obstacles to an increased collaboration

Another important obstacle is “time”. Lacking resources in terms of time and a rise of the workload in research inhibit the collaboration between the institutions. This category was mentioned 7 times. In addition, “national guidelines” was mentioned 7 times. Some institutions described that the political administration and changes in law can be an obstacle to an extension. A limited number of “research staff” seems also do be an obstacle to an extension and is related to the lack of time mentioned above.

Prospects

The studies’ purpose to stimulate discussion and strengthen the collaboration between institutionalised VET research in Europe is based on the conviction that this type of research fulfils an important role in the research landscape. In the following, prospects of European VET research and how to foster and strengthen collaboration will be discussed⁷.

⁷ We include the results of the discussion of an online meeting that took place in November 2020. In the meeting, findings of the survey were presented to respondents to receive additional information from the institutions and to integrate an early feedback mechanism within the process of exploring and interpreting the received information. The different institutions exchanged knowledge and experiences in following thematic areas: 1. “Content and Formats of Cooperation”, “Challenges of VET Research” and “Dialogue between research, policy and practice”.

How can national institutional VET research contribute to strengthening European VET and collaboration?

VET research in Europe contributes a long-term, systemic policy-relevant perspective of future development of VET that other forms and types of research cannot provide. The findings of our survey indicate the diversity of the sector of institutionalised research across countries. It also highlights how increased collaboration across countries could help in tackling the challenges that VET systems are facing and how collaboration could make a to the future development of VET in Europe.

Research cooperation runs best when it is based on projects and enables mutual learning. A project-based cooperation includes research work that is commonly agreed and at the same time based on the particular interests of the project partners. The cooperation includes meetings with co-researchers and joint platforms to develop, plan and run the projects. Erasmus Plus projects are by nature cooperation projects and enable the building of research and development communities. Cooperation also includes the organisation of VET research conferences and the participation in existing networks. It is most important to share and publish the results.

Experience shows that in order to expand or to set the cooperation on a solid footing personal contacts are crucial. This is particularly the case when project proposals (for instance within the Horizon programme) have to be developed. Altogether, the issue of building cooperation relies on individual researchers and their opportunities to establish contacts with their peers. This explains the importance of staff exchanges. Long-term contacts mean that the project partners are knowledgeable of the research and work culture of their colleagues, as well as of their organisational approach to research and possible limitations.

A further point is the visibility of the research results. The visibility can be ensured by participating in conferences and more importantly by publishing in academic journals. Cross-referencing of publications could be better established and journals of research networks or institutes could be promoted in such context. Consequently, the expansion of the research and development cooperation could include:

- fostering individual contacts between the researchers and the next generation of researchers,
- organising online conferences,
- monitoring the cooperation,
- supporting and promoting publications and
- establishing a communication platform.

How can institutional VET research and VET research in universities cooperate?

In total 10 institutions of the survey are part of a university or a faculty of a research institute. All of them are involved in the dialogue with actors from VET practice. Moreover, all of them are involved in the national policy dialogue. Eight of the

ten institutions are accompanying reform projects, whereas most of them are not involved in the active implementation of changes and the development of conceptual and legal foundations. Some of the universities contribute empirical evidence for policy, carry out projects on behalf of ministries or contribute in another way to the knowledge for the national context. Research and development is especially a particular problem for smaller countries due to limited resources in universities and research institutions. Therefore, transnational cooperation as well as research in universities offer the opportunity to complement expertise. Unfortunately, in some national contexts VET as a sub-discipline has not the highest status within academia. If this is the case it is even harder to attract young researchers into the field. Therefore, the nature of the field as an attractive area in which applied research can contribute to the development of educational opportunities for many young people needs to be foregrounded. To perform a high standard in research, careers in VET research have to be promoted.

As far as cooperation is concerned, there are different disciplinary cultures and approaches. In economics a disciplinary orientation prevails. Here, research needs to adhere to very high international disciplinary standards, which can only be developed, maintained, and evaluated within the limits of an academic discipline and community, according to this view. This can present an important hurdle for interdisciplinary research endeavours. Only what has undergone a rigorous process of scientific evaluation is „good enough” for the use by practitioners. Similarly, promotion processes in higher education often only reward discipline-based achievements, whereas interdisciplinary research in some cases does not fit the criteria of career development procedures. On the other hand practice integrated and professionalised research models were presented as alternative way of organising VET research.

Conclusion

The survey and the event gave an overview about the challenges as well as the formats and contents of possible cooperation. The discussions as well as the findings indicate that strengthening the cooperation between the institutions and fostering and establishing a network of VET institutions will lead to an active and sustainable VET in Europe. Although the sector of institutionalized VET research is diverse across countries, collaboration and exchange is an important aspect for strengthening VET in Europe. The discussion about European cooperation in vocational training research has to be continued in further events.

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