



The *Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training* project: Lessons from early implementation

OECD Support for the Evaluation Plan of Bulgaria's Programme "Education" 2021-2027

Vocational education and training: interim evaluation #1

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OECD support for the evaluation plan of Bulgaria's Programme "Education" 2021-2027

EVALUATION OUTPUTS	2024		2025		2026		2027		2028		2029	
	Q1-Q2	Q3-Q4	Q1-Q2	Q3-Q4	Q1-Q2	Q3-Q4	Q1-Q2	Q3-Q4	Q1-Q2	Q3-Q4	Q1-Q2	Q3-Q4
Planning and project management	Implementation plan				Update				Update			
Interim Evaluation Reports and Final Evaluation Reports for main thematic areas												
REACT		FINAL	Dissemination & COMMS									
1. Inclusive education				INTERIM (1)	Dissemination & COMMS			INTERIM (2)	Dissemination & COMMS	FINAL	Dissemination & COMMS	
2. Integration of marginalised communities						INTERIM (1)	Dissemination & COMMS		INTERIM (2)	Dissemination & COMMS	FINAL	Dissemination & COMMS
3. Digitalisation and competency-based model								INTERIM (1)	Dissemination & COMMS		FINAL	Dissemination & COMMS
4. Vocational Education and Training				INTERIM (1)	Dissemination & COMMS			INTERIM (2)	Dissemination & COMMS		FINAL	Dissemination & COMMS
5. Higher Education		INTERIM (1)	Dissemination & COMMS			INTERIM (2)	Dissemination & COMMS			FINAL	Dissemination & COMMS	
Ad hoc needs based reports				Evaluation thinking report								
Summary report												

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Evaluation design

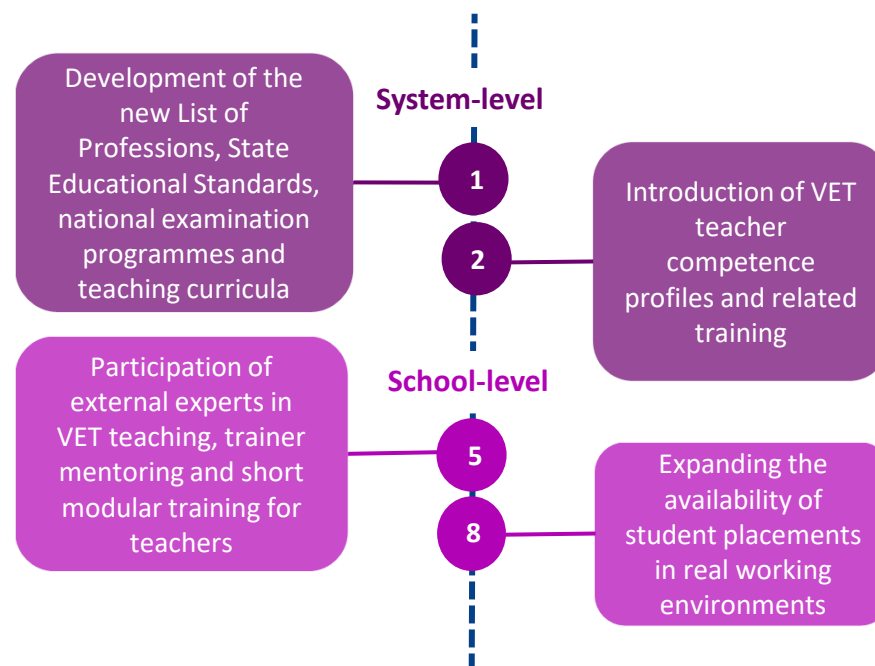




Purpose and scope of the interim evaluation

- OECD interim evaluation #1 of VET
- **Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training** project
- March-December 2025
- To inform current practices and guide future VET initiatives
- The evaluation covers four key project activities (collaborative efforts)

To what extent do the system- and school-level collaborative efforts introduced under *Modernisation of VET* project enable structured and sustained dialogue between VET authorities, employers and other stakeholders to align vocational education with labour market needs.





Overview of the evaluation criteria

Relevance	Are the collaborative efforts introduced under the project appropriate and well-targeted to strengthening labour market responsiveness in VET in Bulgaria?
Coherence	Are the reforms aligned with current legal, institutional, and policy frameworks, and coherent with other national and EU-level initiatives?
Effectiveness & Efficiency	Are the collaborative efforts functioning effectively and making efficient use of available resources and capacities?
EU added value	What added value has EU support brought to the design and implementation of the collaborative efforts?
Sustainability	Are the collaborative efforts likely to be sustained beyond the funding period?





Mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data



Document review: National policy documents, technical guidelines, implementation reports, and key outputs (e.g., revised List of Professions, teacher competence profiles).



Survey of Sectoral Skills Councils: Online format, 51% response rate, closed and open questions



Interviews & focus groups: Ministry and NAVET officials, three SSCs, business associations/trade unions



School site visits: Three schools (VET Excellence Centre, VET school, general secondary with VET programmes). Interviews with leaders, project coordinators and teachers.



Limitations: Findings are illustrative rather than representative; absence of systematic outcome data limits assessment of impact; some activities were still evolving.



Key findings: Overall





EU support drives large-scale VET reform, ensuring stronger consistency and alignment across pathways

SCALE

Unprecedented scale and pace of reform

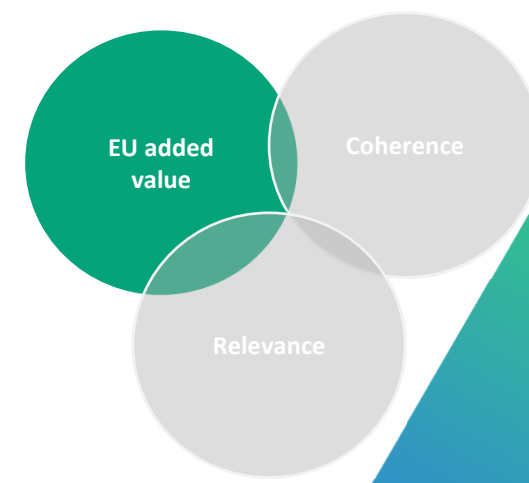
BREADTH

Supports an alignment of key VET components, creating system coherence

POLICY GAP

Fills a critical gap in allocation of national funding

“This is the only project aiming to change educational content, professions and the [state educational] standards comprehensively at the national level. National funding primarily focuses on improving [school] materials and...environment”– Project management team

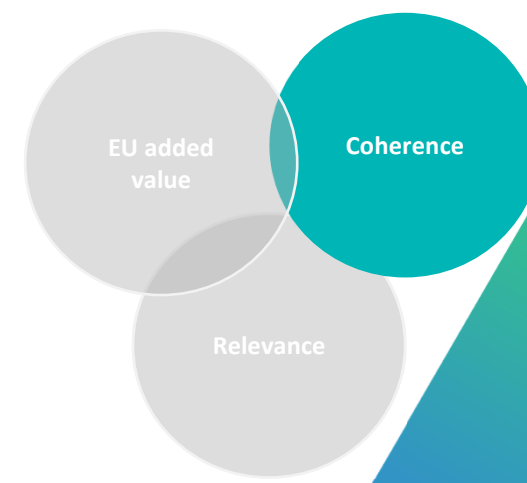


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The project demonstrates strong internal and external coherence

Programme “Education”	National priorities	European frameworks
Complementarity across the three VET projects: > Modernisation of VET: System-wide focus (revises reference frameworks and activities open to all schools) > Dual VET Education: Specific programme > VET Centres of Excellence: Specific schools	Advances Priority Area 7 of Bulgaria’s Strategic Framework (2021-2030): > Enhancing VET quality and responsiveness to labour market evolutions > Supporting digital and green transitions > Updating standards and teacher competence profiles for future professions	Aligns with Council Recommendation on VET (2020) and Osnabrück Declaration (2020) by: > Strengthening adaptability to labour market changes via SSCs and revised List of Professions > Seeks to make VET more attractive through modernised content and work-based learning



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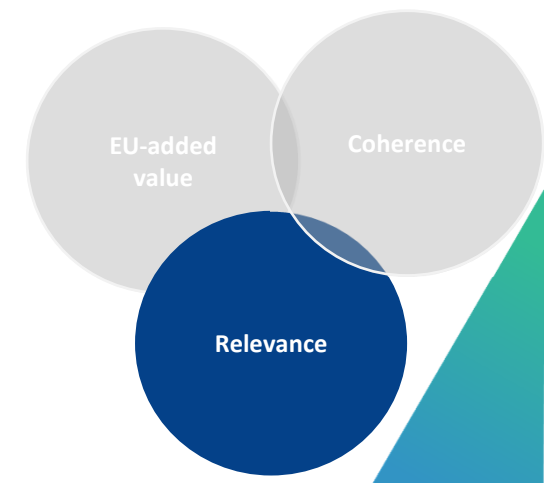


The reform strengthens VET-labour market collaboration, but the project does not address key issues in the VET data infrastructure

By strengthening collaboration mechanisms between VET professionals and labour market actors, the activities seek to tackle key challenges for VET in Bulgaria:

- Limited curricular alignment with changing labour market
- Low practical orientation in teaching and learning
- Low appeal of vocational pathways

But the project does not address key issues in the VET data infrastructure, which may constrain system-level collaboration



Key findings: System-level collaboration





The project is achieving many of its objectives at system level

SYSTEM-LEVEL

Fostering structured collaboration at system level in shaping key VET components

Simultaneous revision of 5 components of VET reference framework, improving coherence and consistency

Operationalising SSCs under a clear mandate, with cost-effective delivery of key outputs

The revised List of Professions offers a broader qualification structure supporting flexibility and school implementation

Maintaining efficient administration despite scale and demands of tasks





Recommendation 1: Institutionalise the Sectoral Skills Councils to enhance VET responsiveness to labour market needs long term

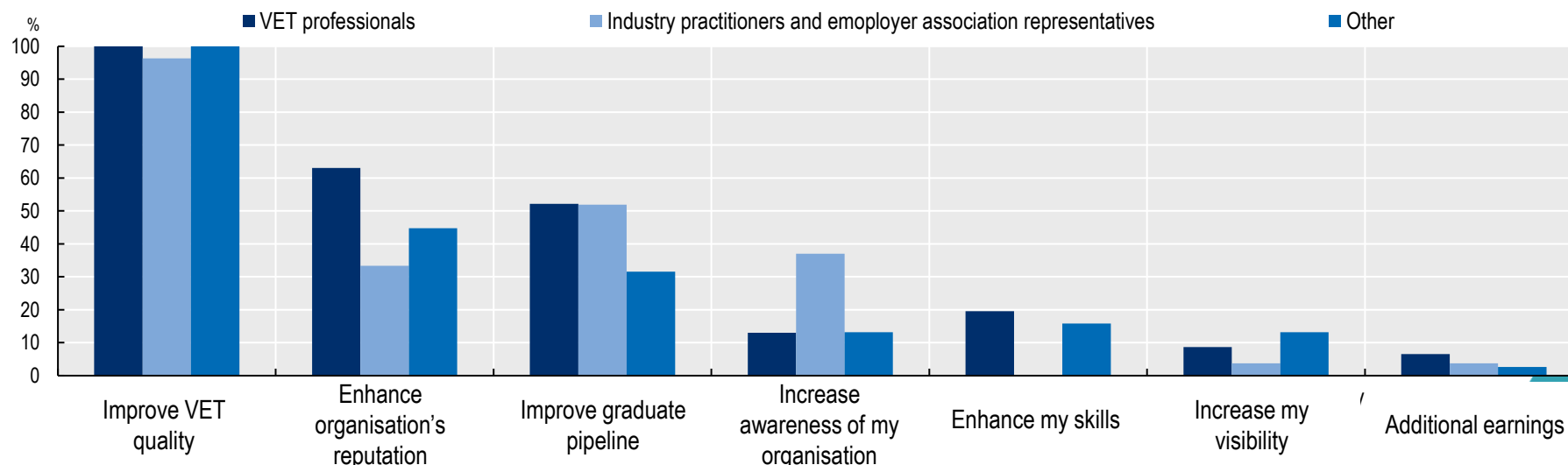
SSCs provide a permanent, formal mechanism for multi-stakeholder collaboration, filling a critical gap by institutionalising dialogue in VET governance

1. Recruitment: the Ministry implemented an open, transparent criteria-based recruitment process.

2. Functions: SSCs have a clear mandate, with well-defined roles and responsibilities

3. Participation model: Most SSC representatives have strong intrinsic motivation to participate

Motivations for participating in the Sectoral Skills Councils (SSCs)





Recommendation 1: Institutionalise the Sectoral Skills Councils to enhance VET responsiveness to labour market needs over the long term

Institutionalise the SSCs to continue strengthening the VET system's responsiveness to labour market needs over time

Anchor the SSCs in law

**Build a standing
recruitment pipeline**

**Apply a clear
contracting model**

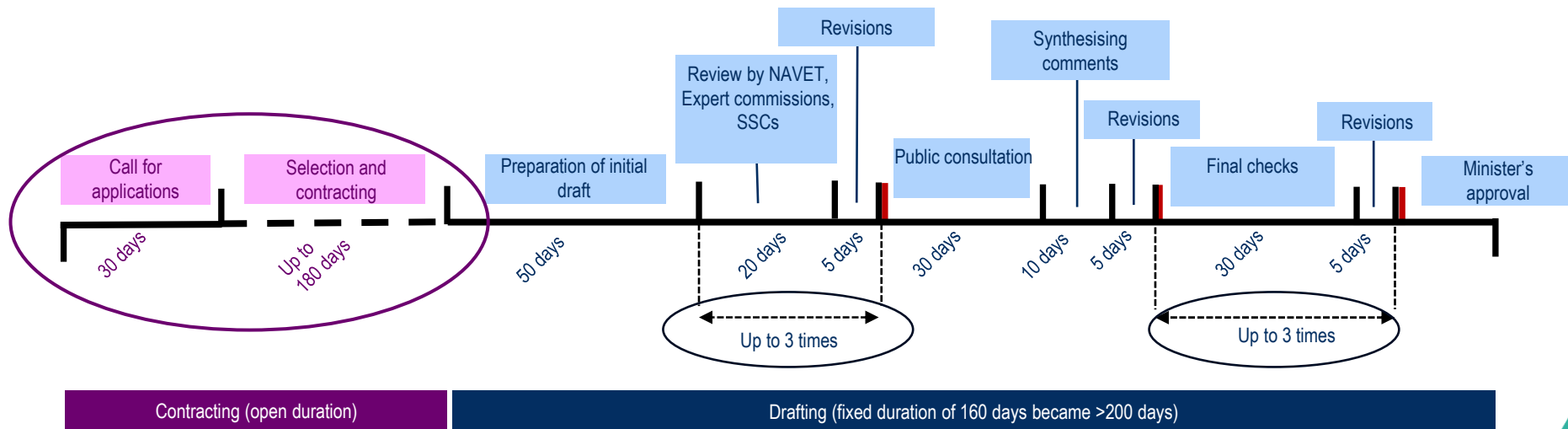
**Strengthen member
support and
recognition**

**Extend SSC remit to
support school-
employer collaboration**



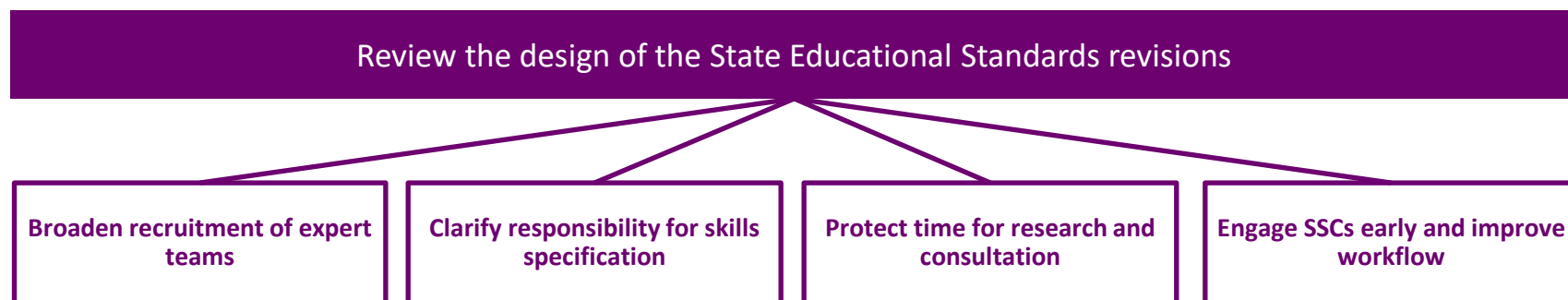
Recommendation 2: Review the design of future revisions of State Educational Standards

- The simultaneous revision of all SES and examination programmes aimed to improve coherence and align learning outcomes with assessment,
- NAVET (4 coordinators) supported the SES drafting process (150 standards) with extensive procedural and technical support.





Recommendation 2: Review the design of future revisions of State Educational Standards



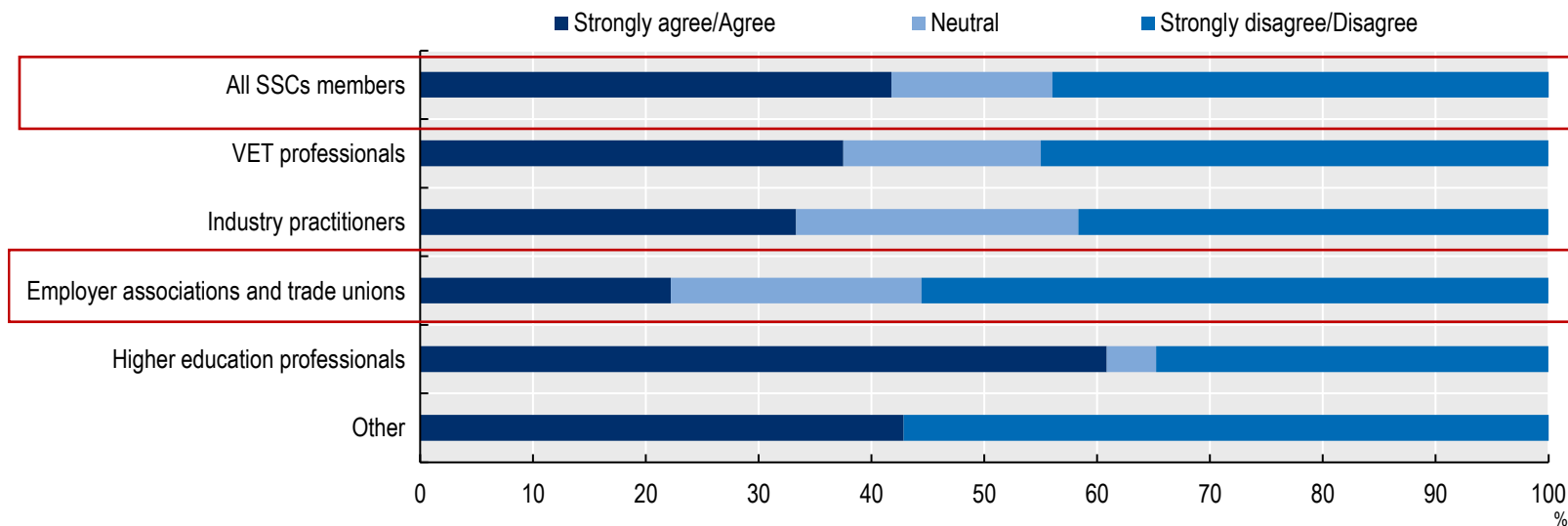


Recommendation 3: Establish a clear, staged review and implementation process for teacher competence profiles

SSCs are in charge of drafting teacher competence profiles for new professions and green/digital priorities:

- As of June 2025, **14 of 20 sectors submitted drafts**, showing strong engagement despite tight timelines
- Flexibility in profile selection allowed SSCs to address **emerging skills needs**, e.g., digital and sustainable design
- Multi-stakeholder involvement brought **sector-specific insights** and aligned with international good practice

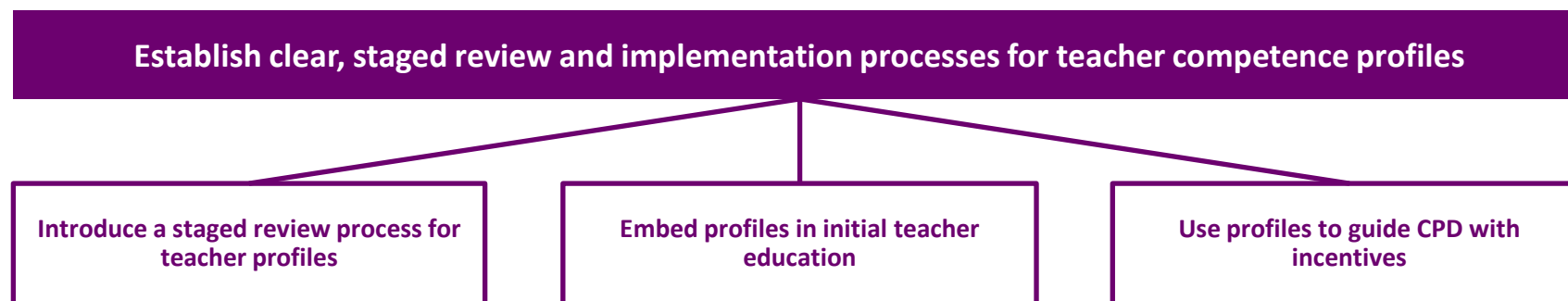
Share of respondents who agree/disagree that the SSC has the right skills and competences to design teacher competence profiles



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Recommendation 3: Establish clear, staged review and implementation processes for teacher competence profiles

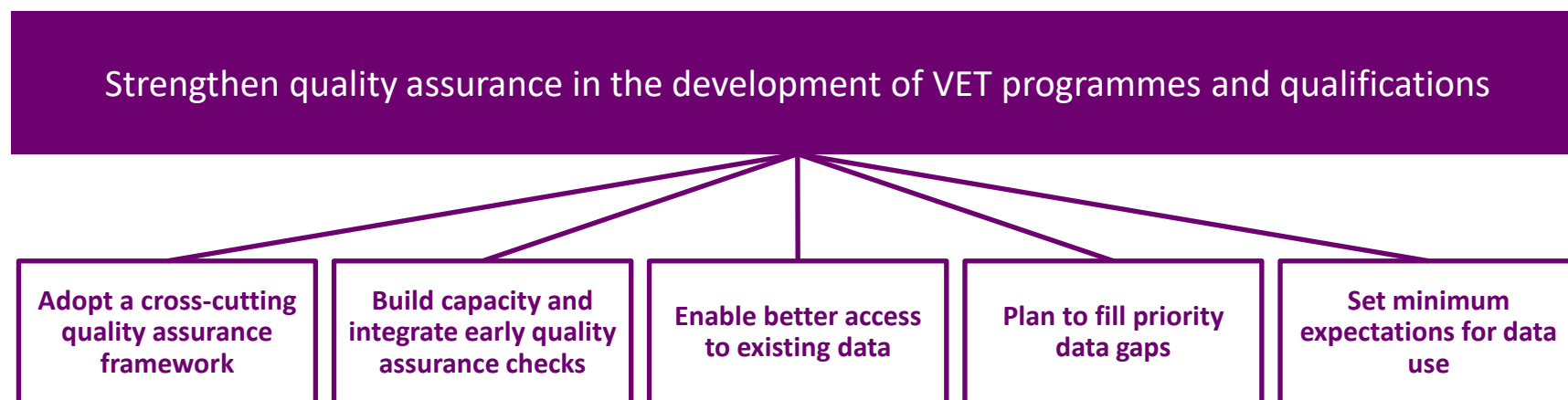




Recommendation 4: Strengthen quality assurance in the development of VET programmes and qualifications

The absence of content-focused quality assurance frameworks limited the development and consistency of several outputs.

- Clear and detailed definition of what constitutes a high-quality output
- Clear expectations of what the development process should entail
- Underpinned by quality use of data



Key findings: School-level collaboration





The project is achieving many of its objectives

SCHOOL-LEVEL

Encouraging schools
to build strong
partnerships with
local employers

Addressing key
system needs by
aiming to fill gaps in
skills and practical
knowledge among
teachers

Expanding work-
based learning
opportunities for VET
students



Recommendation 5: Provide guidance on good practice for involving external experts from business and NGOs in school activities

Activity 5:

- ♦ External practitioner teaching programme
- ♦ Mentoring workshops for trainers
- ♦ Workplace training for VET teachers

However, there are some cross-cutting challenges:

Participation is uneven

Schools and teachers
lack clear guidance

Participation largely
depends on goodwill
and intrinsic motivation

Implementation
capacity varies widely

Activities run separately
from teacher
development and
curriculum reform



Recommendation 5: Provide guidance on good practice for involving external experts from business and NGOs in school activities

Provide guidance on good practice for involving external experts from business and NGOs in school activities

Clarify the intent and delivery of practitioner-teaching

Frame monitoring trainings for external experts

Organise opportunities for schools to exchange experiences



Recommendation 6: Explore sustainable options for supporting student placements in the long term

Country	Programme	Typical duration (hours)	Organisation	Timing (Outside or during academic year)	Financial compensation
Bulgaria	Student practices	240	Integrated	Outside (school days or holidays)	Yes BGN 4.5 per hour
France	BAC Pro – PFMP	210-420	Blocked	During	Yes, stipend from 2023 (EUR 50-100 per week)
Italy	PCTO	200-400	Hybrid (integrated and blocked)	During	Rare, small employer allowance
Netherlands	MBO Level 3-4 (BOL track)	200-320	Hybrid (integrated and blocked)	During	Sometimes small employer allowance
Poland	Technikum	160-320	Hybrid (integrated and blocked)	Outside (school holidays) or during	Rare, small employer allowance
Spain	FCT	350-400	Blocked	During	No
Sweden	Gymnasieskola	Approx. 250	Blocked	During	No
England (U.K.)	T-Level industry placement	315	Flexible (integrated or blocked)	Outside (school holidays) or during	No

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Recommendation 6: Explore sustainable options for supporting student placements in the long term

Explore sustainable options for supporting student placements in the long term, including new approaches to financing, timing, and recruiting host organisations

Rebalance financing for student placements

Integrate placements into vocational curricula

Broaden the pool of placement hosts



Moving forward





The projects featured several promising practices that can be carried forward

Ministry of Education and Science

- > **Sectoral Skills Councils (SSCs)** create **formal, multi-stakeholder platforms** that **shape national standards and exams**, ensuring **alignment with labour market needs**
- > **Transparent SSC membership rules** diversify **perspectives** and strengthen **legitimacy**; **voluntary participation** mobilises **highly motivated experts**
- > **Commitment to inclusive revision processes** ensures **broad input** into **system instruments**, reinforcing **trust** and improving the **relevance of qualifications**

National Agency for VET

- > **Linking standards and exam design to the same team** strengthens **alignment between learning outcomes and assessment**, ensuring that what is taught is directly reflected in how learners are evaluated
- > **Common templates and tailored guidance** promote **consistency and evidence-based drafting**, reducing variability and improving the quality of standards and exams across sectors
- > **Joint revision of professions list and standards** prevents **duplication and gaps**, creating a more coherent qualification framework and supporting labour market relevance

VET schools

- > **Long-term employer partnerships** ensure **curricula remain relevant** and continuously **informed by workplace needs**, strengthening the link between education and labour market demand
- > **Open calls for practitioner-teachers** broader access to **current industry expertise**, bringing real-world practices into classrooms and enriching vocational learning
- > **Short pedagogical training for external experts** improves **instructional quality and safety**, equipping specialists with essential teaching skills while preserving their technical know-how



Overview of recommendations

1. **Institutionalise the Sectoral Skills Councils** to enhance VET responsiveness to labour market needs long term
2. **Review the design of future revisions of State Educational Standards**
3. **Establish clear staged review and implementation processes** for teacher competence profiles
4. **Strengthen quality assurance** in the development of VET programmes and qualifications
5. **Provide comprehensive guidance for schools** on collaborating with external experts from business and NGOs
6. **Explore sustainable options for supporting student placements** in the long term

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Questions for discussion

- Based on the findings, what do you see as the top 3 priorities for the coming years with regards to Activities 1,2 5 and 8 under *Modernisation of VET*?
- Identify 1 way in which the activities could build on their current strengths to deliver on these priorities
- Identify 1-3 new things that that will have to be introduced/adapted
- Based on this, identify key actions to be taken as follows:
 - ◆ Within 3 months
 - ◆ Within 6 months
 - ◆ Within 12 months





Thank you!

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