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ESTUDIOS

≡ The vocational **education and training system** in Castile-La Mancha

Executive summary

The vocational education and training system in Castile-La Mancha

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The opinions, analyses, interpretations and comments found in this document reflect solely the opinions of the respective authors and not those of the publishing institution.

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Executive summary

General observations

Research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) have exhibited various biases in the past, with a strong emphasis on R&D and focus on large enterprises and universities, which has led to little importance being given to vocational skills development and VET centres. Meanwhile, the structure of VET systems has not paid sufficient attention to the requirements of the regional innovation systems in which VET systems operate or the RIS3 priorities set for those systems.

These shortcomings have recently been underlined by the EU. RIS3 have been included once again in the Community's new programme of social policy, only now they incorporate vocational skills and financial support for their promotion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). As European Commission documents indicate (see COM(2017) 376 final), linking VET with RIS3 makes even more sense in regions that have traditional industries and small enterprises such as Castile-La Mancha. Moreover, the European Commission is advocating a new centre model (Centre of Vocational Excellence — CoVE), whose functions go beyond solely generating skills in people in initial VET and VET for employment to involve VET centres in providing other services in areas such as innovation, entrepreneurship, the connections between different stakeholders in the system, and local and regional development strategies.

Although the initial design of RIS3 in Castile-La Mancha did not explicitly address integration of the VET system, there was a desire for this to happen within the system itself, and steps were taken to align the system (at least in its training activity) with RIS3. In the new context emerging in the EU in which vocational skills and VET are incorporated into RIS3 and a new centre model is being developed, increasing the importance of VET within Castile-La Mancha's new RIS3 is a viable objective. However, when it comes to the new functions that VET centres can

take on (beyond their contribution to generating vocational skills) or the desired participation of VET stakeholders in RIS3 governance, the range of options seems to be more limited.

This participation in governance can only be achieved if Castile-La Mancha begins the transition towards a new centre model and improves the current weaknesses in governance in the region's VET system.

- To start this transition, the region should work to separate VET programmes from general education programmes across the range of centres, increase the number of integrated centres and explore the 'maturity model' promoted by the Commission for developing CoVEs with a relatively small group of dynamic centres.
- To improve governance, more life should be breathed into the region's 3rd VET Plan for 2018–2022 (*III Plan de FP de 2018–2022*), Castile-La Mancha's VET Council (*Consejo de FP*) and the Advisory Committee on Employment and VET for Employment (*Comisión Consultiva para el Empleo y la FPE*). The structure and operation of government bodies linked to VET must also be strengthened and a solution found for compartmentalisation in this area, and the complexity and fragmentation of provincial structures and operations reduced. Partnerships between VET centres should be promoted and it should be made possible for all stakeholders (associations of VET centres and private VET educational centres) to have representatives in governance bodies.

Finally, in relation to the seven broad international trends identified in systems for generating vocational skills, the report shows that Castile-La Mancha has to take the following on board: (i) the region has to keep improving the levels of education and qualification of its population; (ii) it must increase participation of the adult population in learning; (iii) while qualifications are now expressed in terms of skills or learning outcomes, collaborative, challenge-based learning methodologies have yet to be introduced to any significant level; (iv) the region must further develop cross-cutting skills; (v) it must increase the level of diversification of VET centre functions in Castile-La Mancha; (vi) there is an acceptable level of permeability between the various levels of VET, and between VET and university qualifications; (vii) the level of hybridisation and blurring of boundaries between vocational and university systems in Castile-La Mancha should be increased to match that of the most advanced references.

Characteristics of Castile-La Mancha's regional innovation system

Castile-La Mancha has the following structural characteristics: It has a population and GDP somewhat below the average for Spain's autonomous communities, an ageing population, low levels of urbanisation and population density, low potential

accessibility, moderate availability of natural resources, small enterprises with a low level of internationalisation, a medium–low percentage of public sector employment and relatively high administrative decentralisation. The following factors have a major impact on the VET system:

- An ageing population reduces the cohorts that access initial VET, and requires greater development and integration of VET for employment, with participation from VET educational centres.
- Given the region’s low levels of urbanisation and population density, a balance must be sought between objectives of territorial cohesion and efficiency, applying flexible formulas such as regular rotation of training programmes in less populated areas.
- The small size of the region’s enterprises makes it particularly important to have school-based VET systems, with multifunctional centres and intermediaries (local development agencies, clusters and sectoral associations, and so on) that can coordinate and gather information on the needs of this sphere of training and innovation and responses to these needs.
- Administrative decentralisation must be exploited — without undermining the overall coherence of the system — to agilely and flexibly align the VET system with local requirements and contexts, for example by adapting course curricula or launching specialised training courses and proposing suitable multilevel structuring (at the regional, provincial, district or city/town level) of the VET system. All of should be done without undermining the overall coherence of the system.

To improve Castile-La Mancha’s position in science and technology, apart from increasing the resources allocated to these areas, these resources must be concentrated on comparatively well-positioned spheres linked to Castile-La Mancha’s key sectors (such as health and life sciences) or used to address weaknesses in fields of crucial importance to emerging sectors prioritised by RIS3 (engineering and technology).

Castile-La Mancha’s economy specialises in the agri-food sector and other traditional industries such as textiles, footwear, non-metal industries, and so on, while it also has a strong subspecialisation in advanced market services (communication and information technologies, financial and business services, etc.). This specialisation profile is not particularly positive as a whole, since the sectors the region specialises in — traditional consumer goods — are characterised by low levels of technology and demand. They are also intensive in their use of natural resources and cheap labour, and offer occupations requiring lower levels of education. This region has to choose between reinventing the bases of its competitiveness in the sectors it currently works in and encouraging diversification towards other kinds of activities.

Forecasts indicate that employment will grow by 13% between 2018 and 2030. Castile-La Mancha should prepare itself for a drop in farming jobs, the servitisation of its economy and strong worker turnover, which will account for some 80% of job opportunities.

In competitive performance, Castile-La Mancha ranks 14th out of Spain's 17 autonomous communities, and 158th out of the EU-28's 218 regions, despite improvement in its indicators in recent years. The fields where it has greatest room for improvement are employment (included in the performance indicators) and internationalisation and R&D and innovation (in competitiveness factors).

In human resource indicators, Castile-La Mancha stands at 161st out of the 218 regions. There is a notable asymmetrical polarisation in levels of education. Similar to in the rest of Spain, the volume of employment at the intermediate level of qualification is quite low compared to that of low-skilled work, where the volume of employment is much higher. Despite this, there is still a high level of overqualification, which is indicative of the type of demand for jobs in the region. This suggests that the problem of qualifications is even more serious on the demand side (enterprises) than in supply (training centres), and that Castile-La Mancha is operating a 'low-skill road' model which must be tackled using a combination of education and training policy (on the supply side) and industrial and innovation policy (on the demand side).

Initial VET

The **number of VET graduates** entering the productive system is calculated using three successive filters: firstly, the number of students enrolled in VET; secondly, the percentage of these that finish their course and graduate; and thirdly, the percentage of graduates that gain employment and enter the labour market.

The percentage of the population aged 15–19 enrolled on VET courses is similar in Castile-La Mancha to the proportion in Spain as a whole (36.4% and 36.6%, respectively). However, both of these figures are approximately one-quarter lower than those in the other EU-28 countries. The report suggests that, to raise these percentages, general measures should be taken to increase or improve the attractiveness of VET courses and to promote specific initiatives targeting certain groups that are currently under-represented.

In relation to general measures, it is worth making the distinction between those measures that have an objective impact on the attractiveness of courses (including improving facilities and equipment, expanding dual VET of excellence, rolling out challenge-based and ICT-based methodologies, and developing gateways to other levels of education) and those that use communication and guidance to increase the information available to young people and their parents on VET. Both types could be improved in Castile-La Mancha.

As for specific initiatives for different groups, there are three groups that require special attention. The first concerns women who account for 45% of students enrolled in VET in Castile-La Mancha compared to 55% men. The second concerns adults due to their lower levels of education in Castile-La Mancha and the growing need for lifelong learning. The final one concerns various disadvantaged groups (immigrants, unemployed, and so on). This diversity of students calls for a stronger boost for non-traditional types of training — distance, part-time, in evening hours, and so on — as well as for mechanisms recognising skills acquired outside the classroom.

But it is even more effective to reduce rates of dropout from VET: while these are high in Spain as a whole (40%), they are higher again in Castile-La Mancha (44%). Moreover, those rates in Castile-La Mancha are higher in basic VET and on industrial and ICT courses. Once again, apart from providing centres with more resources (for monitoring, tutoring, and so on) it is also necessary to deal with the type of training given, developing project-based and dual VET methodologies, for example.

When it comes to VET graduates entering employment, the existing information system in Castile-La Mancha makes it difficult to know the extent to which this occurs and the conditions under which those graduates join the labour market. The incomplete data provided by VET centres seem to show that employment rates following training are far from high, and vary a great deal depending on the professional family, education level, course, and even centre (for the same course). In this area, the systems providing information on employment opportunities need improvement, a key issue if the VET on offer is to be aligned with the demands of the productive fabric, as well as for the reorientation of young people and professional families.

Nevertheless, apart from the quantity of VET graduates that enter the productive fabric, the **structure of the set of VET graduates** is also very important. The students that enrol on and graduate from VET can be divided up vertically by education level into basic VET, intermediate VET and higher VET. They can also be classified horizontally by professional family and vocational course.

At the vertical level, Castile-La Mancha displays a comparatively high level of enrolment in basic VET, and a low level of enrolment in higher VET. Although an offering of this kind foments the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, it also generates a degree of mismatch with market demand, as reflected in the descending scale of subsequent employment the lower the level of education possessed by the VET graduate. In this respect, the report proposes not only correcting the deficit in higher VET courses but also promoting more practical, project-based methodologies in basic VET to reduce high dropout rates, and developing complementary training for basic and intermediate VET students who decide to continue studying to a higher level.

The structure of the set of graduates by professional families and vocational course (or level of horizontal alignment) indicates that the range of the offering is in line with the size of the region's economy. However, enrolment is concentrated in just a few professional families, with the five largest accounting for 62% of enrolments, while the uptake in industrial professional families is relatively low, accounting for just 25% of the total students enrolled. This concentration in a low number of professional families is even greater among women (66%), a fact that also clearly echoes traditional stereotypes as regards the different courses studied by the sexes. The concentration of enrolments in a handful of professional families is also generally more acute in smaller towns.

In Chapter Four the level of horizontal alignment is examined in further detail. To calculate the level of mismatch between the supply of VET graduates by professional families and the needs of the productive fabric we have used three factors.

- Firstly, we have employed sector-specific forecasts on the opportunities stemming both from expansion (due to variation) and worker replacement (generally due to retirement) in existing jobs, estimating the number of these jobs that will be filled by VET graduates, in total and by professional families. We then crossed this demand for graduates in each professional families with the students graduating from the VET system in each professional families to obtain the surplus or deficit of graduates. Comparing these numbers with the total number of graduates gives the rate to which coverage is excessive or insufficient in each group.
- The degree of over- or under-coverage was calculated by comparing the sector structure and the structure of graduates by professional families in Castile-La Mancha with Spain as a whole.
- Thirdly, the rates of VET graduate employment for each course and professional families were also used to assess the level to which each course and professional families is in line with the needs of the productive fabric (the greater the rates of VET graduates entering the labour market, the better the alignment).

These three calculations show that there is a fundamental under-coverage in the professional families most directly linked to industry, while non-industrial professional families showed some balance. This insufficient coverage is more patent at present than for the forecasts up to 2030. The professional families where it would make the most sense to increase the VET offering due to a higher level of under-coverage are commerce and marketing, mechanical manufacturing, construction and civil works, apparel and leather, graphic arts, security and environment, and wood, furniture and cork. In contrast, there is some over-coverage in the following professional families: IT and communications, farming, administration and management, physical activities and sport, and health.

In such a large autonomous community as Castile-La Mancha, devolving planning of the training offered to the provincial level is absolutely essential. The overall mismatch varies greatly from one province to another: it is particularly acute in Guadalajara and Cuenca, for example. Moreover, under-coverage and over-coverage are not found throughout the autonomous community but concentrated in certain provinces.

Finally, there are professional families that display clear indicators of under-coverage and high levels of VET graduates entering the labour market that nevertheless fail to attract students. This suggests that corrective policies designed to tackle mismatches cannot only consist of increasing or decreasing the number of places available on courses in the professional families concerned; appropriate communications and vocational guidance policies must also be put in place.

To move on from an analysis of the structure of the offering to examine the **resources dedicated to it**, and starting with teaching staff, we can see that measures are required to increase their experience of the business world, participation in VET for employment, use of collaborative, project-based learning, and mastery of foreign languages.

VET educational centres equipment and facilities are insufficient. This is a consequence of the stagnation of investment seen during the global financial crisis, although this situation has experienced a turnaround in recent years.

While improving teaching staff and equipment and facilities calls for an increase in public funding, the investment required is such that proposing policies that divide resources up equally among everyone, or based on inventories detailing the state of facilities, will simply not work. Resources must be allocated in line with priorities and outcomes, guaranteeing maximum effectiveness at all times. In this respect, in cases where a centre does not take full advantage of the resources provided, these should be made available to enterprises and other VET suppliers in a way that resolves the barriers and lack of flexibility currently preventing this from happening.

Nevertheless, the performance and functioning of centres ultimately depend on **governance** at least as much as on resources. We can divide centres up into three broad categories: integrated (public), public (standard) and private centres.

The integrated centre type was created to allow the development of multifunctional VET centres, in particular in initial VET, VET for employment and innovation services. These centres would not offer general education courses. These centres tend to have more resources and autonomy and are usually accredited to impart VET for employment with certification. However, there are only two integrated centres in Castile-La Mancha, and despite belonging to this category they have not been allocated substantially more resources, although the drafting of a decree by the government of Castile-La Mancha on the organisational structure and

functioning of this centre type is at a very advanced stage, and will give them increased autonomy and resources. It seems to be a priority - and all stakeholder in the system recognise this - to increase the number of integrated centres and to change the framework (regulations, resources, etc.) that affects them. However, there are serious obstacles to doing so, since first it would be necessary to drop their general education courses and with them considerable investment if they are to comply with the minimum requirements laid down in state legislation on integrated centres.

Private centres have a relatively low presence in Castile-La Mancha (accounting for 13% of VET students) compared to Spain as a whole (27% of VET students). In the majority of indicators, private VET centres in Castile-La Mancha achieve good results in finishing rates, teaching staff's qualifications, facilities, teacher training, centre management certificates, introduction of dual VET, participation in VET for employment, and so on.

The necessary increase in resources allocated to public centres must be accompanied by significant changes to governance in such centres. They must be equipped with more management structures (by acknowledging staffing and reducing teaching workloads), and they must also be called on to develop proper VET strategies. Public centres must also be given greater autonomy and include business representatives on their governing boards. And effective mechanisms must be put in place to monitor and evaluate centre activity to enable results-based allocation of resources.

Alongside these measures, the formation of associations should be encouraged, and networks of centres established within Castile-La Mancha, both to foster representation in other bodies (such as in Castile-La Mancha's VET Council) and to share knowledge and exploit synergies. The formation of associations might be related to the centres' ownership, but the creation of networks and hubs could involve grouping centres — regardless of ownership — according to Castile-La Mancha's RIS3 priorities (such as in agri-food or industry 4.0) or by professional families (for example, to encourage updating and adaptation of curricula).

VET for employment

The considerable changes made since 2015 in state legislation governing VET for employment have had less of a negative impact in Castile-La Mancha since socio-economic partners in the region were not mere intermediaries in VET for employment (a function restricted by the new legislation) and thanks to the good work of the new team that took over at the Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment (*Consejería de Economía, Empresas y Empleo*) in 2015.

In the **supply of VET for employment** (programmed and subsidised by the government for both unemployed and employed people), the new Regional

Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment team proved itself to be agile and dynamic, launching new programmes, developing competitive intelligence mechanisms in diagnosis and evaluation, and diversifying the offer across stakeholders, professional families and territories. It also introduced new priorities, emphasising VET for employment for the unemployed over those in employment, and prioritised quality and employability in programmes (measured by the number of training hours offered, resources invested and qualification available) over mere quantity (measured as the number of actions and participants in training initiatives). Faced with the changes that have occurred in the numbers for the active population and the unemployed, as well as the magnification of certain traits among the latter (lower qualification levels, increased age of the long-term unemployed, and so on), in the future certain changes will have to be introduced to the current structure of the set of training programmes.

VET for employment programmed by enterprises (by the demand side) in Castile-La Mancha must be further developed. Three basic indicators for 2018 confirm this: spending on training per worker (€56 in Castile-La Mancha and €82 in Spain as a whole); the percentage of enterprises offering training (18% in Castile-La Mancha and 21% in Spain); and the percentage of waged workers in the private sector participating in subsidised training (26.5% in Castile-La Mancha; 33.7% in Spain). This is only partly due to a greater presence of small enterprises in Castile-La Mancha. Castile-La Mancha's SMEs are not sufficiently aware of the benefits of training their workers, and do not take enough advantage of opportunities to obtain subsidies covering training costs unless intermediaries (sector associations and clusters, chambers of commerce, local development agencies, and so on) give them the help they need in this area. More than 50% of the VET for employment programmed by Castile-La Mancha's businesses is concentrated in two professional families with low strategic value (security and environment, administration and management) and only 37% of participants in subsidised training in Castile-La Mancha are women, compared with 44% across Spain as a whole.

But the level of development of VET for employment not only depends on demand (whether directly from enterprises or with government intervention); it also depends on the existence of a **sector providing VET for employment** that makes this training possible. Supply and demand in VET for employment are mutually dependent and must be mutually reinforcing. Moreover, apart from being good for the competitiveness of the businesses to which it provides services, a burgeoning sector of VET suppliers is also a good thing in itself as a source of numerous highly qualified jobs. Aware of this, the Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment has introduced triple criteria modulating the competitive tenders to run VET for employment programmes with the aim of strengthening and diversifying the stakeholders, professional families and territories covered by the sector supplying VET for employment.

Compared with the national average, in Castile-La Mancha that sector is made up of a greater number of entities. There are 800 of these on the state register for Castile-La Mancha: that accounts for 5.5% of the total entities in Spain when the region's active population is just 3.8% of the Spanish total. However, these entities tend to be smaller in Castile-La Mancha, the majority being micro-enterprises.

The report presents a classification of VET for employment entities with the following main categories: private suppliers, social partners, local councils, private education centres and public centres. According to the total volume of resources attracted to the sector, in Castile-La Mancha private suppliers and social partners predominate. The former are smaller and highly specialised and geographically dispersed, and mainly offer training to the unemployed. The latter are larger and offer more general courses; they are concentrated in towns and cities and targeted more at those in employment. There is a higher proportion of private suppliers and local councils and fewer public centres in Castile-La Mancha compared to Spain as a whole, while social partners are not only intermediaries but also direct suppliers of training.

The government should continue to strengthen and diversify the VET for employment supply sector, continuing to apply the triple criteria currently in use (stakeholder type, professional families/training speciality and province). Moreover, it should offer stable frameworks for financing and finding formulas for generating agreements with centres of excellence to promote partnerships; supporting their penetration in the creation of skills diagnoses and in training initiatives subsidised by the State Foundation for Training in Employment (*Fundación Estatal para la Formación en el Empleo* — Fundae); and making better use of public centres and schools.

There are many advantages to imparting **VET for employment in schools**, including making greater use of facilities and equipment; training and updating of teaching staff; closer relations between schools and enterprises, and so on. Public education centres also constitute the most direct and controllable mechanism the government has for ensuring its objectives are effectively met. That is why schools offering VET should be further involved in VET for employment. All of the measures proposed above to achieve improvements (increasing the number of integrated centres, investment in equipment and facilities, fostering teacher placements in businesses, changes to governance, and so on) would contribute to this aim. But without a doubt the most direct measures involve the creation of certain structures and forms of recognition (staffing levels, workloads and incentives) that favour the management of VET for employment by the centre and the involvement of its teachers.

As we indicate above, a useful first step would be to address the move to providing VET for employment in a select number of centres, applying criteria based both on the fields of training offered — above all, ensuring that the training is in the

industrial professional families that display the greatest need — and on the levels of dynamism and interest shown by centres' management teams and teaching staff. In any case, the measures taken by the Regional Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (*Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deportes*) must also be complemented by the Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment's financing measures. This is one of the areas in which the coordination between the two regional ministries will be crucial.

Dual VET

Faced with an imprecise national regulatory framework, each Spanish autonomous community has developed its own regulations. This has given rise to a confusing situation characterised by disorder and inefficiency. Central government must approve new legislation on dual VET and establish a specific type of employment contract for that sphere.

In Castile-La Mancha, dual VET has been promoted both in the sphere of education (dual VET-education) and in the world of work (dual VET-employment). In **dual VET-education**, we can see that the predominance of small enterprises employing competitive strategies with a low level of sophistication and the limited regional government resources led Castile-La Mancha to choose a flexible model that tended towards quantitative expansion. The percentage of VET students taking up this option in the region in 2017–2018 was 5.9%, compared to 3.2% across Spain. These are low numbers in both cases, albeit following a steady increase since 2013.

Dual VET-education in Castile-La Mancha develops projects at three levels: basic, intermediate and higher VET. There is almost no use of training and apprenticeship contracts and there are few students who are remunerated by enterprises in the form of grants. The education authority provides little additional financial resources to facilitate the incorporation of students into this kind of training, and it should increase the involvement of socio-economic stakeholders and intermediaries in this area. There is a high concentration in three professional families (agriculture, health, and administration and management). There is also a lack of procedures for training and certifying tutors and trainers in enterprises, as well as for registering and accrediting businesses so that these can participate in dual VET.

The report details a whole set of measures for improving and expanding dual VET-education which we will not repeat here. But there is one point worth highlighting due to its relevance in Castile-La Mancha: the expedience of a greater level of coordination and unity of action between the Regional Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and the Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment in the sphere of dual VET, where both are active. This would give rise to many synergies, for example in the creation of joint databases of

host businesses and organisations, training processes for trainers and tutors in enterprises and accreditation of these enterprises, as well as the development of links with intermediaries.

Dual VET-employment, which must necessarily be linked to the award of certificates of professional competency and training and apprenticeships contracts, has met with little success in Spain. This is evidenced by the fact that training and apprenticeship contracts accounted for just 0.18% of the total contracts signed in Spain in 2019. This low uptake can be attributed to the characteristics of Spain's business fabric and poor regulation of training and apprenticeship contracts.

However, in Castile-La Mancha the use of training and apprenticeship contracts is slightly higher (0.25% of the total contracts signed). Since 2016, the Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment has been promoting dual VET for employment programmes in a pioneering initiative designed to boost quality VET for employment targeting disadvantaged groups (in this case, young people with no qualifications not in employment or education), and this contributed to the difference.

The programme offered generous grants (on average, €13,300 per participant) to cover the costs of training, guidance and recruitment. Some 18 promoting entities, 175 businesses and 339 students took part in the 2018 call for applications, with grants totalling €4.5 million. The Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, Enterprise and Employment has made substantial efforts to mobilise potential promoting entities and businesses; create initiatives to register and standardise training entities; select projects in line with relevant criteria and advanced evaluations of programme performance and results; and so on, meaning that it can be qualified as a programme that represents good practice. One recommendation worth making is for more to be done in communications and awareness-raising to promote the programme, and efforts made to involve clusters and sector associations, VET educational centres (currently entirely absent from the programme), and local development agencies, which also require prior promotion in the region.



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