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ESTUDIOS

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**Executive summary**

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# Vocational education and training in Navarre. Towards a new school model and the challenge of dual VET

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## Executive summary

The main aim of this report is to analyse the benefits and possibility of changing the model in Navarre's vocational education and training (VET) centres so they can implement Dual VET and perform a series of non-traditional functions which go beyond their specific, key function: to provide initial VET (IVET) or VET for young people.

Navarre's VET has a 'school-based' learning scheme, although its traditional VET programme does include alternating work-school training, which becomes even more intensive in Dual VET. Navarre's VET centres were the first in Spain to separate general education from VET and are the most advanced in that regard, such that 88 % of VET students are enrolled in schools dedicated solely to VET programmes. This network of centres specialising exclusively in VET provides a strong base from which to tackle this change of model.

Like VET centres in the rest of Spain, but unlike those in central and northern EU countries, Navarre's centres concurrently offer programmes at various levels of qualification. This makes it difficult to establish a clear identity for higher VET (HVET) as tertiary education. Currently, the staff charter, quality assurance, financing mechanisms, infrastructure, etc. are typical of secondary schools and not of tertiary education, which is the level at which HVET is entered in the statistics. This makes it difficult for them to take on certain functions assumed by the post-secondary VET centres that have emerged elsewhere in Europe in recent decades. In addition, there has been relatively less development of higher-level VET in Navarre centres, compared to the Spanish average, although the push towards HVET in Navarre in recent years is changing the situation considerably.

Another similarity between Navarre and Spain's other autonomous communities is that over three-quarters of VET-enrolled students are in state schools. And most students enrolled in private VET programmes are at charter schools, meaning they still receive public funding. The public or private nature of these schools is related to some of their features (mainly to their managerial autonomy but also

to their location, types of courses, etc.), making the private schools appear better positioned to provide certain functions (e.g. employment training), while the state schools are better positioned for others (e.g. support for local development). In any event, with respect to the schools' governance, the changes required by the new model seem more substantial in state schools than in private ones, as will be indicated below.

### **IVET in Navarre**

Given the fact that new functions should only be taken on once the key, primary, and specific function of VET centres is guaranteed — to provide IVET — this study began by analysing the characteristics of this initial training scheme in Navarre. The following are some of the positive aspects of IVET:

- highly developed, integrated VET centres (as mentioned above);
- high degree of centre specialisation in specific occupational groups, which favours economies of scale and prevents duplication;
- major effort to adapt curricula to the local situation;
- greater development of agricultural and industrial VET courses, despite their higher cost, which is in line with Navarre's specialisation in the productive sectors and its S3<sup>1</sup> priorities.
- smaller group sizes and lower student/lecturer ratio;
- sufficient supply of companies for internships, although some centres should enlist the participation of new companies;
- VET graduates have notable technical skills;
- staff are well-qualified and have a strong technical background;
- notable standard of equipment, despite the halt in investment during the financial crisis;
- sufficient available resources to take on new functions.

But, together with these strengths, it is also worth mentioning matters that need to be corrected or offer room for improvement:

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1/ S3 is an acronym for *Smart Specialisation Strategies*. These types of strategies were established as an *ex ante* condition imposed by the European Commission on countries and regions wishing to access European structural funds. In 2016, the Navarre Government updated its smart specialisation strategy, known as the 'Navarre S3'. Some of the notable features which distinguish these types of strategies are that they seek to focus investment on research and innovation (and not on physical infrastructure); they insist on setting thematic, or vertical, priorities (and not only on promoting horizontal policies); and they advocate that priorities should be established based on a new governance model which supports entrepreneurial discovery processes. Four stakeholders are involved: government, businesses, knowledge organisations and civil society, and together they are called the 'quadruple helix'. VET centres, which are the subject of this report, could be added to the helix of knowledge organisations, together with universities and research and technology centres.

- low percentage of VET students;
- need to continue increasing social recognition of HVET;
- subspeciality in occupational groups related to service-sector S3 priorities (health, creative and digital industries, and integrated tourism);
- low percentage of female students in VET, highly concentrated in a small number of occupational groups — stereotypically female — with fewer career prospects and lower salaries;
- few VET courses taught in English and little inclusion of English in VET curricula;
- embryonic state of project-based collaborative learning;
- insufficient development of cross-cutting skills (a matter related to the low development of project-based collaborative learning and Dual VET);
- high early leaving rates (although slightly lower than the Spanish average);
- student demand not always in line with economic or social needs, which is due to insufficient information and guidance and is, in turn, reflected by low employment rates for some courses;
- staff with little professional experience (common in VET throughout all of Spain), as well as insufficient training in new teaching methodologies;
- low use of available equipment in some centres.

One of the IVET options available is Dual VET, which offers significant benefits not only for students but also for companies, the government and even the VET centres themselves (see the summary of advantages in Table 2). One of the problems revealed by comparative analysis of Dual VET is that the same name is used to describe very different concepts. Therefore, this report has made an effort to distinguish between terms such as work-linked training, dual training and apprenticeships, as well as types of dual learning. On that basis, Navarre's Dual VET has been characterised as school-based Dual VET, comprising two phases (short alternating periods of school and company training), with minimum remuneration for the student but, generally, no employment contract (no apprenticeships).

Compared to Spain as a whole — and taking into account that Spain is significantly behind the rest of the EU with respect to implementation of apprenticeships, although the trend in recent years has decreased this gap — Navarre is above the national average. Although the overall number of VET students in Navarre is not high (Navarre's VET-enrolled students make up 1.1 % of the national total), the dual model is implemented more in Navarre than in other regions (2.7 % of the total), which represents a considerable lead.

Nevertheless, if Navarre wants to reach the European average, it needs to increase the pace at which its Dual VET programme is developing by focusing its efforts

on the centres, companies, courses and qualifications best suited to it. To do so, it would be beneficial to rely more on expert intermediaries to communicate Dual VET's advantages and recruit more participating companies (thus having a wider selection from which choose the ones that can offer the best training).

### **Dual VET in Navarre**

Among the unique features of Navarre's Dual VET programme, the following stand out:

- Implementation of the dual model has normally occurred because the entire group of students from one course took apprenticeships under this model. In other words, the groups were homogeneous and the dual model applied to all the students. This facilitates management procedures, although it is not normally as highly regarded from a student-learning perspective. In Navarre, implementation of the dual model has generally been applied to the entire group of students on a course rather than only selecting individuals to participate. This facilitates the management of dual training at the centre, but is not normally as highly regarded from a student-learning perspective.
- The number of Dual VET courses per centre is somewhat lower in Navarre than in other autonomous communities, which has allowed the centres — as research recommends — to explore and research the model, looking for unique features and learning opportunities to later share with the rest of the centres and groups.
- The partnership with Volkswagen makes Navarre one of the few autonomous communities in Spain with specialisation programmes in which students spend a third year in training, mostly at the company. Nevertheless, these specialisation programmes should be encouraged further, particularly in the realm of Industry 4.0, with approval of specific regional legislation to support them.
- Compared to the Spanish average, Navarre has more Dual VET courses in lower-level qualifications, that is, basic and intermediate VET. Analysts generally believe that students on higher courses are more likely to possess the requisite skills and maturity to participate in this form of training. However, it is also claimed that Dual VET positively affects students' motivation and allows them to develop practical and cross-cutting skills, which are key to integrating disadvantaged and less-qualified groups.
- Compared to the rest of Spain, private schools in Navarre appear to be more involved in implementing Dual VET.
- Navarre's Dual VET seems to be highly focused on a small number of occupational groups and, compared to the rest of Spain, is more related to industry and less to services.
- In addition to applying a two-phase dual system in all Navarre centres — considered by research to be more advantageous from a learning perspective



— this system has a wide variety of formats (alternating school in the morning with work in the afternoon, or a few days at school and another few at work, etc.), which reflects the flexibility of Dual VET and its adaptability to different circumstances.

- Decision 344/2017 on Navarre's Dual VET rightly opted for rigour and quality in Dual VET, despite the awareness that it would delay its development in the short term.
- Nevertheless, still only 20–25 % of students in the dual programme have an employment contract. Changing this also involves central government's approval of a training and apprenticeship contract that is adapted to Dual VET in the education sector.
- Although it is still true in Navarre that the percentage of companies that accept students under the dual model increases according to company size (and with characteristics like being part of a corporate group, performing R&D, exporting, etc.), more than three-quarters of Dual VET students carry out their training in SMEs.
- Navarre has chosen to uphold lecturers' teaching hours, even though classroom time is lower due to students leaving for on-the-job training, and has established in-company training for students which complements, not substitutes, classroom teaching.

An online survey on the perceptions of Dual VET among representatives of Navarre's VET centres produced the following results:

- The private schools, as well as those that have already implemented Dual VET, have a more positive opinion of it than schools without it. This may be due to their greater adaptability and the information they have about Dual VET. Schools should be encouraged to communicate and share experiences with one another.
- Although Dual VET, according to research, is more suited to certain types of sectors and companies than others, the schools in Navarre find this VET scheme to be compatible with the programmes they offer and, despite the dominance of SMEs in Navarre, they have enough participating companies.
- Fears about the companies' training skills have not been resolved as it is unknown how and by whom the companies' mentors and instructors are trained. The training procedures for mentors/instructors should be clarified and put in place as soon as possible, and public incentives should be provided so companies commit themselves to applying them.
- It is deemed preferable to select which students will participate in Dual VET; however, this may conflict with Navarre's education system given that Dual VET is designed to include the student group as a whole.

- Although frequent meetings are held between the mentors from the centres and the companies, and the companies' opinions are taken into account when assessing the students, the companies are generally not involved in selecting them.

From a company perspective, the incentives to become involved in Dual VET are similar to those indicated by research (see the aforementioned list of Dual VET's benefits). The same is true for the disincentives (providing a trainee wage, managing paperwork, adjusting schedules, mentorship work, etc.). The most significant finding, however, is that none of the above — including the controversial issue of trainee wages — appear to have much negative influence. We can conclude that, despite the lack of public incentives for companies to implement Dual VET, there are sufficient motivating factors overall to encourage their participation.

### **The non-traditional functions of Navarre's VET centres**

Before analysing the non-traditional functions performed by Navarre's VET centres, this report will present the failings in the regional innovation systems — mainly with respect to lifelong learning, innovation services for SMEs, industrial entrepreneurship and local development — which need to be corrected. Also included are the type of factors, both internal and external, that influence VET centres to consider providing these non-traditional functions.

- Among the internal factors, aside from the type of centre (mentioned above), the study comments on the centre's size, the organisation of its governing bodies, the industrial experience of its staff and the personal characteristics of its head.
- Among the external factors, some are related to general economic trends (an ageing population, the shift to a knowledge society, the growth of open innovation, regionalisation, etc.), and others are linked to the characteristics of the local context (economic-business structure, existence of other knowledge infrastructure, degree of socioeconomic development, powers and policies of local government, etc.).

These internal and external factors vary considerably from one place to another. Different behaviours are seen in English-speaking countries and in central and northern Europe as regards non-traditional functions like VET for Employment, providing innovation services to SMEs, entrepreneurship or fostering local development.

In the case of Navarre, the non-traditional function which initially seems the most feasible, similar to, and coordinated with IVET is VET for Employment. It is worth starting out by indicating that this programme's design is highly affected by the following:

- the fragmentation of the VET system, responsibility for which is split between the State and the autonomous communities, and between the Education and Employment departments;
- the significant institutional changes in recent years due to the adoption of Law 30/2015, and the resulting disappearance of the Fundación Tripartita (foundation for on-the-job training) and implementation of a fully competitive environment and a focus on economic efficiency in calls for proposals; and changes in the Navarre Government, restructuring of the Governing Council of Navarre's Employment Service, and modifications to the priorities set for the different models of VET for Employment.

Among the **VET programmes offered to the unemployed**, Navarre stands out for its 11 % coverage rate. Although still insufficient, this is five times higher than the Spanish average and is on the rise.

The programme offering is overly focused on 'professional certificates', excessively long, and not up-to-date or adapted to the local context.

The types of courses offered — which are grouped together in a small number of occupational programmes — are not well aligned with S3 priorities or productive needs and are highly concentrated in central Navarre.

The management duties delegated to state schools have not proven to motivate them particularly, since they have shown very little proactivity. Private schools, on the other hand, operate in a fully competitive environment and are among the top providers.

There was a drastic drop in **VET offered to the employed** in 2015/16, which caused part of the private network of suppliers to disappear, eliminated specific training activities and those with a higher cost, and discouraged investment. Nevertheless, funds for these course offerings began to recover in 2017, and the way calls for proposals are held was improved. State schools have not participated in these types of training programmes, and private schools have only done so on a small scale.

With respect to **demand-oriented VET** — a training programme that has been greatly affected by a mandatory quota for company and worker training and which later reimburses firms for the costs incurred in training — Navarre once again has one of the highest coverage rates (36 %) in Spain. Even so, the percentage of companies which are not reimbursed is still high (75 %), and the coverage rate for female workers is significantly lower. Compared to Spain as a whole, Navarre stands out for the high percentage of industrial workers who receive training. However, this mainly involves courses related to services (for example, occupational health and safety), which are not linked to S3 priorities. Navarre's VET centres do not provide demand-oriented company training or carry out training-need assessments at companies.

The **provision of technical and innovation services to SMEs**, which would be the second-largest, non-traditional function that integrated centres could carry out, is not common at Navarre centres either. Those centres that do provide these services have an industrial profile, professionally experienced staff, a strategic plan and continuing professional development officers. From observing how this function is carried out at centres in other locations (Germany and autonomous communities like the Basque Country), this study has drawn a series of lessons which could guide its implementation in Navarre:

1. coordinate action across all centres;
2. focus on technology services and the most important industrial occupational groups according to S3;
3. begin activities at the best prepared and most willing centres;
4. create internal teams and assign a full-time promotions officer to them to stimulate local demand;
5. prioritise types of services provided and types of companies with which to develop projects;
6. comprehensively communicate local centres' capacities; and
7. set up public support measures to develop the centres' structure and demand from SMEs, among others.

With respect to entrepreneurship, raising awareness and training the student body should be thought of as a standard component of IVET, an approach that the centres in Navarre have also successfully put into practice. Although there have been encouraging initiatives in incubation and support for business development, end results in recent years are not particularly noteworthy. This business incubation/development function initially seems less important than other non-traditional functions and justifiable only in cases when centres can offer something, like industrial entrepreneurship, that other centres lack.

Lastly, **the centres' support of local development** — in addition to that produced by their very existence (employment, purchases, etc.) and by the activities they carry out (developing the skills of the region's workforce, in particular) — can happen when a centre acts as an active and main stakeholder in the helix of knowledge organisations in areas that are trying to implement local development strategies. The problem is that most of Navarre lacks the conditions for this to occur, these conditions including, for example well-defined and accepted district-level divisions and stakeholders who support local development, two elements needed to carry out these strategies and which would allow the centres to play an active role in them.

It can be seen from the centres' relationship with their surrounding area and with different types of stakeholders that state polytechnic schools are the best rooted in their areas and work the most with development agencies. In contrast, private and integrated state schools tend to work more with science/technology stakeholders and companies. In any event, to deepen their roots in their local areas, it would be advisable to make changes in the state schools' social councils. And, similarly, to experiment with and learn to participate in collaborative local development processes it would be helpful to select one or two schools (located in peripheral areas where there are local stakeholders, like development agencies or district business associations) with which to try implementing these types of initiatives.

To develop these non-traditional functions and implement Dual VET — and even to progress with some of the key challenges IVET currently presents, such as strengthening higher-level VET and switching to project-based collaborative learning (both of which require a change in the schools' models) — it seems necessary to consider if these schools have sufficient resources and if the schools' governance structure allows them to be put to efficient use.

With respect to **resources**, the study carried out indicates that, more than being a problem of insufficient staff or resources with which to take on these new functions, the main problem is governance: resources are distributed in a very reglementary way, and they are largely not managed strategically.

In this respect, according to the data collected to draw up this report on Navarre, it is worth pointing out that self-assessed ratings of staff and equipment at private schools are higher than those at state schools. Likewise, the former use their resources more intensively than the latter, which, to a large extent, refers again to governance issues.

On the subject of **governance**, over the past decade Navarre's schools have taken the first step towards becoming integrated VET centres by separating general education and vocational training. However, both state and regional legislation on integrated VET centres stipulates that what characterises these centres, apart from this separation, is the development of additional, IVET functions. To that end, legislation on integrated VET centres theoretically grants them autonomy and requires that they establish integrated strategies and areas of responsibility.

However, as the central government has not yet adopted the necessary implementing regulations, Navarre's administration has likewise not created an environment in which that envisaged autonomy manifests itself in integrated state schools' real capacity to act (for example, in important matters like hiring external or internal staff, billing, purchasing or running budget surpluses, etc.).

Although their scope for action is limited, the schools do not make full use of what they do have. For instance, their functional projects often lack sufficient, resolute and shared action aimed at developing these non-traditional functions based on

strategies and managed by individuals who show real dedication in key areas (teaching methodologies, relationships with companies, technology development, etc.). The initiatives normally come from the VET services department, it being less common to find initiatives, proactivity and a business focus at the schools.

Lastly, the centres in Navarre are not exploiting the opportunity to form partnerships with each other, or with foundations, associations and other organisations. The social councils need to explore the interests of the sector's companies, as well as those of local stakeholders and other knowledge brokers.



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