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# Guidance in vocational education and training in Andalusia: diagnosis, challenges and proposals

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### **Executive summary**

Policies implemented at European level addressing vocational guidance in the context of vocational education and training (VET) have led to numerous proposals that emphasise the need to develop services and actions designed to provide lifelong guidance for all. This paper conducts a diagnosis of the current state of guidance in VET in Andalusia and formulates a series of action proposals based on the concept of comprehensive vocational guidance set out in the European Commission's recommendations, which define it as: a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills. (European Commission, 2008, C 319/4).

The project examined in this report is the outcome of the synergies established between various fields — research into VET, the practice of VET and vocational guidance — in the quest to find new approaches and in alignment with a focus on lifelong learning, from early childhood through to active ageing, spanning all the different life roles that individuals simultaneously play.

The purpose of the project was to analyse the current situation as regards vocational guidance in the context of VET in Andalusia and to identify possible actions and initiatives that, within the framework of an integrated system, could encourage the individuals targeted by this VET to construct their own career and life paths. Specifically, and adopting a collaborative and participatory approach, it aimed: 1) to perform a diagnosis of the current situation as regards vocational guidance in the context of VET; 2) to develop a collaborative process via which to draw up proposals for action and improvement in vocational guidance in Andalusia; and 3) to implement a participatory process to test and review those proposals

with various stakeholder groups: educational and vocational counsellors, VET instructors, vocational training and guidance instructors, VET student advisers, families, business, the third sector, and VET instructor and counsellor training managers.

The project was jointly sponsored by Andalusia's regional ministry of education and sport and Fundación Bankia por la Formación Dual. Without this initiative, this paper would not have been possible.

The research process followed a mixed methodology that combined quantitative and qualitative data-collection and -analysis procedures. In addition, a collaborative and participative approach was adopted that enabled the authors to gain a holistic view of the issue, achieved not only by listening to different voices, but also by doing so interactively. The initial approach derived from the consideration that in order to generate transformation and change the main stakeholders and protagonists must be involved in the process from the start.

The quantitative data were obtained from various information sources, in particular the Séneca information system operated by Andalusia's regional ministry of education and sport, from which data were retrieved from the individual records of all the students enrolled in VET in Andalusia in the 2011/12 and 2018/19 academic years. Other data included those provided by the statistics and cartography service reporting to the same regional ministry, and the statistics on non-university education provided by Spain's ministry of education and vocational education and training.

As regards the qualitative information, this essentially derived from creative ideagenerating sessions inspired by Design Thinking (Brown, 2008) and conducted in two groups: the first comprising technical staff from Andalusia's regional ministries of education and sport, and of employment, training and self-employment (lead group), and the second comprising a panel of experts drawn from a variety of fields (educational and vocational counsellors, VET instructors, and business representatives). Finally, a session was held to review the proposals on vocational guidance in VET in Andalusia. It was attended by over 100 representatives of various stakeholder groups, among them students, families, instructors, educational and vocational counsellors, companies, and guidance counsellor trainers. The process was as follows:

- a) Lead group session 1: identification of areas of interest.
- b) Lead group session 2: production of a SWOT analysis of the current situation regarding vocational guidance in VET in Andalusia.
- c) Expert panel session: Design Thinking process, completion of the SWOT analysis and drafting of action proposals.
- d) Sessions reviewing the proposals with stakeholder groups.

e) Joint session between the lead group and the expert panel to review the action proposals.

In addition to the debates, ideas and questions raised by the people participating in this research process, documentary sources available in the European, national and regional contexts were used. In this regard, we took into account that the analysis of the current situation regarding vocational guidance in Andalusia had to be approached from a systemic perspective contextualised by the policies adopted at national, European and international level.

The initial diagnosis of the situation analysed the following: a) the socioeconomic context; b) the situation regarding VET in Andalusia; and c) the characteristics of the vocational guidance provided in the context of VET in Andalusia.

Based on the information generated and gathered, needs and opportunities for action were detected and the essential elements that should characterise the provision of comprehensive lifelong vocational guidance in the context of VET were identified. Thus, **the essential elements** that should characterise the provision of vocational guidance in VET are as follows:

- a) Development of an **integrated guidance system** in which all of the stakeholders involved work collaboratively under a common plan that makes guidance available to individuals throughout their entire lives.
- b) A guidance process focused on developing the competences needed to manage both careers and the transitions that occur during a lifetime. These competences should be explicitly integrated into the curriculum from early childhood education through to post-compulsory education. This offering must be available to all pupils and students so that they all have the opportunity to make academic, vocational and personal decisions based on information that is free of bias on the grounds of gender, origin, socioeconomic or cultural background, academic results or specific needs for educational support.
- c) Personnel appropriately qualified for the functions they need to perform and the post they hold. The initial and ongoing training provided to all staff offering guidance (instructors, educational and vocational counsellors, and company internship tutors) should include development of their own careermanagement competences and tools to strength learning. Joint training proposals should be developed in which all stakeholders involved in guidance processes should participate collaboratively.
- d) Use of **experiential methodologies** that put into practice acquired knowledge, self-knowledge skills and attitudes, social skills, planning, commitment to learning, search for and selection of information about training and vocational opportunities, exploration of the world of work, decision-making and construction of transitional pathways.

- e) Generation of **teaching resources based on information and communication technologies** that facilitate the work of the various formal and informal guidance counsellors, as well as ensuring **accessibility** to high-quality vocational guidance and information for the entire population.
- f) Development of systems and processes to assure the quality of the guidance provided, involving all stakeholders and stakeholder groups and including rigorous systematic gathering of evidence with which to draw up improvement plans and perform appropriate follow-up. To this end, synergies with institutions and research teams able to help assure the quality of the counselling provided must be generated.
- g) Adoption of a perspective of fairness and social justice from which to address factors that may obstruct the development of meaningful, free and motivated careers. In this regard, situations involving particular social vulnerability should be considered.
- h) Adoption of a cross-cutting **gender perspective** applicable to all actions with the objective of **narrowing the gender gap** in access to certain vocational profiles. This approach should start from early childhood education in which initial acknowledgement of the world of work should begin and should overcome gender stereotypes that can condition future academic and vocational choices for boys and girls (Regional Ministry of Education, 2008).

The **main needs** for action were detected in relation to the following aspects:

- 1. As regards the planning of vocational guidance integrated into the curriculum throughout schooling:
  - The lack of a planned and integrated curriculum to develop careermanagement competences as part of the lifelong learning process from early childhood education through to active ageing.
  - The actions carried out in educational institutions focus more on educational
    guidance than on vocational and professional guidance. These actions
    essentially only take place at specific key times. Students' choice of VET
    subjects is based on insufficient and incomplete information, which then has
    consequences in terms of students' academic success and mobility.
  - Regulation of the guidance provided to VET students, as well as consideration
    of it in VET centres' tutorial guidance and action plans, devotes very little
    attention to vocational guidance. Similarly, there are no institutional plans
    to provide specific support to students with specific needs for educational
    support with vocational guidance.
- 2. With regard to **development of an integrated vocational guidance and information system**:

- The minimal culture of institutional collaboration between vocational guidance services and counsellors (employment, education, etc.). Some of the actions implemented depend on the willingness of the corresponding staff.
- Weak regulatory implementation at regional and national level that does not allow for deployment of the integrated vocational guidance and information system set out in Law 5/2002 on vocational education and qualifications.

#### 3. In relation to **support of successful completion and return by VET students**:

- The high percentage of students who do not earn any qualifications after two or more years of study: 51.79% in basic VET; 45.91% in intermediate VET; and 27.94% in higher VET.
- The high percentage of Year 1 students who do not progress to Year 2: 43% in basic VET and 36% in intermediate VET; in higher VET this percentage is lower (21%), though still significant.
- Gender differences are evident in the enrolment figures: there are more men than women at every level, and this inequality is even greater in the lower ones. There is also bias in the selection of occupational groups, among other aspects. However, women stand out as achieving better academic results.
- A high degree of mobility between VET programmes, both within and outside occupational groups (reaching 15% in some occupational groups).
   A proportion of students temporarily drop out of their studies and then, via a variety of routes (admission exams, etc.) re-enrol at higher levels, making patent the diversity of training pathways.
- The prevalence of compensation measures as compared with preventive and development measures.
- The lack of specific support for students with specific needs for educational support with vocational guidance in the context of VET.

#### 4. As regards **improving knowledge and awareness of VET**:

- Although VET is viewed increasingly positively, parents still do not consider it
  a primary option for their children. The rate of enrolment in intermediate and
  higher VET stands at just over one third of the population.
- The lack of lifelong vocational/professional guidance plans; the fact that
  many of the actions to promote VET take place outside the educational
  institutions attended by potential VET students; and the fact that VET is
  frequently presented as a means of preventing early school-leaving rather
  than as a series of studies with their own intrinsic value may be some of the
  reasons why the enrolment rate is lower than it is for other forms of learning.

#### 5. In relation to appropriate academic organisation and planning of VET:

- The need to implement specific regulations on VET in Andalusia and on educational and vocational guidance.
- The ratio of guidance counsellors to students is too high (around 800 students per counsellor when the OECD recommends 250).
- The lack of comprehensive educational and vocational guidance plans integrated into the curriculum and provided over individuals' entire lives.
- The number of integrated VET centres is very low and they are distributed unequally between provinces. The case is similar with dual VET programmes, which are distributed unequally between occupational groups.

## 6. As regards appropriate training and selection of vocational guidance counsellors:

- Initial training of teaching staff (primary, lower and upper secondary, and VET staff) includes little or no content on vocational guidance. Training for educational guidance counsellors gives priority to this type of content and to acknowledging diversity in vocational guidance.
- The functions performed by guidance departments focus more on educational guidance than on vocational guidance. In addition, according to the legislation, it is not necessary for integrated VET centres to employ a specialist vocational guidance counsellor. There is also no need for vocational guidance counsellors recruited to these positions to have specialist training in the area.
- The lack of a clear competence map setting out the roles of the various guidance counsellors and the position that they could occupy in an integrated vocational guidance system.

## 7. With regard to development of innovative vocational guidance and training methodologies and resources:

- In provision of guidance, priority is given to one-off and eminently informative actions at the expense of more process-based and educational ones. Information and communication technologies are used more as an information repository than as an interactive space.
- There are good VET practices that use innovative methodologies based on the development of personal and social competences, although there is little information about their impact.

# 8. In relation to development of specific systems to assure the quality of vocational guidance:

The sector's evaluation culture is still nascent. Some educational practices
of interest are not rigorously evaluated and there do not appear to be
any specific quality systems applicable to quidance. The pressure of the

teaching and counselling workload does not facilitate the gathering and analysis of data with which to evaluate the guidance provided.

 The vocational information necessary to provide high-quality vocational guidance (training pathways, employability, employment rates and market demand, etc.) is fragmented and is not always up-to-date or easily attainable.

#### 9. As regards strengthening **company involvement**:

- Despite the necessity of their contribution to on-the-job training and the dual VET model, the level of company involvement in training programmes is very low. Moreover, participation is made more difficult by the lack of integrated guidance plans and programmes.
- Dual VET is still extremely scarce and under development.

For each of these elements, this study identified factors favouring the development of vocational guidance. Taking into account both the needs and these facilitating factors, the authors identified the following challenges and objectives in relation to the development of vocational guidance in the context of VET in Andalusia:

Challenges	Objectives
Challenge 1: Planning of vocational guidance integrated into the curriculum throughout schooling	Objective 1. Design a curriculum intended to develop career-management competences throughout schooling, indicating the content to include in the subjects and those that should be developed as part of tutoring and expert counselling.  Objective 2. Incentivise vocational guidance both before and during VET, focusing on learning career-management competences.  Objective 3. Ensure the development of personal, social and career-management competences during VET, emphasising lifelong learning.
Challenge 2: Development of an integrated vocational guidance and information system	Objective 4. Design and develop a framework of procedures for coordinating and managing integrated guidance actions between administrations, services and guidance counsellors, encouraging participation by the various stakeholder groups.  Objective 5. Achieve regulatory implementation of the integrated vocational guidance and information system set out in the current legislation.
Challenge 3: Support of successful completion and return by VET students	Objective 6. Design and develop guidance plans to prevent early school-leaving and improve VET student performance at all levels.  Objective 7. Address the gender gap in access, qualifications and pass rates in VET.  Objective 8. Address the geographic, social, cultural, economic and occupational group-based gaps affecting performance and pass rates.  Objective 9. Establish mechanisms to detect and develop talent, placing students centre-stage.  Objective 10. Encourage the development of personalised training pathways, favouring the permeability of lifelong formal and non-formal education.  Objective 11. Raise society's awareness of the importance and added value of VET.  Objective 12. Provide high-quality information on VET in the context of vocational guidance and career management.  Objective 13. Raise awareness among companies about the vocational skills of holders of VET qualifications.

Challenges	Objectives
Challenge 4: Appropriate academic organisation and planning of VET	Objective 14. Achieve regulatory implementation of VET and guidance. Objective 15. Update and extend the VET offering (occupational groups and models). Objective 16. Increase the flexibility of academic organisation to make the system more permeable to personal training pathways. Objective 17. Include consideration for students with disabilities in the regulation and organisation of VET training and the related guidance processes. Objective 18. Specifically consider tutoring and vocational guidance in the organisation of VET.
Challenge 5: Appropriate training and selection of vocational guidance counsellors	Objective 19. Adapt counselling staff at educational institutions to the appropriate functions and ratios, considering the inclusion of vocational guidance counsellors in secondary schools and integrated VET centres.  Objective 20. Delimit and specify the functions of the various guidance counsellors and the requirements for access to the position, adopting an approach based on providing comprehensive guidance.  Objective 21. Include content on tutoring and vocational guidance in initial instructor training (primary, secondary and VET).  Objective 22. Design continuing professional development plans targeting the various guidance counsellors, strengthening the focus on integration and collaboration.
Challenge 6: Development of innovative vocational guidance and training methodologies and resources	Objective 23. Strengthen the use of experiential and work-focused methodologies that favour the acquisition of career-management competences.  Objective 24. Develop platforms containing virtual vocational guidance resources with a focus on career development.
Challenge 7: Development of specific systems to assure the quality of vocational guidance	Objective 25. Develop a specific quality assurance system for vocational guidance.  Objective 26. Design and enable procedures to ensure reliable and accessible capture of vocational information and data useful in the provision of vocational guidance.  Objective 27. Promote research into vocational guidance and VET.
Challenge 8: Strengthening company involvement	<b>Objective 28.</b> Involve companies in the design, development and evaluation of VET, especially in the modules to which they contribute directly (e.g. on-the-job training).



