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ESTUDIOS

➤ Challenges and opportunities for **vocational education and training** in relation to smart specialisation in Castile and Leon

Executive summary

The Estudios collection published by Fundación Bankia por la Formación Dual contains benchmark studies and research intended to further analysis, implementation and knowledge of dual vocational education and training (VET).

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Executive Summary

The **Vocational Education and Training (VET) system** can perform five key functions: offer initial professional training and education (IVET) for young people, offer professional training and education for employment (VETE), provide technical services, promote entrepreneurship, and foster cooperation in clusters and in local development. Through these functions, meanwhile, it can make a fundamental contribution to those requirements associated both with horizontal and general priorities, and also more thematic or vertical priorities, resulting from the smart specialisation strategy established by the autonomous region of Castilla y León.

Castilla y León occupies a **competitive position** slightly lower than the average of the EU-28 regions, largely as a result of the weaker evolution of its economy during the economic crisis, in particular in terms of social competitiveness indicators (unemployment, risk of poverty, etc.). Efforts made in terms of inputs (for example, R&D expenditure and personnel) are not reflected to the same extent in the output indicators (such as exports). In comparison with the EU, its main competitive weakness is to be found in the segment of the population with intermediate and high-intermediate skills levels. With an increasingly aged population, it will prove necessary to adapt the training offering to a population of such characteristics, thereby increasing the need for continuous training, with a corresponding reduction in initial training, and it would seem reasonable to transfer resources from the latter to the former.

In terms of productive, commercial and technological specialisation, Automotive and Agri-food stand out, followed by Rubber and Plastics, and Pharmacy. Valladolid and Burgos account for more than two thirds of Castilla y León's exports.

In order to develop a **smart production strategy** more spread across its territory, Castilla y León should add to the above strategic activities tourism (above all rural and cultural and language-related), where Castilla y León is relatively specialised

of specialisation. In terms of Information and Communication Technologies, the need would be to reduce its current weakness and develop specific ICT training programmes for those activities deemed strategic in Castilla y León, given the considerable influence of such technologies on sectoral competitiveness.

The innovation and learning models in those sectors where Castilla y León reveals comparative advantages correspond not so much to an STI (science, technology and innovation) model, but rather a DUI (doing, using and interacting) learning model, for which the key factors are labour relations, intermediate skills levels and supplier-customer relations.

The prospects for employment in those sectors that could be deemed strategic for Castilla y León vary widely. In tourism and ICT, they are positive. However, prospects are negative in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. In any case, according to the rating analyses, the expectations of those particular manufacturing sectors in which Castilla y León stands out are better than the average for sectors as a whole, except for Rubber and plastics.

The VET system of Castilla y León reveals numerous **positive aspects**: a rich network of integrated VET centres, a reasonably balanced provincial deployment of VET centres, specialisation in professional families connected with the industry and reasonably well aligned with its industrial specialisation, teaching staff at VET centres with a satisfactory level of education, a skilled team at the Directorate-General for Professional Training and so on. Nonetheless, adaptation to the requirements of the production system would require progress or the continuation of the initiatives undertaken in various spheres.

As regards **initial VET (IVET)**, there should be an increase in the number of those holding VET qualifications, by bringing more women and adults into the world of IVET, and reducing the rates of those who do not complete their studies. From a more qualitative perspective, meanwhile, the first step in the formal transformation of mixed and specific centres into integrated centres must continue with a genuine transformation of these centres into integrated institutions, more intensely engaging their teaching staff in professional training for employment (VETE) and in other non-traditional activities of VET centres (for example, the provision of technical services, which does not at present exist).

Public VET centres need to enjoy greater administrative autonomy and must operate with more flexibility, to ensure they are not placed at a disadvantage compared with private establishments, which precisely because of this greater flexibility and adaptive capacity, should receive more support. The relative lack of capital investment in equipment, worsened by the financial structures experienced during the crisis, likewise needs to be addressed. This must, though, be combined with a rectification of the underuse of installations and equipment seen at many centres, through their greater involvement in VETE.

The introduction of quality management systems at institutions should be pursued, along with structures and strategies for the spheres of educational methodology, technology and enterprise relations, likewise demanding recognitions of dedicated roles and resources. Further progress is also needed in the active participation of companies in the governing bodies of these institutions.

In **VETE**, the need is to increase the coverage rate of professional education and training for the unemployed, expanding the resources for this, along with the recruitment rates of those on the courses. In demand-based VET, the greatest problem is with smaller enterprises and the lack of perception at companies as to their needs. It would be advisable to promote the development of simple needs diagnosis platforms, subsidising their application at SMEs.

As regards the VETE offering, the need is to increase the role here of integrated centres, which means giving them greater autonomy, engaging the teaching staff and having in place a programme with a degree of stability. All the above without halting the progress towards open competition in the VETE offering, while aiming to regulate the process of restructuring currently taking place within the fragmented sector offering such training.

There needs to be an increase in the number of centres developing **Dual VET** projects, the number of students at each centre following dual mode studies, and the number of companies involved in this model. In order to be effective, though, efforts would need to be concentrated at those centres (integrated and specific), companies (multinationals and large and medium firms), activities (industry and certain services) and locations (those with a greater enterprise density), where short-term progress is more likely to be achieved.

The Dual VET regulations passed by the Regional Government of Castilla y León (for the selection of students, remuneration, etc.) are positive, as are the initiatives being promoted to showcase the Dual mode by means of information and training days, preparation of guides, etc. The involvement of companies in Dual VET demands that the continuing uncertainties and lack of understanding about the system be dispelled, along with a reduction in the paperwork involved in joining the process (for instance, the agreements and authorisations required) and in daily administration (for example, tutoring and evaluation of apprentices). Throughout this whole process, VET institutions, and above all the tutor at the institution, can play a key role, if they are given the skills and resources required.

As regards the adaptation of the **VET applications, certificates and courses available** in Castilla y León in accordance with its production structure and the requirements of the manufacturing of the future, the initial VET stage does not reveal any serious misalignments in terms of professional families (except for the under-representation of agriculture), although there would seem to be greater

problems within the families themselves in terms of qualifications (Livestock, Rubber and Plastics, Mechatronics, etc.). There are clearer misalignments in VETE, where the need is for further development of technical and specific skills tied to the strategic economic activities of Castilla y León. The new manufacturing of the future will not seemingly involve radical changes in the offering of qualifications, but instead those already in place will need to be supplemented through additional knowledge, essentially in the field of ICT and its implications. One formula that should be explored in this regard would be three-year Dual VET specialisation programmes.

Lastly, from the **institutional** perspective, there needs to be a strengthening of collaboration between the education and employment authorities, the promotion of associations among teaching institutions, and the strengthening of the role of enterprise, both in the general governance system, and that of the centres themselves.



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