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[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5562\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5562_en.pdf)

More information on the survey at: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/opinion-survey-vocational-education-and-training-europe>

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# Contents

Introduction .....	3
CHAPTER 1. Awareness and knowledge .....	5
CHAPTER 2. Experience and satisfaction .....	7
CHAPTER 3. Attractiveness and access .....	11
CHAPTER 4. Outcomes and effectiveness .....	12
CHAPTER 5. Main conclusions and further research needs .....	13

# Introduction

In 2016 CEDEFOP launched its first ever opinion survey aimed at investigating European citizens' opinions on vocational education and training (VET). The Survey covers a wide range of topics related to VET. In order to make the survey more accurate, the focus is on initial vocational training at the level of upper secondary education, although there are questions pertaining to both IVET and CVET. The survey was administered in 28 countries and provides unprecedented data on Europeans' perception and opinions on awareness, attractiveness and effectiveness of VET in Europe and analyses the respondent's experiences and satisfaction with VET. The survey covered the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States, resident in each of the 28 Member States and aged 15 years and over. Fieldwork took place between the 1st and 29th June 2016. In Luxembourg, 760 people were interviewed. 82% of the respondents went or were currently going to upper secondary education, of which 68% went to General Education (GE) and 32 % to VET. Because the survey assures a representation of the resident population in terms of EU nationalities, 42% of the respondents had a migratory background <sup>(1)</sup>. They may not have completed their education in Luxembourg, but in their countries of origin. Therefore, the opinions expressed in the present survey can't be related specifically to the national educational system, but have to be seen as opinions of European citizens on VET in general. VET systems throughout Europe are highly contextualised and diverse across Europe and the opinions expressed in this survey are necessarily influenced by the experiences respondents have had directly or indirectly with VET. Opinions expressed by the residents, who are also economic stakeholders, parents and people taking active part in the educational and youth sector - are nevertheless interesting as they may influence school and professional guidance of young people and recruiting/hiring practices in local companies, and thus school and professional trajectories of young people.

Exploring the image of VET is particularly relevant in a context where VET suffers often from a negative perception.

The national system of VET in Luxembourg has its particular features. The most distinctive feature of vocational training is the provision in schools of a system of vocational education comparable to the German duals system.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Indeed, a special feature of the Luxembourgish population is the high share of foreign citizens – the rate of people with a migratory background living in Luxembourg is up to 61%.

General education and technical and vocational theoretical education are provided in schools, while, for most occupations, practical instruction takes place in companies. This system has the advantage of allowing young people to gain first-hand experience in the professional world, which may facilitate their transition from education to employment afterwards.

A major reform of the VET system in Luxembourg has been implemented since 2008. In the context of this reform and in the framework of the importance of VET in the national economy, understanding perceptions about the value of VET, its ability to equip people with the right skills and the likelihood of finding employment for VET graduates are decisive elements in creating VET as an attractive educational option. Studies <sup>(2)</sup> have shown that in Luxembourg VET programmes enable young people to quickly obtain a stable job. Indeed, after 3 years of completing school, 87 % of pupils with a VET diploma are in employment <sup>(3)</sup>, among which 89 % have a permanent contract. This is particularly notable as in Luxembourg, the participation in VET amounts to 60% (compared to EU 26: 48, 5%) (Spotlight Luxembourg, 2013). Compared to other European countries VET participation is thus not lagging behind general education.

With regard to the high diversity of VET systems throughout Europe, a definition was read out to the respondents to make sure that there is a common understanding of VET among respondents to the survey:

*‘Vocational education is designed to give participants the practical and technical skills, know-how and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation or trade. In the following questions, we refer to vocational education which takes place at upper secondary education at 16-18 years old.’*

The following chapters will present the results of the survey administered among respondents in Luxembourg and will be structured along four main sections:

1. Awareness and knowledge
2. Attractiveness and access
3. Experience and satisfaction
4. Outcomes and effectiveness

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<sup>(2)</sup> The TEVA study, on the transition from education to employment, is carried out by the Training Observatory. The study, based on administrative data, is an instrument for analysing and monitoring the integration of new school-leavers into working life. It allows to measure the effectiveness of VET in Luxembourg.

<sup>(3)</sup> Employment rate, three years after leaving school in 2012, pupils with a VET diploma (CITP/CCM, CATP, DT).

## CHAPTER 1.

# Awareness and knowledge

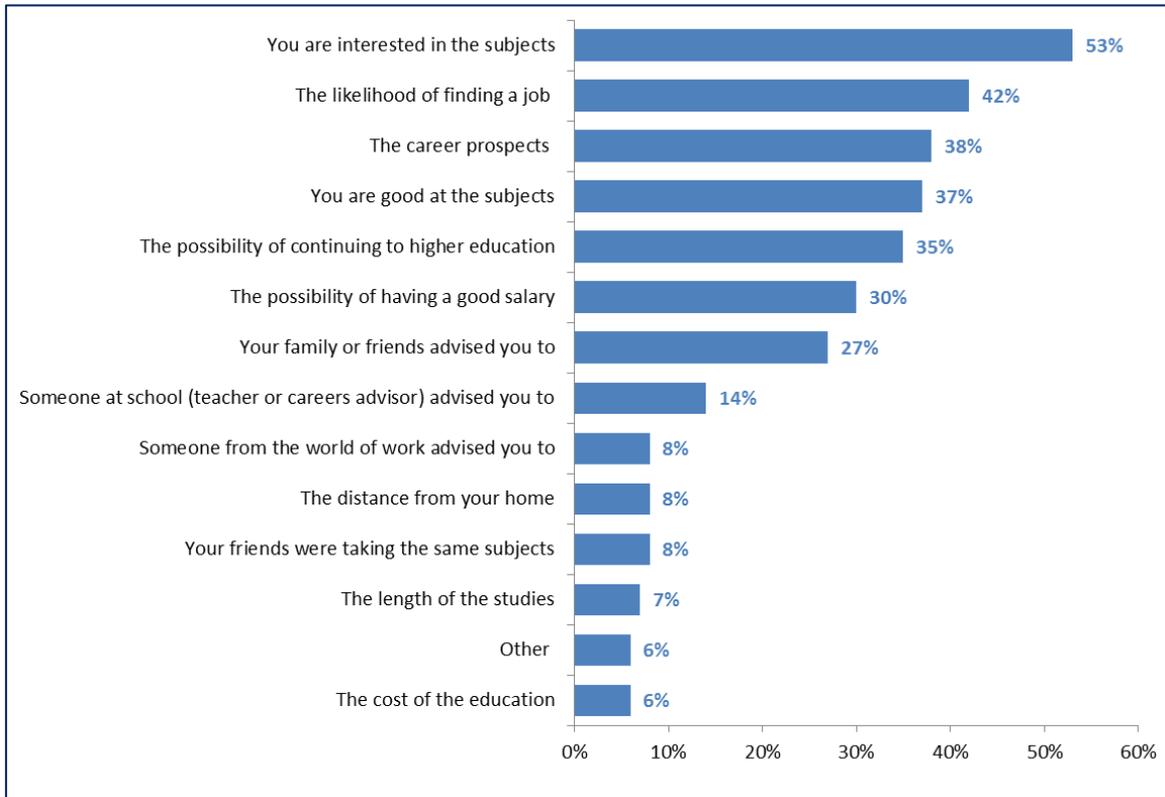
70% of the respondents say that they have heard of VET (in general i.e. IVET and CVET) before the interview, and knew what it was. Most likely VET is associated with preparing you for a specific occupation (88%) and it is associated with taking place before starting working life (82%). 85% of the respondents consider VET also in relation with continual professional development. VET is associated with occurring in a school (81%) and work environment (83%). 74% of the respondents associate VET with doing manual work. VET is rarely associated with training that takes place in higher education, like universities. Less than half of the respondents relate VET with higher education (46%).

Coming to IVET, the role of guidance and career advice are essential elements that shape young people's school paths. Although career and scholar choices are influenced by many different elements, it is interesting to note in that context, that only 51% of the respondents say that they received information about VET when taking their decision about their upper secondary education (61% for those who did VET and 47% for those who did GSE). 19% of the respondents in GSE were even advised against taking VET programmes. It would have been interesting to be able to analyse these affirmations with regard to the age of the respondents and with regard to the country in which the education was actually completed. Guidance practices are subject to change depending on the priorities in educational policies. Dating the moment when guidance took place would allow making the link with the political context and priorities.

It would have been interesting to see whether younger people have had more access to guidance and information on VET than older people. The same is true with regard to the country in which education has been completed. Indeed, guidance practices not only change over time, but also between countries. EU countries vary greatly with regard to their guidance policies and practices. The high share of residents from other EU countries in Luxembourg obliges to take this into consideration.

Concerning the factors that may have influenced educational choices, different aspects are mentioned by the respondents. Personal interest in the subjects (53%), career prospects (39%) and the likelihood of finding a job (42%) are among the main reasons having played a role in the educational choices mentioned by the respondents.

**Figure 1. Share of respondents for whom the following factors played a role in their choice of general or vocational secondary education at the time of choosing (%)**



## CHAPTER 2.

# Experience and satisfaction

82% of the respondents went or were currently going to upper secondary education, of which 68% went to General Education (GE) and 32% to IVET. Thus, 68% do not have experienced IVET. Concerning the education they received at upper secondary education, 45% of IVET learners did accomplish all their training in a school setting. More than half of the IVET learners thus have had the possibility of acquiring workplace experience during their apprenticeships. Even learners accomplishing all of their education in school often have the opportunity to gain work experience during obligatory internships. This constitutes a considerable advantage of VET, as it allows getting in touch with the employment market and getting a real sense of the labour world. With regard to the Luxembourgish educational system, one of the main specificities of the national VET, is the dual system that allows for strong links between school- and work-based learning. The 2008 <sup>(4)</sup> VET reform and recent changes have further strengthened the links to the labour market. This specific feature allows to best preparing learners for their upcoming professional life.

42% of the respondents have a migratory background, reflecting the Luxembourgish population structure. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know how many of the respondents have actually accomplished their education and training in Luxembourg. The data discussed below thus doesn't give any information about the Luxembourgish VET system itself, but solely informs about the experiences of the resident population regarding IVET. Considering respondents having participated in VET, almost 9 out of 10 estimate being satisfied with the general (89%) and professional (87%) competences that they could develop during their education.

Among respondents having participated in GE, the satisfaction with regard to general competences amounts to 92% and drops to 68% regarding work-related competences. This fact may be largely related to the fact that VET pupils have had the opportunity to acquire workplace experience in the course of their education and training.

Notwithstanding the education received, there is a high rate of satisfaction with regard to the education received. Indeed, 90% of the respondents having

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<sup>(4)</sup> Implemented in 2011-14.

followed secondary education (GE or VET) say they are satisfied with the quality of education received during upper secondary education (88% of VET learners).

With regard to the available equipment, 78% of the respondents having followed secondary education (GE or VET) said they were satisfied. It would have been interesting to have an indication on the country where the training was completed as there are certainly important differences with regard to the available equipment between the European countries.

The results concerning the key competences are shown in the table below.

**Table 1. Key competences developed while at upper secondary education**

Key competences	LU	General	Vocational
Communication skills	70%	68%	77%
Speaking a foreign language	84%	88%	76%
Mathematical skills	78%	82%	71%
Science and technology skills	62%	64%	57%
Digital and computer skills	46%	46%	46%
The ability to pursue and organise your own learning	72%	71%	75%
Social and civic competences to engage in active democratic participation	59%	62%	56%
The ability to be creative	67%	62%	77%
Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship	57%	53%	68%
Cultural awareness (appreciation of music, performing arts, literature and visual arts)	56%	61%	43%
The ability to think critically	75%	78%	72%
The ability to work with others	82%	80%	88%

Concerning communication skills, 77% of respondents having participated in secondary VET say that they have had the opportunity to develop communication skills.

With regard to the ability of speaking a foreign language, GE respondents are more numerous to be satisfied with the skills developed during upper secondary education. Indeed, 88% of respondents having followed GE say they are satisfied about being able to speak a foreign language, compared to 76% of respondents having followed VET. This finding may be related to the fact that more weight is put on language learning in GE, as compared to VET. Moreover,

the very particular linguistic situation in Luxembourg must be considered when talking about the perception of language competences. Luxembourg is a multilingual setting, where French, Luxembourgish, German and English are spoken on a daily basis. This particular multilingual situation can pose difficulties for migrants, as they have to speak three or four foreign languages. Especially fluency in French is an important element for a successful integration in the employment market. This multilingual component of Luxembourg is an important element to consider with regard to the perception of the languages learnt. Indeed, their facility to communicate in the new multilingual setting and thus the actual language(s) learnt during upper secondary education, may influence their perception of the actual languages learnt. Moreover, the length of time already living in Luxembourg may also influence the perception of language competences.

When it comes to mathematical skills, 82% of respondents having followed GE and 71% of the respondents having followed VET say they are satisfied about the skills acquired during upper secondary education.

The share of respondents satisfied with scientific and technological skills goes up to 62% only, whereas in the domain of digital and IT skills, the share of satisfied respondents is 46%, independently of the type of secondary education they have followed. Regarding this indicator, it would have been interesting to know the age of the respondents, as the development of digital skills may be a more or less recent political priority in educational policies. Younger respondents may be much more numerous to have had the opportunity of acquiring digital skills than older respondents, whose education took place a long time ago. This element may also be relevant for other competences (like scientific and technological skills), who may not have been in the curricula while the respondents were going to school.

The ability of being creative seems to be more developed among respondents having followed VET than among respondents having followed GE: indeed, 77% of the former say to be satisfied with the skills acquired in upper secondary education, against 62% of the latter.

In the same vein, respondents having followed VET are more numerous to have developed competences in entrepreneurship. A little bit more than half of the respondents having followed GE say to have been able to develop these skills. Fostering entrepreneurial thinking early has become a political priority in Luxembourg and different stakeholders have emerged in the framework of fostering this competence. *Jonk Entrepreneuren* is an NGO offering programmes delivering entrepreneurial education to children and young adults aged nine to 25, teaching them to take initiative, solve problems and to keep going if the first

idea is not the best. It's about learning an entrepreneurial attitude and taking responsibility. Also the annual Lux Future Lab's summer school can be mentioned in this context, where 16-18-year-olds learn to think innovatively and proactively consider their futures. These programs, a.o., help to install a sense of entrepreneurship among learners.

Concerning cultural awareness, only 43% of VET respondents say having developed competences in upper secondary education, against 61% of respondents having followed GE. This is an interesting finding, considering the high share of foreigners living in Luxembourg and the daily intercultural exchanges taking place.

With regard to the capacity of thinking critically, 75% of the respondents say to have had the opportunity to develop this skill. There are no major differences between VET and GE respondents.

VET respondents are more frequent to say having developed the capacity to work with others (88% vs 80% of GE respondents). This may be related to the fact that many VET learners have had the opportunity of completing their education partly in a work based environment, where they have had the opportunity to gain first-hand experience and the obligation to collaborate with others. Even for those whose education completely took place in school, often have had the opportunity to do internships and work on projects in workshops.

An important shortcoming of this type of data is that the collected opinions expressed on the competences acquired are only a retrospective. The longer the retrospective, the less reliable the opinions are. Indeed, how difficult is it to evaluate once competences developed during upper secondary education, when upper secondary education took place 15 or more years ago? This is a general problem with the collection of retrospective data, which is very difficult to overcome and has to be kept in mind when analysing the data.

## CHAPTER 3.

# Attractiveness and access

There is a general agreement on the fact that VET in general strengthens the economy of the country (89%) and contributes to reducing unemployment (85%) and to combat social exclusion (86%). There are no significant differences with regard to whether the respondents have accomplished secondary VET or secondary GE.

58% of the respondents affirm that VET at upper secondary education has a positive image. The share rises to 63% among those having done vocational education. Independent of the training received at upper secondary education, more than 80% of the respondents agree on the fact that general secondary education has a better image than VET. Nevertheless, 63% think that VET allows to rapidly find an employment and to access to well-paid (51%) and highly considered jobs (55%). Concerning the employment prospects, there is thus a relatively positive attitude towards VET. These perceptions are confirmed by a study of the Training Observatory that shows that a majority of pupils with a VET diploma have rapid access to employment. Indeed, among the pupils that enter the labour market in 2011/12, 80% access employment rapidly, i.e. in less than 4 months after finishing school. The data from the Training Observatory is based on administrative data and allows to follow-up pupils of technical and general secondary education and allows measuring the efficacy of the training system and thus allows overcoming possible misconceptions of VET.

This appearing attractiveness and positive experiences nevertheless hide a certain lack of appeal of VET. Indeed, only 45% of respondents having followed VET would recommend young people to do VET training. Another interesting element is that 80% of the respondents consider that learners with low grades are guided towards VET and 59% consider that it is easier to obtain a VET diploma or certificate than to obtain a GE diploma.

Conferences organized (like for instance by the CSL on Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016 on the challenges of VET) and campaigns like the Winwin campaign of the chamber of employees or the handsup.lu campaign of the chamber of trades contribute to overcome the attractiveness challenges. In the same vein, the chamber of commerce and the chamber of employees have developed orientation tools allowing pupils to find the right apprenticeship. Indeed, 'Talent-Check' and 'Basic-Check' give pupils the opportunity to sharpen their profile and have a better knowledge about their competences in different fields.

## CHAPTER 4.

# Outcomes and effectiveness

As mentioned in Section 3, to a large extent, respondents, whether they have GE or VET training, consider VET as being beneficial to the society at large. When it comes to a more individual level, 80% of the respondents affirm to never have had difficulties to finding a job and there is an overall satisfaction of their professional career (88%). There are no significant differences with regard to the type of secondary education received. With regard to youth unemployment having risen in the last decade, it would be relevant to have more information with regard to age of the respondents on this item in order to tackle generational differences. Moreover, for older respondents, whose professional careers have started 20 or more years ago, it may be more difficult to give an overall undifferentiated appreciation of their professional career. With regard to economic fluctuations on the employment market, it is somewhat difficult to give an appreciation on a dual answer option. Does it make sense to have a general appreciation of a career, which after all lasts 40 years? Another element related to age is whether the difficulties older employees or jobseekers may have in finding a new job really pertain to the education they received 20 or more years ago. The value of the responses given by young and older respondents is thus very different, as young people give an appreciation of a much shorter career than older respondents. These elements should be kept in mind when considering the answers given by the respondents on this item.

45% of VET respondents took less than six months to find a job, whereas 54% of respondents having followed general secondary education found a job in six months or less. This response item is also very dependent on the moment they enter the labour market. This item has to be considered with regard to the unemployment rate and the general economic situation at the moment of entering the labour market. A further element to consider when tackling the length of job research is also the actual trade/profession chosen and not only the fact of having followed VET or GE. The presented data thus may hide important variations among VET learners according to the specific trade. Moreover, it must be kept in mind, that the type of education received is not the only variable influencing the length of job research.

## CHAPTER 5.

# Main conclusions and further research needs

The survey from CEDEFOP shows some ambiguities around VET and provides insights into main images and stereotypes surrounding VET as it is perceived by the resident population. As Luxembourg has a high share of resident population with a migrant background, it does not give any insights about the Luxembourgish VET system itself and can therefore not be considered as an evaluation of the national VET system but solely as a reflection of surrounding opinions.

With regard to the high migration rate in Luxembourg, it would have been interesting to analyse the results taking into account not only the type of education received (GE/VET), but also other relevant indicators such as nationality of the respondents and the country in which the education was completed. The perception of the attractiveness of VET and its outcomes is largely influenced by the experiences respondents have had with VET. This consideration must of course be differentiated considering the length of residence in Luxembourg and by the fact of having children in school or not. There are thus many elements that may be considered when analysing opinions and perceptions. The same considerations must be made with regard to the competences and skills acquired during VET/GE. An interesting analysis could have been made depending on the countries where respondent did their education. The questions regarding acquired competences have only 'Yes/No' answer options, which do not give respondents the opportunity to express more differentiated appreciations. It would have been interesting to use Likert scales, allowing respondents to give more nuanced answers.

Moreover, due to the specificities of VET and its particular work-related organisation, it would have been interesting to use this indicator as an independent variable, in order to provide insights with regard to the utility and effectiveness of work-related trainings and think about political priorities in educational policies to be elaborated or strengthened.

A gender-based analysis would also prove to be interesting as, at least in the Luxembourgish educational setting, there is a gender-based difference in educational choices, which can also be found in the segmentation of the employment market.

Although there are some shortcomings to the opinion survey, it is nevertheless an interesting and valuable insight on the general perception of VET of the resident population. Perceptions, that are even more important as residents are also economic stakeholders, parents or people taking active part in the educational and youth sector – perceptions that may therefore directly or indirectly influence scholar and professional trajectories of young people.