Chapter 5. Preparing students for the future: Policy trends, progress and impact

This chapter examines key education policies implemented in OECD countries between 2008 and 2017 to better prepare students for the future. Taking a comparative approach, it analyses overall education policy trends, continuity and change since 2008 related to this issue. Policies analysed encompass increasing completion of upper secondary education, developing quality vocational education and training, strengthening accessibility and quality of tertiary education, and improving the transitions between upper secondary and tertiary education to the labour market.

Highlights

- Policies reported to reduce early school leaving include a variety of approaches, such as to improve student orientation by revising the content of courses and the curriculum and improving qualification frameworks. Education systems have also introduced policies to promote participation in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and to develop inclusive learning environments to support migrants and refugees.

- Key education policies reported to develop quality vocational education and training (VET) include objectives such as improving apprenticeship systems, diminishing high levels of skills mismatch and advancing employer co-operation in VET programmes. Education systems also reported policies to improve the quality of student experience in these programmes and the transition to the labour market or further education.

- To strengthen access to and quality of tertiary education, many countries have adopted policies to expand funding for students, implement quality assurance measures and modify higher education frameworks. The majority of the policies reported are targeted. Some promising policy practices include improving access to tertiary education for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- The majority of key education policies reported to improve the transitions between upper secondary and tertiary education to the labour market are comprehensive in scope. Education systems have implemented policies to establish better links between educational levels and the labour market and to connect employers with job seekers.

Introduction

Preparing students for the future implies that young people should be educated to be active citizens who are capable of participating fully in the economy and society through diversified cognitive and non-cognitive capacities and specific skills relevant to the labour market. Upper secondary education, VET, and tertiary education are key education sectors in which students can benefit from targeted initiatives to prepare them for further education or the labour market (OECD, 2015). Lifelong learning has also increasingly become a priority and an important element in society today.

Chapter 4 analysed the evolution of education policy priorities to better prepare students for the future. Persisting education policy priorities identified include: 1) reducing skills mismatch and early school leaving rates; 2) improving the attractiveness of VET; 3) facilitating transitions of VET students to the labour market; and 4) increasing employer engagement. Emerging policy priorities identified include: 1) increasing the quality and relevance of tertiary education, and 2) the internationalisation of higher education.

As for equity and quality, the OECD Secretariat has also identified some correspondence between policy priorities identified and policy developments in education systems' efforts to prepare students for the future. This chapter analyses policy continuity and policy change of key education policies implemented in 33 OECD education systems between 2008 and 2017 to better prepare students for the future (as defined in the EPO analytical framework). It examines four policy areas: 1) increasing completion of upper secondary education; 2) developing quality VET options; 3) strengthening access to and quality of

tertiary education; and 4) improving student transition between upper secondary and tertiary education and to the labour market. (See Annex A, Table A A.1 for detailed information on the structure of the EPO analytical framework and the list of participating education systems.) All policies examined in this chapter are also included in the country snapshots in Chapter 7.

Increasing completion of upper secondary education

Box 5.1. Policy pointer: Increasing completion of upper secondary education

Upper secondary education is an essential part of students' education pathways. In a well-designed system, students obtain and enhance basic skills and knowledge that can be used to enter either post-secondary education or the labour market, and they simultaneously evolve into active citizens (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2017a). Factors identified by previous OECD evidence that help keep students in the system longer include: 1) career guidance and counselling; 2) additional learning support at the end of upper secondary; and 3) greater flexibility in course curricula to address various student skills and needs, especially for students at risk of dropout, (OECD, 2008; OECD, 2017b). Furthermore, the development of qualification frameworks can allow for more transparency on the knowledge and skills that secondary students need to obtain during study programmes, and they can help offer students better accessibility and smoother transitions across education systems (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2011).

- **Policy priority identified (OECD):** Reducing high early school leaving rates.

- **Principle of action identified (OECD):** Provide more and earlier individualised support to students at risk of falling behind. Measures to promote employment opportunities and income support for drop-outs later on in their working lives may be more costly and less effective than strengthening the education system. Favour policies that encourage students to go back to school.

- **Summary of policy trend identified:** OECD education systems have implemented policies to keep students in the system, while improving their learning opportunities. Policy options reported include advancing student guidance, revising qualifications, updating course curricula and increasing participation in STEM-related fields. Recently-implemented policies concentrate on similar areas, but also on technology education and support for migrants and refugees.

- **Examples of policies:**

  - **Reducing early school leaving and increasing students' participation and achievement:** BEL (FI), CAN (Quebec), FRA, DEU, ITA, LVA, NZL, NOR

  - **Student orientation:** ISL, ITA, JPN, NZL

Note: See Annex C, Box C.11 for a summary of education systems where reducing high early school leaving rates is identified as a relevant policy priority, as well as selected related policies.

Upper secondary education was compulsory in at least 20 OECD countries in 2017 (OECD, 2018). Across OECD countries, a total of 17% of 25-34 year-olds who had education attainment below upper secondary education were unemployed in 2017. In comparison, the rate of unemployment among the same age cohort with completed upper secondary education was 9% during the same year (OECD, 2017a).

Education policy continuity and reform across the OECD, 2008-17

Responses to the EPO Survey 2016-17 and the EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 suggest that upper secondary education completion remains a priority for many member countries and, as explained in Chapter 4, there appears to be some continuity in these policies. At least two-thirds of the older key education policies on upper secondary education (i.e. those implemented between 2008 and 2014) are still in place, aiming to keep students in the system while improving their learning opportunities. For Belgium (Flemish Community), Canada (Quebec), France, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Mexico,

Slovenia and Spain, key education policies remain in place to reduce early school leaving. Other education systems reported different approaches to provide better student orientation and learning: revising qualification frameworks (in Mexico and New Zealand) and updating course curricula (in Italy, Japan and Norway). In addition, Australia and Canada (Ontario) reported policies specifically promoting increased participation in STEM-related fields.

Education systems also reported some recently implemented key education policies in this area (i.e. starting in 2015). Some countries have implemented policies with a similar focus to those described above. Key policies aim to provide better student guidance by revising the qualification framework, as in Belgium (French Community) and Iceland, and new course curricula, as in Mexico. Many key policies also focus on reducing early school leaving, as in Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Hungary, Italy and Latvia. Other participating education systems have implemented policies that aim to highlight more targeted issues: technological education in Ireland, and support for migrants and refugees in France and Germany.

Table 5.1 classifies the key education policies reported to the OECD according to their scope of intervention: 1) **Comprehensive** (overarching general strategies using various policy tools); 2) **Content** (specifically related to content knowledge); and 3) **Targeted** (focused on a specific recipient or approach). It also indicates whether policies are: 1) **S**till in place (continued since the 2015 Education Policy Outlook comparative report and/or policies implemented between 2008 and 2014); 2) **M**odified (e.g. content, scope, coverage); replacing an older policy); or 3) **R**ecent (implemented as of 2015).

Table 5.1. Policies to increase completion of upper secondary education, 2008-17

Code	Comprehensive policies	Code	Content	Code	Targeted policies
	GOVERNANCE AND GENERAL STRATEGY		**CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS**		**STUDENT DROPOUT**
S	**Australia [SN]**: Policies to strengthen STEM (2014-26)	R	**Belgium (Fr) [SN]**: Decree mandating work experience in the third year of secondary education (2016)	R	**Austria [SN]**: Apprenticeship until 18 (2017)
R	**Belgium (Fr) [SN]**: Pact for Excellence in Teaching (2015-30)	S	**Canada (Ontario) [SN]**: Technology and Learning Fund (2014-17)	S	**Belgium (Fl) [SN]**: Master plan for secondary education and policy measures for the reduction of early school leaving (2013)
R	**France [SN]**: National action plan to support migrants (2017)	S	**Iceland [SN]**: Reforms on upper secondary education (2011)	S M	**Belgium (Fl)**: Together against Early School Leaving (2015), previously Action Plan on Early School Leaving (2013) and *Spijbelplan* (2012))
S	**Germany**: Qualification Initiative Getting ahead through education (2008)	R	**Iceland**: National Qualifications Framework for all school levels (2016)	R	**Belgium (Fl)**: Early School Leaving Monitor (2016)
S	**Iceland [SN]**: White Paper on Education Reform (2014)	R	**Ireland [SN]**: Digital Strategy for Schools (2015-20)	S	**Canada (Quebec)**: I Care about School strategy (2009)
S	**Italy**: Reform of upper secondary education (2010-15)	S	**Japan**: National Curriculum Standard for high school (2009)	S	**France**: United Against School Dropout (2014)
R	**Italy:** Good School Reform (2015) (April 2017 implementing Decree No. 63. on the right to study)	S	**New Zealand**: National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) (2009), part of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQA)	S M	**Germany**: Educational Chains Initiative (2010) for career support
S	**Mexico [SN]**: Compulsory upper secondary education (2012)	S	**Norway**: Certificate of Practice Scheme (2008)	S	**Germany**: VerA programme (2010-20)
R	**Mexico [SN]**: New Educational Model (2017)			R	**Germany**: Career orientation programme (2016), part of the Ways to Education for Refugees programme
				R	**Hungary [SN]**: Public Education Bridge Programme (2016)
				R	**Hungary [SN]**: VET Bridge Programme (2016)
				S M	**Latvia**: Support to students at risk of social exclusion (2007-13, 2014-20)
				S	**Latvia**: Regulation for absent students (2011)
				S	**Latvia**: Educational Development Guidelines 2014-2020
				R	**Latvia**: National Reform Programme (2016)
				S M	**Mexico [SN]**: Constructing Yourself (2008)
				S	**Mexico [SN]**: Movement against school dropout (2013/14)
				S	**New Zealand:** Achievement Retention Transitions programme (2013), within the Youth Guarantee (2010)
				S	**Slovenia [SN]**: CroCooS (2014-17)
				S	**Spain**: Programme to Reduce Early Dropout in Education and Training (2014-20)

Notes:

1. **[SN]**: Policy information was only included as an additional policy of potential interest to other countries in the country snapshots (Chapter 7).

2. See Annex B for information on policies reported in the previous cycle for which no further details were available.

Sources: EPO Survey 2016-17 and EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 for Austria, Belgium (Fl, Fr and Dg), Italy and Sweden.

Reducing early leaving rates, and increasing students' participation and achievement in upper secondary education

Combating high early school leaving rates in upper secondary education remains a policy priority for several OECD education systems (see Chapter 4). Many factors, including students' socio-economic status, demographics and educational backgrounds play an important role can that can determine whether students are potentially at risk of dropping out (OECD, 2017a).

As student dropout has multiple causes in different contexts, education systems' approaches are also diverse. Some education systems address this issue through policies directly targeting students, such as improving their motivation in Canada (Quebec), providing individual support and orientation to students in Germany and Latvia, or identifying the different profiles of students at risk and monitoring those who leave education, as in the Flemish Community of Belgium and New Zealand. To ensure access to secondary education, some systems, such as Italy and Latvia, provide direct financial support to students. Policies in Spain aim to directly target students at risk of early drop out, for example with scholarships and by awareness campaigns. In Italy, national and regional authorities are responsible for assuring the right to study, by providing financial support to students needing assistance for school fees, textbooks or transportation to school. Systems including Germany, Italy and Norway and are working on providing more flexible pathways that facilitate certification or other financial support.

Developing more comprehensive measures and establishing partnerships with the private sector or local and regional authorities are among current approaches in France and Germany. This is also an important area of action in more recent policy developments. For example, preventing dropout is an important component of the Pact for Excellence in Teaching (2017) in the French Community of Belgium, which aims to reduce school dropout by 50% by 2030. Its key elements include data collection, a data definition of roles and tasks for actors, instruments, and a co-ordination framework for different actors (see Chapter 7).

Policy focus

In 2015, the parliament of the **Flemish Community of Belgium** launched the action plan "Together against Early School Leaving" (previously the Action Plan on Early School Leaving [2013] and *Spijbelplan* [2012]). It targets different types of populations at risk: early school leavers (emigrants with low education level); truants; NEETs; and general youth at risk (SERV, 2015). The policy guidelines in the Action Plan outline actions that have been completed, are in operation and are about to begin. Local actions are aligned to the European reference framework of prevention, intervention and compensation (*Vlaanderen Department Onderwijs en Vorming*, 2017). Furthermore, the action plan includes monitoring, identification and co-ordination. In 2016, the government set up the Early School Leaving Monitor to monitor and track the outcomes, socio-economic characteristics and study progression of young people who leave education without an upper secondary qualification.

- • **Progress or impact:** As of 2017, 52 actions have been completed, 51 are still in operation and 4 are about to begin. Actions and results on the four levels include reporting recurrent absences of students and addressing students directly in case of truancy, in order to make schools more responsive. The group of measures also includes setting up a plan to combat bullying. Another completed action is the appointment of a Flemish truancy officer who is in charge of accompanying, following up and evaluating the implementation plan. (*Vlaanderen Department Onderwijs en Vorming*, 2017)

In 2009, the province of **Quebec (Canada)** introduced the "I Care about School" strategy (*l'École, j'y tiens!*), aiming to reach a student completion rate of 80% in secondary education by 2020, through reduced class size, after-school care and reintegrating students who have dropped out of the system.

> ● **Progress or impact:** A 2012 evaluation of the programme found that the participants of the experimental study group increased their commitment after the programme's intervention. The assessment suggests that this might be attributed to one part of the curriculum of the programme, the media project, which particularly motivated the participants (Lalande Charlebois, 2012).

France implemented the action plan *Tous mobilisés pour vaincre le décrochage scolaire* in 2014. It integrates previous educational support measures geared towards students at the lower secondary education level (*dispositifs relais*) and focuses on the prevention of early school leaving and school retention. It also aims to develop partnerships, in particular with local and regional authorities, to target young people who have already left education. It is built on three pillars, mobilisation of all to overcome school dropout (*Tous mobilisés pour vaincre le décrochage scolaire*), choosing prevention (*faire le choix de la prévention*), and a new opportunity to qualify (*une nouvelle chance pour se qualifier*) (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*, 2017a). In 2017/18, the plan will continue to address prevention measures, such as education alliances and the right to redo an exam, as well as remediation, which includes personal activity accounts, an information system to track school dropouts and structures to facilitate the return to school. Several measures will continue to be implemented to prevent school dropout, such as educational and personalised support, a personalised programme for educational success *(programme personnalisé de réussite educative*, PPRE), internships and tutoring, and a group to prevent school dropout (*groupe de prévention du décrochage scolaire*, GPDS).

> ● **Progress or impact:** A 2014 evaluation report found that school dropout is a complex multifactor process. The report found that policies on reducing dropout were in the development phase. The phase of construction with modest means and policy steering, was in its early stages, with unequal progress across the country. Some recommended measures included implementing a more global and integrated political approach with components of prevention, intervention and remediation, as well as a strong focus on the prevention of early school leaving. The report also recommended establishing a more systematic alliance among schools, classes and prevention actions for the personnel working for *l'Éducation nationale*. The measures may have had a positive impact on the overall reduction in school dropout, which has dropped significantly over the last decade. On average, between 2013 and 2015, 13% of students left school without a diploma or just the 10th grade diploma, compared to 17 % from 2007 to 2009 (RERS, 2011; RERS, 2017). Also, 9% of 18-24 year-olds do not have a diploma, compared to an average of 11% in the European Union. Success factors identified include: 1) the priority accorded by the government to combating school dropout; 2) the implementation of tools, including the extension of the interministerial system of information exchange; 3) a human resource management system; and 4) a systematic evaluation of the devices and experimentation. The actions of the plan completed in 2015 and 2016 were evaluated in 2016. The objective was to improve information systems and design new digital tools for tracking and monitoring young people who are at risk of dropping out (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*, 2017b).

Germany's overarching Qualification Initiative "Getting ahead through education" (*Aufstieg durch Bildung*) operated from 2008 to 2015 and then was superseded by several programmes on the federal and *Länder* levels. It addressed all areas of education, from ECEC to VET and (continuing) higher education, as well as lifelong learning. In 2008, the target was set to spend 10% of gross domestic product on education, science and research. The objectives corresponding to upper secondary education and beyond include: 1) increasing the number of students in academic and vocational education; 2) making vocational education more attractive; 3) facilitating transfer opportunities between VET and academic education; and 4) improving equity and access to education (such as by integrating young people with a migration background). One programme helps refugees during their studies at institutions of higher education. The Qualification Initiative also

aims to increase students' interest and enthusiasm for scientific and technical vocations. For example, Girls' Day is targeted at young female students to raise their interest in pursuing studies in STEM subjects (BMBF, 2017a).

- **Progress or impact:** According to the 2015 report on implementation of the Initiative, the targets were about to be reached or had already been surpassed. For example, the target of increasing the participation rate in additional training to 43% from 2006 to 2015 was surpassed in 2014, with a record high of 51% (KMK and GWK, 2015). Further evidence on the overall objectives identified several developments. The number of young people without vocational education dropped to 13.8% in 2013, and the number of women in STEM careers is increasing. Also, further financial investments have been made, such as allocating EUR 100 million to help refugees to study in universities. In addition, the ministry has been allocating an extra EUR 130 million for the acquisition of the German language, the identification of competences and potential of refugees and their integration into training and occupations (BMBF, 2017b).

Germany's Educational Chains Initiative (*Initiative Bildungsketten*, 2010) aims to ensure a better transition into VET and the labour market. Under this Initiative, vocational trainers and senior experts are engaged to give guidance to youth. The Initiative is also part of the Alliance for Education and Training 2015-18 (*Allianz für Aus- und Weiterbildung*) (BMBF and BMAS, 2017), which brings together federal and regional governments, and social partners to improve the attractiveness of VET. The Initiative has been enhanced to extend counselling and coaching and to operate in 11th grade of secondary schools (*Gymnasien*). The government is also reinforcing collaboration between municipal youth, social services and employment agencies to aid young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (EC, 2016a). As part of the Initiative, the government also developed the VerA Programme (2010-20), which provides free-of-charge support to prevent early leaving in apprenticeships.

- **Progress or impact:** The 2014 external evaluation of the Initiative focused on the core elements of potential assessment, practical occupational orientation and mentoring of the transition to the labour market. Experts have stated that assessment of students is a good basis to move to the practical occupational guidance. Among practical occupations, internships were most positively evaluated by both students and other stakeholders. The importance of having internships as part of the programme was especially stressed by staff of special needs' schools (*Förderschulen*). Outcomes on mentoring of the transition to the labour market have been mixed, as the initial and overall conditions varied immensely. For example, half of the mentors operated only at one school, while the others had to work at several schools simultaneously (RMC, IES and ISM, 2014).

In 2016, **Germany** established an extended career orientation programme on VET programmes in the trade sector (*BMBF-Programm Berufsorientierung für Flüchtlinge*) for asylum seekers, young refugees or those with temporary residence status who are allowed to access the labour market and are beyond the age of compulsory education, as part of the Ways to Education for Refugees initiative (*Wege in Ausbildung für Flüchtlinge*) (BMAS, 2016). The programme is also part of the Education Chains Initiative (2010). The programme set the goal to train and bring into trade training up to 10 000 refugees by 2018 (BMBF, 2016). The target group is those who have already completed an integration course, have a good competency in German and have previously completed a first orientation in trades (BMBF, 2016; BMAS, 2016). Participants can test apprenticeships in up to three different trades (BMBF, 2016). In response to first experiences, several adjustments were implemented in 2017 to make the programme more flexible (BMBF, 2017c). For example, instead of limiting the programme to a maximum of 13 weeks, it was increased to up to 26 weeks, and the length of time a participant can spend in an enterprise was doubled to 8 weeks (BMBF, 2017c).

- **Progress or impact:** A case example of the city of Duisburg shows that as of April 2017, 11 people had completed the programme and some of them had already started an apprenticeship in a trade. By then, 33 people were participating in the programme. The overall completion rate is high: within four rounds, only 6.5% of the participants dropped out (BMBF, 2017d).

In **Italy**, legislative Decree No. 63 of 13 April 2017 concerning the right to study provides for the allocation of financial aid to students to complete secondary education and thereby intends to improve learning outcomes (EC, 2017a). Special focus is put on students in the final (Grades 12 and 13) (EC, 2017b). Over EUR 40 million was spent in 2017 and will be spent annually on tuition fees, purchasing textbooks and tablets, mobility and transport of low-income students (EC, 2017a; EC, 2017b). Students will be exempted from fees (EC, 2017b). The Decree also provides local authorities with the possibility of entering into specific agreements with public and private entities for the provision of additional benefits.

- **Progress or impact:** According to additional evidence, the supplementary funds are now almost EUR 40 million per year. Besides that, each Italian student is granted a gift of EUR 500 on his/her 18th birthday as a "*bonus culture*" intended for cultural consumption (EC, 2017b).

In **Latvia**, students at risk of social exclusion due to their poor financial or social situation are eligible to receive a scholarship for successful learning in vocational education. From 2007 to 2013, this scholarship programme was funded by a contribution from the European Commission's European Social Fund (ESF). As the ESF did not renew the funding for its 2014-20 funding cycle, since 2015 the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science has increased the funding paid from the state budget for scholarships (Metis GmbH, Fondazione Brodolini and Panteia, 2016).

- **Progress or impact:** According to an evaluation of ESF funding in Latvia, between 2004 and 2012, the share of vocational education students increased from 26% to 39%. Data of the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia show the share of students in vocational education (after the 9th grade) was 35.9% in 2011/12 and 36.6% in the 2016/17 school year. The ESF scholarships for VET led to an increase in enrolment and attendance in VET education and courses, a sign of its success. Between 2007 and 2013, 71 284 students had benefitted from a scholarship (67% of the total number of VET students). This was far more than the targeted 40 000 students. As a result of its success and since the scholarship programme did not continue beyond 2015, the state budget amount for VET scholarships was increased (Metis GmbH, Fondazione Brodolini and Panteia, 2016). Also, the OECD identified the need to increase the mean-tested scholarship to a level that allows students to concentrate on completing VET programmes and to make it compatible with state family benefits (OECD, 2017c). As of 2018, the government provides additional support, funded by EU structural funds, which allows families to receive both the family allowances and the VET stipend.

Latvia has implemented several policies to address early school leaving. A 2011 regulation allows educational institutions to inform parents, municipal or state institutions if a student is not attending school without an appropriate reason. It also promotes the accounting of compulsory school age children who are not registered in any education institution. The Education Development Guidelines 2014-20 aim to reduce the number of early school leavers through, for example, a 2017 ESF project that supports students in general education institutions (Grades 5-12) and vocational education students (Years 1-4). Students at risk get individual support (such as compensation for public transport expenses, consultations and support by specialists). A prevention system has also been developed. The overall goal is to have systematic support implemented in 665 education institutions by 2022. In addition, the measures of the 2016 National Reform Programme also address reducing early school leaving by, for example, improving career guidance to students and quality assurance in general and vocational education (EC, 2016b). Initially, the target of the National Reform Programme of Latvia was to reduce the share of early school leavers (aged 18-24) to 13.4% by 2020 (Government of Latvia, 2017).

- **Progress or impact:** Overall, the early school leaving rate has been decreasing in recent years, from as high as 15.5% in 2008 (Eurostat, 2016). The early school leaving rate of those aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training has risen slightly, from 8.5% in 2014 to 10% in 2016, but it remains below the EU average of 10.7% in 2016 and has reached the Europe 2020 target of 10% (Eurostat, 2016; EC 2017c). Disparities remain between genders and rural and urban areas (EC, 2017c).

The Achievement Retention Transitions programme was implemented between 2013 and 2017 as part of **New Zealand**'s Youth Guarantee (2010). The initiative collaborates with local secondary schools to identify young people at risk of not achieving National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level 2. There was a particular focus on Māori and Pasifika students. The initiative also aimed to generate higher levels of NCEA achievement and support the government's Better Public Services target of 85% of 18 year-olds achieving NCEA level 2 or equivalent by 2017.

- **Progress or impact:** The initiative built on a 2012 pilot programme that led to significant improvement in the numbers of students achieving NCEA level 2. While this specific initiative had not been evaluated, the overall estimations for 2016 were positive, as the NCEA level 2 attainment rate for all 18-year-olds was expected to increase to 85.5% (a 10.9% increase since 2011), which is above the Better Public Service target of 85% by 2017. In addition, the achievement rates of Māori students (66.5%) and Pasifika (74.7%) students had risen in 2016 with the highest increase among Māori students (3.3 percentage points) since 2015 followed by Pasifika students (0.6 percentage points) (Education Counts, 2018).

Norway's 2008 proposed pilot project on the Certificate of Practice Scheme (*Praksisbrev*) aims to reduce dropout in upper secondary education. In 2014, the scheme was developed into a permanent arrangement where, by law, the regional authorities (owners of upper secondary schools) are obliged to offer a Certificate of Practice. This certificate is a two-year practical education programme after which students can apply for an ordinary vocational education apprenticeship to obtain a VET certificate.

- **Progress or impact:** According to a 2008-11 evaluation, 49% of the students enrolled in this programme obtained an apprenticeship after completion, whereas only 29% of students who attended ordinary vocational upper secondary education succeeded in finding an apprenticeship (NIFU, 2011). Success factors of the programme include centring education around practical job experiences instead of school-focused education and providing participants with placements in companies, which increased their chances to move on to an apprenticeship afterwards. Other important factors were evaluation of applicants to the programme before acceptance, proactive involvement of the schools in the programme, and the possibility of moving on to a trade or journeyman's certificate after completion of the certificate (CEDEFOP, 2017a).

In **Spain**, the Programme to Reduce Early Dropout in Education and Training (2014-20) provides funding for preventive measures, such as external evaluations in certain grades to detect early difficulties in learning and minimise the risk of dropout. In addition, a royal decree regulates the general system of scholarships and study aids annually. Studies are conducted to identify areas with high school dropout rates to analyse causes and profiles and thereby evaluate and design specific intervention pathways. Awareness campaigns are targeted at students and their families to ensure the best possible use of training. Specific programmes are implemented in areas and groups with the highest dropout risk through co-operation and co-ordination with different institutions and local and regional authorities. Also, to facilitate reintegration, young people from age 16 to age 24 who drop out are supported through adult education institutions and local authorities.

- **Progress or impact:** Evaluation has shown that programmes on second-chance opportunities and vocational training measures offered by adult education institutions have contributed to the reduction of dropout rates in Spain. Early school leaving rates of 18-24 years-olds have declined from 31.7% in 2008 to 18.3 % in 2017(Eurostat, 2016).

Better student orientation through improved qualifications frameworks and more engaging and relevant course offerings.

Establishing and developing qualification frameworks can help to provide greater clarity of the knowledge and skills that students can expect to acquire through an academic programme, as well as provide students at the secondary level with greater accessibility and smoother transitions across different options of an education system. Moreover,

qualifications frameworks are quality-assurance mechanisms that outline what is expected from specific training programmes (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2011). In response to an increase in the number of students in upper secondary education, course curricula have become more flexible to cater to students' diverse skills and needs (OECD, 2017b).

Qualifications frameworks

Some OECD education systems, such as Chile, Iceland and New Zealand, have implemented and revised their national qualification frameworks (NQF) to improve student orientation. Revisions aim to ensure that qualifications are relevant and sufficient, or to facilitate student transfer between education providers, as in New Zealand.

Policy focus

The National Qualifications Framework for all school levels in **Iceland** was adopted in 2016. As of 2018, the Directorate for Education is preparing a review of the national curriculum guidelines for compulsory education.

- **Progress or impact:** The 2016 analysis of the NQF in Iceland by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) found that as of 2016 the framework had advanced to the "early operational stage". All qualifications at upper secondary level, including general and vocational education, contain the NQF and European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels. The different stakeholders from education, training and the labour market recognise the framework as a positive development. This can probably be explained by their close involvement during the development and ongoing reforms of the NQF. At the same time, the report stressed, among other points, that continuing engagement of stakeholders in the future is one of the main challenges and, thus, it is important to clarify their role in the implementation process. Also, the report recommends implementing a co-ordination committee to facilitate the exchange of information with stakeholders (CEDEFOP, 2017b).

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA, 2009) covers levels 1 to 3 of the **New Zealand** Qualifications Framework (NZQF). At secondary school, students work towards one of these three qualifications. After secondary school, students who want to continue at the tertiary level can choose from a number of education options, ranging from universities to polytechnics, private training establishments, industry training organisations and further learning on the job. Students need to obtain NCEA level 2 or its equivalent to continue studying at higher levels.

- **Progress or impact:** Several reviews of aspects of the NZQF were undertaken from 2011 to 2016 that aimed to reduce duplication, ensure qualifications are relevant and fit-for-purpose, and make it easier for students to transfer between providers offering programmes towards the same New Zealand qualification. As pointed out by New Zealand in the EPO Survey 2016-17, the reviews led to an overall 74% reduction in the number of qualifications at levels 1-6 (measured at the approval-to-develop stage). Previous national and provider-developed qualifications at levels 1-6 are being replaced with new qualifications.

Course curricula

Another approach taken to facilitate better student orientation is to revise the curricula in upper secondary education. In Italy and Japan, policy reforms aim to respond to the changes in competencies required by the labour market and ease transition pathways through upper secondary education.

Policy focus

Italy has been reforming offerings at upper secondary education level since 2010, when the upper secondary curriculum was revised to improve student choices for optional subjects. In 2014/15 to enhance participation in work-based learning, 10% of registered

upper secondary students participated in a pilot programme for combined school-based and work-based traineeships (*alternanza scuola-lavoro*). These traineeships became compulsory for all pathways at upper secondary level in 2015, thus institutionalising work-based learning in the upper secondary curriculum. Further reform of the VET offering has been legislated in 2017 as part of the 2015 Good School Reforms (April 2017 implementing Decree No. 61 on vocational educational reform) (see the section on developing quality VET).

- **Progress or impact:** In the 2015/16 school year, 652 641 students in upper secondary schools participated in mandatory *alternanza scuola-lavoro* compared to 273 000 in the 2014/15 pilot phase. The traineeships are now mandatory, following the 2017 legislation. As of September 2017, approximately all 1.5 million students enrolled in the last three years of upper secondary education are expected to engage in *alternanza scuola-lavoro* experiences.

In 2009, **Japan** revised the National Curriculum Standard for upper secondary education, which serves as the fundamental standard of curriculum for students at this level. In general, it is revised once every ten years. The current National Curriculum Standard aims to allow students to acquire and use fundamental knowledge and skills and develop abilities and attitudes to proactively deal with various problems and solve them by thinking, making judgements and expressing themselves ("solid academic ability"); to cultivate self-discipline, empathy and co-operative spirit for others, and a rich sensibility ("richness in mind"); and to foster health and fitness for living a vigorous life ("healthy body"). The government aims to balance these elements to nurture students' "competencies for living". In the revision of the National Curriculum Standard, the declining results in the OECD's Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) from 2000 to 2006 were seriously taken into account (Nakayasu, 2016). The focus was put on aligning the skills taught to children to the key competences measured in PISA (MEXT, 2017; Nakayasu, 2016).

- **Progress or impact:** Evidence shows that overall, the adjustments made help promote school climate development, give teachers greater autonomy in designing the school curriculum, concentrate on "learning-centred education" and widen learning on the global and community scale (Aranil and Fukuya, 2010).

Developing quality vocational education and training

Box 5.2. Policy pointer: Developing quality vocational education and training

VET systems can boost economic development and help countries remain competitive in the globalised world by adapting to evolving skills' needs, through the expansion of a workforce with mid-level trade or technical and professional skills (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2011). Evidence shows that strong VET systems can help reduce youth employment and help economies become more resilient (OECD, 2011). In order to improve the overall quality of VET programmes, education systems must align the skills taught in VET systems with labour market demands, provide young people with sufficient career guidance, or also improve teacher quality through education, experience and increased workplace training (OECD, 2010; OECD, 2014a; OECD, 2015). In order to cater for lifelong learning and foster occupational mobility, it is essential as well that VET systems train young people to obtain generic and transferable skills (OECD, 2011).

- **Policy priorities identified (OECD):** 1) Raising the attractiveness of VET. 2) Creating or strengthening apprenticeship systems. 3) Encouraging employer engagement.

- **Principles of action identified (OECD):** 1) Make vocational education a more attractive option by making programmes more relevant to the labour market, facilitating pathways to tertiary education or higher-level VET (if at upper secondary level) and further involving employers in the establishment of curriculum. 2) Provide an apprenticeship system with VET programmes that reflect student preferences and employer needs, improve financial support for students in vocational education and strengthen collaboration of businesses and schools at the local level. 3) Encourage employer engagement by giving them more incentives, such as tax exemptions.

- ▪ **Summary of policy trend identified:** OECD education systems have implemented strategies and tools to improve the quality of VET programmes and policies to support students during their transition into post-secondary education or the labour market and to improve access to VET and its attractiveness. More recently implemented policies address targets in the same areas.
- ▪ **Examples of policies:**
    - – **Improve quality of VET programmes:** IRL, ITA, LTV, NZL, PRT
    - – **Support students' transitions into post-secondary education or the labour market:** ITA, NZL, SVN
    - – **Improve access and attractiveness:** BEL (FI), CAN, HUN, ITA, ESP

Note: See Annex C, Boxes C.12, C.13 and C.14 for a summary of education systems where increasing the attractiveness of VET, creating or strengthening apprentice systems and increasing employer engagement in VET are identified as relevant policy priorities, as well as selected related policies.

VET starts at age 15 in most OECD countries and includes education and training programmes created at upper secondary (initial) or post-secondary level that generally lead to a specific job or type of job. Unlike traditional academic paths in upper secondary and tertiary education, VET combines learning relevant theory with practical training. VET is confronted with the challenge of providing a good combination of specific and broader skills that allow students to enter the labour market, while enabling them to continue learning and evolve professionally later in life. Governments are increasingly considering VET a policy priority, although it is still viewed as having lower social status in some countries (OECD, 2011; OECD, 2017a). In several OECD countries, for example, VET has been insufficiently addressed in policy discussions, as more emphasis has been put on general academic education (OECD, 2011; OECD, 2017a).

Furthermore, some VET systems struggle to provide sufficient numbers of workplace training and trainers (OECD, 2011). Yet, in some OECD countries, VET has become an essential part of upper secondary education. The benefits of VET are manifold: qualifying young people for the labour market; equipping adults with essential skills; and filling the gap between high-level skills and low-level skills by developing a labour force with the mid-level trade, technical and professional skills needed to be competitive in the globalised world (OECD, 2011; OECD, 2015; OECD, 2017a). In some cases, a specific VET system is essential, as companies often only train their employees in their specific field, and employers might be unwilling to hire young people who are not immediately ready for the job (OECD, 2011).

VET can also help to decrease inequalities, as it provides alternative pathways to education and can foster economic development, through its capacity to adopt to evolving skills needs.

Education policy continuity and reform across the OECD, 2008-17

Responses to the EPO Survey 2016-17 and the EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 show that the development of quality VET remains a policy priority for many OECD education systems. More than half of the older key education policies (i.e. those implemented between 2008 and 2014) are still in place, addressing strategies and tools to improve the quality of VET programmes, as in Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Other policies aim to support students during their transition into post-secondary education or the labour market, as in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), New Zealand and Slovenia. In Belgium (Flemish Community), Italy, Mexico, Norway and Spain, policies focus on improving access to VET and its overall attractiveness for potential students.

Education systems have also reported some recently implemented policies (i.e. starting in 2015) that aim to improve strategies and tools to enhance the quality of VET programmes, as in Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Chile, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia. Further key policies recently implemented include those to support students' transitions into post-secondary education or the labour market, as in Canada, Finland, Italy and Slovenia, and to improve access to VET and its attractiveness, as in Australia, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Japan and Latvia.

Table 5.2 classifies the key education policies reported to the OECD according to their scope of intervention: 1) **Comprehensive** (overarching general strategies using various policy tools); 2) **Content** (specifically related to content knowledge); and 3) **Targeted** (focused on a specific recipient or approach). It also indicates whether policies are: 1) **S**till in place (continued since the 2015 Education Policy Outlook comparative report and/or policies implemented between 2008 and 2014); 2) **M**odified (e.g. content, scope, coverage); replacing an older policy); or 3) **R**ecent (implemented as of 2015).

Table 5.2. Policies to develop quality vocational education and training, 2008-17

Code	Comprehensive policies	Code	Content	Code	Targeted policies
	GENERAL STRATEGY AND STRUCTURE		**CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS**		**ACCESS**
S	**Australia [SN]**: Preparing Secondary Students for Work framework (2014)	S	**Estonia [SN]**: Reforms of the VET system (Vocational Educational Institution Act, [2013], Vocational Education Standards [2013])	R	**Australia [SN]**: Smith Family's Learning for Life Program (2016-17 to 2019-20)
S	**Belgium (Fl) [SN]**: Ethical Trading Initiative for Young People Programme (2013)	S	**Latvia**: Reform of vocational education curricula (2008-20)	R	**Canada**: Canada Apprentice Loan (2015)
R	**Belgium (Fl)**: New model of dual learning (dual vocational learning) (2015/16)	S	**New Zealand**: Secondary-Tertiary Programmes (STPs, Trades Academies, 2009)	R	**Hungary**: Szabóky Adolf vocational scholarship programme (2016), formerly known as the Vocational School Scholarship Scheme
R	**Belgium (Fr) [SN]**: Pact for Excellence in Teaching (2015-30)	S	**New Zealand [SN]**: Service Academies (2009)	R	**Ireland [SN]**: Action plan for apprenticeships (2016-20)
R	**Canada [SN]**: Harmonise apprenticeship training for 30 Red Seal trades by 2020 (2016)	S	**New Zealand**: Vocational Pathways as part of the Youth Guarantee (2010)	S	**Mexico [SN]**: Dual training system (2013)
R	**Chile [SN]**: National VET Policy (2016)	S M	**Norway [SN]**: Working Life Course for lower secondary students (2009)		
R	**Finland [SN]**: Reform of vocational upper secondary education (2018)	S	**Portugal**: Reforms to the VET offering at secondary level (2012-17)		**QUALITY ASSURANCE**
R	**Germany [SN]**: Vocational training initiative (2016)	R	**Portugal [SN]**: National Credit System (2016)	S	**Sweden [SN]**: Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2009)
S	**Ireland**: Education and Training Boards Bill (2012)	S	**Slovenia**: Reform of vocational education and training (2008-11)		
S	**Ireland**: SOLAS - Further Education and Training Authority (2013)	R	**Slovenia [SN]**: Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act (2015)		
S	**Ireland**: Further Education and Training Strategy (2014-19)	S	**Spain [SN]**: Under the Organic Law on the Improvement of the Quality of Education (LOMCE, 2013), optional vocational pathways and new VET diploma		
S M	**Italy**: Higher Technical Institutes (2011)				
R	**Italy**: Jobs Act (2015)				
R	**Italy**: Decree No. 61 of 13 April 2017 (2017) modernising and streamlining				

	vocational educational offering
R	**Japan [SN]**: Partial amendment to the School Education Act to implement new higher education institutions (2017)
R	**Latvia [SN]**: Action Plan for 2016-2020 Development of Adult Education Provision and its Governance Model
R	**Portugal [SN]**: Qualifica Programme (2016)
R	**Slovak Republic [SN]**: National project for the support of dual education (2016)
R	**Slovak Republic [SN]**: Amendment on VET (2018)
R	**Slovenia [SN]**: VET modernisation measures (2016-21) (Apprenticeship Act, [2017], Amendments to the Vocational and Technical Education Act [2017])
S	**Spain:** Dual Vocational Training Model (2012)

Notes:

1. **[SN]**: Policy information was only included as an additional policy of potential interest to other countries in the country snapshots (Chapter 7).

2. See Annex B for information on policies reported in the previous cycle for which no further details were available.

Sources: EPO Survey 2016-17 and EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 for Austria, Belgium (Fl, Fr and Dg), Italy and Sweden (see the Reader's Guide).

Strategies and tools to improve quality of VET programmes

Improving the quality of VET programmes can help to position the VET educational pathway as an equivalent option to academic programmes (CEDEFOP, 2016). According to OECD evidence, overall quality of VET programmes can be improved by: 1) aligning the skills of VET systems to labour market demands; 2) equipping young people with enough career guidance; 3) advancing teacher quality by improving education and experience; and 4) enhancing workplace training (OECD, 2010; OECD, 2014a; OECD, 2015).

Some reported policy efforts have focused on reforming the VET structure. These include implementing guiding frameworks for students, as in Latvia and New Zealand, and revising current VET programmes to avoid overlap with other programmes, as in Italy. Portugal discontinued VET policies at the lower secondary level due to risks of early segregation and low-skilling, but continued its efforts to increase coverage and quality in VET at the upper secondary level. Policy efforts in other OECD countries, including Ireland, aim to align skills taught in education with those sought in the labour market.

Policy focus

As part of the ongoing VET reforms, **Ireland** implemented the Education and Training Boards Bill (2012), which aims to better integrate skills and training into education by replacing the 33 Vocational Education Committees with 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Implemented in 2013, the ETBs are overseen by a national representative body, Education and Training Boards Ireland. The services of the further education and training sector (FET) are mainly provided by the ETBs (ETBI, 2017). The programmes

develop skills for employed and unemployed individuals, assist students' transition into the workplace and provide literacy and numeracy skills to disadvantaged adults.

- **Progress or impact:** By mid-2014, the training centres previously operating under the Further Education and Training Authority (*An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna,* known as SOLAS) were transferred to one of the ETBs. The annual FET services plan outlines, among other elements, the programmes and courses to be delivered by the 16 ETBs (EC, 2015a).

Under the FET Act, the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) took effect in **Ireland** in 2013, replacing the previous authority (*An Foras Áiseanna Saothair*, known as FÁS). SOLAS is tasked with proposing a five-year strategy on FET, operating under the Department of Education and Skills. In co-operation with the 16 ETBs, SOLAS works on the integration, co-ordination and funding of several FET programmes (SOLAS, 2014). The first FET five-year strategy (2014-19) aims to meet the skills needs of the economy and to increase active inclusion, quality provision, integrated planning and funding, and the standing of FET (SOLAS, 2014). SOLAS has published annual FET services plans since 2014. Further FET strategies to improve the quality of VET include the FET Professional Development Strategy (2017-19), the Technology-Enhanced Learning in FET Strategy (2016-19) and a series of FET programme evaluations that are underway.

- **Progress or impact:** Regarding the 2014-19 strategy, 231 234 new entrants were registered in 2015, and 369 523 beneficiaries were reached in 19 career clusters. The overall investment was EUR 643.5 million (SOLAS, 2015). By 2016, the number of beneficiaries had increased to 339 283 and the number of new entrants to 245 400, while the budget decreased to EUR 634 million (SOLAS, 2016). The overall budget increased slightly to EUR 638 million in 2017. The number of beneficiaries decreased slightly, to 323 308, with 230 641 new entrants recorded in 33 skills clusters (compared to 19 skills clusters in 2016 (SOLAS, 2017a). As outlined in the 2017 service plan, the focus remained on long-term unemployed persons with low work intensity or limited working hours and the barriers to employment faced by those groups (SOLAS, 2017b).

Italy's Decree No. 61 of 13 April 2017 aims to enhance vocational education by innovating and revising the current programme offerings to avoid overlap between technical paths and regionally organised vocational training. Starting in the 2018/19 school year, the pathways offered in vocational institutes will be increased from 6 to 11, with the various curricula being aligned to sector priorities. The percentage of time dedicated to branch-related learning will increase to 40% in the first two years of study and to 50% in the last three years. Vocational institutes and regional VET providers will be part of the national network of vocational schools, to provide a more streamlined, efficient vocational offer (EC 2017b).

- **Progress or impact:** In 2017, an additional EUR 25 million was assigned to the dual system. In addition, the tax incentives for private employers were prolonged to 2018 in order to enhance youth employment (EC, 2017b).

The reform of vocational education curricula (2008-20) in **Latvia** aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational education in accordance with the needs of the economy. **Latvia** is currently promoting sectoral qualifications structures and is restructuring the vocational educational curricula. Overall, it will develop or restructure occupational standards and qualification requirements to facilitate outcomes-based VET programmes, enhance the examination system and improve assessment of knowledge, skills and competences acquired beyond the formal education system. In 2016, Latvia made amendments to the state vocational secondary education standard to introduce a technical approach to general subjects. These measures aim to reduce contradictions between general subjects in general secondary education and vocational secondary education, as well as to strengthen STEM subjects in vocational education.

- **Progress or impact:** According to Latvia's survey responses regarding the reform of vocational education curricula (2008-20), the government has updated 80 out of 240 occupational standards and basic qualification requirements, has introduced a third of modular programmes and has formulated 13% of the examination content.

In **New Zealand**, Vocational Pathways, part of the Youth Guarantee set of initiatives, were launched in 2010. They provide a framework for students to show how their learning and achievement is valued in the workplace, by aligning learning to the skills needed for six broad industry areas. New Zealand has also introduced more information tools, including the Occupation Outlook, which contains information on education, employment and income for 60 key occupations, as well as FindMyPath, which helps students plan employment and qualification pathways.

- **Progress or impact:** The 2013 Youth Guarantee policy monitoring report for 2010-12 states that Vocational Pathways allow students, education providers and employers to visualise the importance of their education to the job market and future studies. By 2013, five pathways were ready to be put into practice the following year (Earle, 2013). Since 2014 there have been six pathways: construction and infrastructure; manufacturing and technology; primary; service industries; social and community services; and creative industries. Further online tools have been added, including Career Quest and Skill Matcher. The Vocational Pathways are renewed every year (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017a).

Portugal has introduced a number of reforms to the VET offering at secondary level. The reform of the VET upper secondary syllabus (2013) aimed to improve transitions between VET, general education and tertiary education (OECD, 2014b). In 2014, Portugal also established the legal framework for a model of Vocational Business Reference Schools (*Escolas de Referência do Ensino Profissional*), which aim to focus on priority sectors of the economy and contain a strong technical element (OECD, 2017c). At primary and lower secondary level, the pilot Specific Vocational Programmes initiative (2012) was discontinued, due to identified risks of causing early segregation and low-skilling. Portugal has also taken steps to improve the flexibility, mobility and quality of its VET programmes, by reorganising VET curricula (2016) to align with the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and developing a quality assurance framework for VET courses (2017) to align with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET).

- **Progress or impact:** The reform of the VET upper secondary syllabus, allows students to get a more work-based education by participating in vocational programmes. This has been achieved by increasing co-operation with the private sector (EC, 2015b). The offer of programmes has been expanded significantly and now encompasses a wide range of higher-skilled occupations, such as electronics and automation, information and communication technologies, and renewable energies. The ongoing VET development has changed the traditional bias in Portugal towards general programmes (OECD, 2017c). In 2015, 45% of upper secondary students in Portugal were enrolled in vocational programmes, close to the OECD average of 46% (OECD 2017b). The VET quality-assurance system was in the process of being implemented, starting in 2017. It is expected that from 2017/18 onwards, school networks will incorporate the quality-assurance status of dual vocational courses as part of the criteria for selecting course offers.

The Qualifica Programme (2016) builds upon previous efforts from **Portugal** in the area of adult education. It represents an increased focus on improving the education and skills of adults following a period of reduced resources for investment between 2011 and 2015. Qualifica Centres aim to provide more effective and broader response to adults' qualification needs by: 1) increasing the number of education centres to improve national coverage; 2) introducing a digital platform (Passport Qualifica), which records the academic achievements of adult and also recognises prior work-related or non-formal learning; and 3) aligning the qualifications to ECVET. The Qualifica network replaces the Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education (*Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*, 2012-14) which had replaced the previous network of New

Opportunities Centres (*Centros Novas Oportunidades*, 2005). With the Qualifica Centres now implemented as the specialised structures for adult education and training, the key objective of the enhanced programme is to establish upper secondary education as the minimum threshold of attainment.

- **Progress or impact:** Investment on adult education from 2011 to 2015 declined compared to previous levels, and opportunities for adults had decreased, but the launch of the Qualifica Programme in late 2016 has reversed this situation. In 2017, the number of Qualifica Centres increased to a total of 303, with 40 new centres established to achieve national coverage. In 2017, 125 893 adults participated, a 42% increase over 2016. Compared to 2015, an increase was achieved in the number of adults in training (88%), recognition of prior learning (125%) and those who had passed the final stage in training and received certification (282%).

Supporting students' transitions into post-secondary education or the labour market

Well-established VET systems can aid in the transition to the labour market by giving young people opportunities to gain professional experience, and also by providing them with a combination of specific and general skills that will help them to evolve professionally according to changes in their own interests and labour market needs (OECD, 2017a). Italy, New Zealand and Slovenia reported examples of policies aiming to strengthen these synergies.

Policy focus

Italy has implemented a major labour market reform (Jobs Act, 2015) which includes measures to support more effective transitions and support the labour market (OECD, 2017e; OECD, 2017f). Notably, a new regulation has been implemented for apprenticeships leading to qualifications awarded in the education system at upper secondary and tertiary level, with a national framework for off-the-job education and training at school. Courses leading to a professional certificate or a diploma will be integrated in regional VET systems of three and four years duration, as a dual system involving both schools and companies. With an additional year of apprenticeship, these courses will give access to VET-oriented tertiary education (OECD, 2017e). Higher training and research apprenticeships, which have been recently been reformed under the Jobs Act, can be also an opportunity to increase access to tertiary-level education while strongly connecting universities and non-academic higher-education institutions with the labour market (OECD, 2017g). To stimulate development of apprenticeships, a major reduction of the costs of labour has been enhanced. Two national pilot projects, promoted by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the Ministry of Labour, support implementation of this reform, especially for young people who want to acquire an upper secondary level qualification together with a regional VET professional qualification.

- **Progress or impact:** The OECD identified challenges ahead of the implementation, such as, the delivery of active labour market policies to increase the skills of unemployed in order to match the needs of firms (OECD, 2017f). To meet challenges of access to higher education, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research has recently begun to increase the funds allocated to universities and is currently working to improve career guidance and strengthen the relevance of tertiary education. According to OECD evidence, the recent increase in spending on scholarships (the Stability Pact 2017) goes in the right direction to improve access to tertiary education. Overall, despite labour market reforms (such as the Jobs Act, and the improved employment situation), a great number of people still are out of employment or the labour force for longer periods (OECD, 2017g).

In **New Zealand**, several programmes are operating as part of the Youth Guarantee initiatives that aim to improve the transition from education to the labour market. Among

these are the Secondary-Tertiary Programmes or Trade Academies (2009) (STPs), which provide senior secondary school students with the opportunity to combine study at school with study in tertiary settings and/or in the workplace. STPs target upper secondary students interested in careers in trades or technology, by collaborating with schools, tertiary institutions, industry training organisations and employers. Students are enrolled in school full time, but typically spend three days per week at school and two days at a tertiary provider, doing an integrated learning programme towards NCEA level 2, which is often seen as a requirement for entry-level jobs (see NZQA, 2017), and industry-related certificates.

- **Progress or impact:** The 2015 STP examination report found that the programmes aid in maintaining students in learning and achieving. More than 80% of the students who graduated from the programme in 2013, had an attendance rate of 80% or more, obtained a minimum of NCEA level 2, and successfully transferred from secondary school. Aspects for improvement include developing an integrated STP curriculum and advancing the partnerships (ERO, 2015). The 2014 Youth Guarantee Monitoring Report, which monitored the education and employment outcomes of participants in programmes including the STPs, also found that a higher share of participants attained NCEA level 2 or equivalent than a group of non-participants with similar demographic and educational backgrounds. The programme aided in the process of employment. It also had a great effect on helping young people to avoid become NEETs at the beginning, and the effect was maintained for STPs one to two years after programme completion. As of 2016, STPs provided 6 190 available places for students, a tenfold increase since 2011 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017b).

As part of the reform of VET (2008-11), **Slovenia** introduced a competence-based approach in VET curricula (2008/11), with a modular structure in teaching and learning, and increased the share of practical training. The updated subject curricula in general upper secondary schools (*gimnazija*) (2008/09) and the updated curricula in basic schools (2011/12) also introduced core competencies in general education. Following the reform of vocational education (2008-11), practical training in the workplace increased, and 20% of the curriculum can now be designed in co-operation with social partners, particularly local companies.

- **Progress or impact:** The overall results of the Practical Training with Work programme in the period from 2008 to 2015 were positive. More than 26 000 students participated, and around 12 000 employers provided work placements. This all contributed to improved links between education institutions, employers and students, as well as better quality of training and matches between labour market needs and supply (Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia, 2018). The total number of upper secondary students in VET increased above the EU average in 2015, and pilot apprenticeships were planned for 2017 (EC, 2017d).

Improving access to VET and its attractiveness

Several OECD education systems have implemented programmes to reform dual vocational learning, as in Belgium (Flemish Community) and Spain, or to provide financial support to students pursuing VET, as in Canada, Hungary and Italy.

Policy focus

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, a new model of dual vocational learning (*Schoolbank op de werkplek*) is underway, with pilots running since 2015/16 and general implementation starting during 2018/19. Students are trained in the workplace and in a centre for part-time education (CEDEFOP, 2017c). One component is an online tool (*werkplek duaal*) where companies can upload requests for getting their apprenticeship place accredited (Syntra Vlaanderen, 2017a). The tool started operating in 2016, and 8 938 accreditations were verified by 2017 (Syntra Vlaanderen, 2017a).

- **Progress or impact:** According to CEDEFOP (2017c), the reforms have already shown positive results. During the pilot stage, 34 schools took part, with 7 operating pathways and 126 apprentices. Also, 25 pioneers of the programme graduated in chemical process techniques. The number of approved accreditations on the *werkplek duaal* website increased to more than 10 000. In addition, 12 sectoral partnerships were active by then (Syntra Vlaanderen, 2017b).

The **Canada** Apprentice Loan (CAL), launched in 2015, provides interest-free loans of up to CAD 4 000 per period of technical training to help register apprentices in Red Seal trades with the costs of training (Government of Canada, 2017a).

- **Progress or impact:** The June 2017 evaluation report on the first phase of implementation of the programme found that there is demand for the programme, as otherwise employers provide little to no financial support to apprentices. As of 2015, 41% of eligible students took up a CAL. From 2015 to 2016, the administrative costs were CAD 4.2 million. Challenges remain in raising awareness among the target group and clarifying the terms of repayment, as they have not been clear to some recipients. The report indicates that the impact of the loans on completion rates will be addressed in the second phase of the evaluation, as more time is needed for data collection (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017).

In 2016, the Szabóky Adolf vocational scholarship scheme (*Szabóky Adolf Szakképzési Ösztöndíj*) replaced the Vocational School Scholarship programme in **Hungary**. It aims to make more attractive to students the VET occupations and careers of skilled workers that the government has classified as being in high demand in the labour market. It also aims to prevent grade repetition and early school leaving of at-risk students. The programme is financed by the training sub-fund of the National Employment Fund. Merit-based scholarships are granted to students enrolled in full-time education for an occupation with shortages on the labour market. Eligible students are required to: 1) obtain training in 1 of the 20 shortage occupations, as defined each school year by the government and the development and training committees established in Hungary; 2) achieve a minimum grade-point average of 2.51 (5 is the highest) for vocational secondary school students and 3.01 for vocational grammar schools students; and 3) have less than seven hours of unjustified absence from school. If students fulfil the requirements, they receive EUR 32 per month in the first semester, which may be increased by EUR 32 to EUR 160 in the following semesters, depending on performance and type of vocational school attended. If their average falls below 2.51, secondary vocational school students have to take a catch-up course to improve their results and regain eligibility for the scholarship.

- **Progress or impact:** VET participation has been low in Hungary. In 2015, the overall participation of students in VET programmes was 23.2% in upper secondary VET, less than half the EU average of 47.3% (Eurostat, 2017a). Yet, at around 70%, Hungary has a comparatively high percentage of VET students in work-based learning compared to other EU countries, considering all programmes with a practical element taking place at a company or at a school (EC, 2017b). The programme, implemented in 2016, can potentially have a positive impact on early school leaving rates, which peaked at 12.4% in 2016, the highest rate since 2007 (Eurostat, 2017b). In 2014, almost half of the overall student dropout was students from vocational secondary school, which represented only 21% of the overall school population (Fehérvári, 2015). The programme has also the potential to improve the employment rates of VET graduates, which are generally high (84.4% in 2016). But VET graduates who complete the vocational secondary school track (*szakközépiskola*) are more prone to unemployment than students in vocational grammar schools (*szakgimnázium*) (EC, 2017e). Also, additional EU evidence asserts that the curricula revision potentially will not improve the level of basic skills and competencies (EC, 2017f). Adult participation rates in lifelong learning increased from 3.0% in 2011 to 6.3% in 2016, but remained below the EU average of 10.8% in 2016 (Eurostat, 2017c).

To better prepare students for rapid entry into the labour market, **Italy** created new Higher Technical Institutes (*Istituti Tecnici Superiori*, ITS, 2011) for short-cycle tertiary programmes, in close collaboration with employers and existing tertiary institutions. The 2015 Good School reform introduced measures to further boost the ITS, including: 1) increasing the share of performance-related funding to 30%; 2) enabling students with

four-year upper secondary vocational qualification to access ITS after completing a foundation year; 3) increasing permeability between ITS and academic higher education; and 4) simplifying administrative procedures.

- **Progress or impact:** Although, the data on employability of ITS graduates is encouraging (with 81% employability within 12 months of graduation according to national evidence), only 8 000 students followed an ITS programme in 2014, with an increase to 8 230 in 2017. This suggests an education pathway that could be capitalised on further. The OECD found that this policy is a good example of innovation, as represented in the positive outcomes of graduates' employability, especially in dynamic business districts. A further development is the establishment of a new university track, a three-year tertiary professional pathway (*Lauree Professionalizzanti*). As of 2018, this track is offered to students alongside the ITSs (OECD, 2017g).

Since 2012, **Spain** has promoted the Dual Vocational Training Model, with entrepreneurs co-responsible not only for the design of the training offer, but also for its implementation. Since its first year of implementation in 2012/13, the number of students has increased fourfold to 24 000, and the number of interested companies has increased to more than 10 000. This training model is proving effective for transferring knowledge between educational institutions and companies and, therefore, for improving the quality of training, the innovative potential of enterprises and students' employability.

- **Progress or impact:** According to a 2016 evaluation, the outcomes of this model have so far been positive. In the first year of implementation (2012-13), 173 schools, 513 companies and 4 292 students were involved in the programme. In 2016, 17, 854 schools, more than 10 000 companies and more than five times as many students (24 000) have participated (Government of Spain, 2017). At the same time, a 2016 evaluation of the Alliance for Dual Vocational Training (a private, non-governmental organisation) identified several challenges, including: 1) increasing the scale, while ensuring quality; 2) developing knowledge and awareness about the model to avoid the emergence of divergent VET models; 3) increasing co-operation among the different stakeholders; and 4) implementing a framework to guide the development of all regional models that clarifies all the elements essential to Dual VET (Bassols and Salvans,2016).

Improving the quality of tertiary education

Box 5.3. Policy pointer: Enhancing the quality of tertiary education

Expanding access to tertiary education has changed in scope and importance, and this has resulted in a greater diversity of study programmes offered in both higher education (tertiary-type A programmes) and vocational or professional programmes delivered by polytechnics, university colleges or technological institutions (tertiary-type B programmes) (OECD, 2008; OECD, 2015; OECD, 2017a). Given such great diversity, increasing quality and relevance to the labour market are key issues, as is ensuring that tertiary education can support and guide the country's mid-term and long-term needs for economic, social and cultural development.

- **Policy priorities identified (OECD):** 1) Increasing access to and quality of tertiary education. 2) Increasing internationalisation of the higher education sector.

- **Principles of action identified (OECD):** 1) Reduce financial barriers to education, especially for disadvantaged students, and increase career guidance so students can make well-informed decisions about their orientation and career. 2) Raise education funding and quality standards, improve teaching quality, and make tertiary education more responsive to labour market needs. 3) Further encourage internationalisation of the higher education sector as a way to improve its quality.

- **Summary of policy trend identified:** Reported policies targeting tertiary education continue to focus on enhancing access to and quality of tertiary education, by supporting students from specific population groups as well as increasing internationalisation in national education systems. Higher education frameworks have been modified to improve quality, access and relevance of education for more students and meet the needs of the labour market. More recent policies reported address similar objectives, as well as quality assurance methods in higher education.

- **Examples of policies:**
    - **Access for young people with a disadvantaged background:** AUS, NZL

> – **Improving quality and access for all, labour market relevance, and internationalisation:** BEL (Fl), FIN, JPN, LVA, SVK, SVN
>
> *Note:* See Annex C, Boxes C.15, C.16 and C.17 for a summary of education systems where increasing access, quality and internationalisation of higher education are identified as relevant policy priorities, as well as selected related policies.

As noted in Chapter 4, OECD countries continue to set policy priorities on increasing access, quality and internationalisation of tertiary education. The benefits of tertiary education are manifold, including higher employment rates and wages and quicker recovery rates after economic downturns in comparison to those who did not attain tertiary education (OECD, 2017a). In 2016, the OECD average of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary education was 43%, up from 26% in 2000 (OECD, 2017a).

Tertiary education systems are facing dramatic overhauls, with a trend towards mass participation and increasingly diversified and flexible types of programmes. In this context, broad participation in tertiary education is only one side of the coin. The quality and relevance of education are equally important to ensure that tertiary graduates are effectively equipped to participate in the new economy and society at large, and that they are prepared to subsequently engage in lifelong learning activities to update their knowledge and skills as the knowledge frontier moves on.

Furthermore, in a globalised world, the internationalisation of education is increasingly important. However, on average, only 5.6% of those enrolled in tertiary programmes in OECD countries are international students (OECD, 2017a). At the doctoral level, international students make up more than 25% of all students. This has been attributed to the fact that some countries have more appealing doctoral programmes than others (OECD, 2017a).

Education policy continuity and reform across the OECD, 2008-17

Responses to the EPO Survey 2016-17 and the EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 suggest that improving the quality of higher education continues to be an area of policy action and that there is continuity in these policies. Almost half of the reported older key education policies in this area (i.e. those implemented between 2008 and 2014) can be considered as still in place. These policies, mostly targeted, focus on access, internationalisation or quality assurance to strengthen accessibility and quality of tertiary education. For example, Australia, New Zealand and Turkey have policies in place that aim to improve access to tertiary education for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds. Some education systems have reported more content-related strategies, which include implementation of tertiary education frameworks and strategy modifications to improve quality and access, labour market relevance and internationalisation, as in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Ireland, Japan, and the Slovak Republic.

In addition to these areas of policy action, education systems also reported some recently implemented key education policies (i.e. starting in 2015) on quality and access, although the scope and approaches vary across countries. Germany, Latvia, Slovenia and Sweden reported policies on quality assurance methods. Other policies focus on improving access to tertiary education for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds, as in Chile and France, or granting alternative study programmes, as in Belgium (French Community). Another important policy area also remains the internationalisation of higher education, as in Latvia and Slovenia.

Table 5.3 classifies the key education policies reported to the OECD according to their scope of intervention: 1) **Comprehensive** (overarching general strategies using various policy tools); 2) **Content** (specifically related to content knowledge); and 3) **Targeted** (focused on a specific recipient or approach). It also indicates whether policies are: 1) **S**till in place (continued since the 2015 Education Policy Outlook comparative report and/or policies implemented between 2008 and 2014); 2) **M**odified (e.g. content, scope, coverage); replacing an older policy); or 3) **R**ecent (implemented as of 2015).

Table 5.3. Policies to strengthen quality and access in tertiary education, 2008-17

Code	Comprehensive policies	Code	Content	Code	Targeted policies
	GENERAL STRATEGY		**STRUCTURE**		**ACCESS**
R	**Germany [SN]**: Treaty on the accreditation of higher education (2018)	S	**Belgium (Fl)**: Short-cycle tertiary education as part of the national qualifications process (2009)	S M	**Australia**: Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP, 2010)
S	**Ireland [SN]**: Surveys for the improvement of quality (2014, 2015, 2017)	R	**Belgium (Fr) [SN]**: Decree that implements dual vocational education in higher education for certain fields of study and programme types (2016)	R	**Chile [SN]**: New Access System for higher education
R	**Latvia**: Strategy for improving higher education system (2014-20)	S M	**Slovak Republic**: Amendment to the Higher Education Act (2013)	R	**Chile [SN]**: Tuition-free higher education (2016)
S M	**New Zealand**: Tertiary Education Strategy (2010-15 and 2014-19)			R	**France [SN]**: Programme of Assistance to the Emergency Hospitality of Scientists in Exile (PAUSE, 2017)
R	**Sweden [SN]**: National system for quality assurance of higher education (2017)			S	**Turkey [SN]**: Facilitation of Procedures for Equivalence of Diplomas for Syrian students (2013)
			GOVERNANCE		**INTERNATIONALISATION**
		R	**Latvia**: Academic Information Centre (AIC, 2015)	S	**Australia [SN]**: New Colombo Plan (2013)
				S M	**Finland:** International strategy for higher education and research (2017-25) (previously Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions, 2009-15)
				S	**Japan [SN]**: 300 000 International Students Plan (2008)
			QUALIFICATIONS	C	**Japan**: Go Global Japan (2012)
		S	**Belgium (Fl)**: A national qualifications' structure (2009-13)	S M	**Japan**: Revitalisation Strategy (2013)
		R	**Slovenia**: Amendments to the Higher Education Act (2016)	S	**Japan**: Top Global University Project (2014)
				R	**Latvia**: Internationalisation Strategy (2015)
				R	**Slovenia**: Strategy for the Internationalisation of Slovenian Higher Education (2016-20)

Notes:
1. **[SN]**: Policy information was only included as an additional policy of potential interest to other countries in the country snapshots (Chapter 7).
2. See Annex B for information on policies reported in the previous cycle for which no further details were available.
Sources: EPO Survey 2016-17 and EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 for Austria, Belgium (Fl, Fr and Dg), Italy and Sweden (see the Reader's Guide).

Improving access to tertiary education for young people with a disadvantaged backgrounds

Although access to tertiary education has increased remarkably across OECD countries in recent years, gaps remain in terms of access for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, adults are better educated today, but some are still left behind. If at least one parent achieved tertiary education, adults aged 30-59 continue to have a greater likelihood of completing tertiary education than adults of the same age group with no parent having attained tertiary education. Today, the gap in returns is increasing between highly educated workers and those with low levels of education. It is therefore essential that education policies help to bridge the gap. (OECD, 2017a)

As access possibilities are still limited for certain student population groups, Australia, Chile and New Zealand reported that they have programmes in place to aid students from disadvantaged backgrounds (see Chile country snapshot in Chapter 7).

Policy focus

In **Australia**, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP, 2010) aims to ensure that Australians from low socio-economic backgrounds who have the ability to study at university have the opportunity to do so. Through its Participation and Partnerships components, HEPPP provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low socio-economic backgrounds, as well as improving the retention and completion rates of those students. Partnerships are created with primary and secondary schools, VET institutions, universities and other stakeholders to raise the aspirations and build the capacity of disadvantaged students to participate in higher education. Funding for these two components is provided to universities based on the number of enrolled students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The third component, that National Priorities Pool, funds projects that target and support building an evidence base for future equity policies, testing new equity interventions at the national and institutional levels, and improving implementation of HEPPP at these levels (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017a; Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2018).

- **Progress or impact:** A 2016 evaluation found that HEPPP is positively influencing the quantity and rigour of higher education equity activities and policies overall. It concluded that HEPPP has provided wide-ranging support to a large number of students and institutions between 2010 and 2015. Some 2 679 projects were implemented at the 37 eligible universities. Over 310 000 students have participated in HEPPP projects, with additional students supported in schools and other institutions. At least 2 913 partner organisations participated in HEPPP outreach activities (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017).

The 2014-19 Tertiary Education Strategy in **New Zealand** and the previous 2010-15 Tertiary Education Strategy help to guide tertiary education investment decisions. Priority areas in the 2014-19 strategy remained boosting achievement of Māori and Pasifika students and strengthening research-based institutions. The 2010-15 strategy focused on increasing the number of young people moving successfully from school into tertiary education and increasing the number of people under 25 who achieve national qualifications at level 4 and above. The 2014-19 strategy covers these policy areas by focusing further on increasing education outcomes by getting at-risk young people into a career. Compared to the 2010-15 strategy, its focus has moved from improving literacy, language and numeracy skills outcomes in lower-level study to improving adult literacy and numeracy. The 2010-15 priority area of improving educational and financial

performance of providers was dropped, but there are two new policy areas: 1) delivering skills for industry so that students can smoothly transfer to the labour market; and 2) increasing international connections (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2013; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017c).

- **Progress or impact:** The 2017 evaluation and monitoring report specifies achievements and challenges on the six priority areas up to 2015. On Priority 1 (delivering skills for industry), the number of apprenticeships has increased through the New Zealand Apprenticeship scheme. In 2015, 42 000 students took part in an apprenticeship, with the government aiming to increase the number to 50 000 by 2020. Also, the overall number of NEETs aged 15-19 dropped to 7% in 2015 from 8% in 2014, while the rate of NEETs aged 20-24 stayed at 18%. Furthermore, the share of 18-year-olds who graduated with NZQF level 2 qualifications increased by 4.7% from 2013 to 2015, with a completion rate of 83.3% in 2015. Also, the share of 25-34 year-olds, with a level 4 qualification and above rose from 53.6% in 2013 to 57.1% in 2016. Overall completion rates at level 4 and above have increased for Māori and Pasifika students. But some challenges remain. For example, the overall percentage of those with a bachelor degree remains below the general population (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017c).

Tertiary education frameworks and strategy modifications: Improving quality and access for all, labour market relevance and internationalisation

Today's economies face the challenge of becoming innovation-driven, skills-based and globalised. As tertiary education aims to equip students with the skills needed for the labour market, education systems must also support students to develop transversal skills, which will help them better adapt to a diversity of contexts, as well as provide clarity for students, employers and society on what these skills are. Furthermore, while studying abroad can help students gain skills needed in the labour market, it remains difficult to establish regular interactions between local and international students so that both can benefit from mutual exchanges (OECD, 2017h).

Countries are working to address the relevance of tertiary-level qualifications in different ways. For example, the Slovak Republic has been reforming its accreditation system for tertiary education, while Belgium (the Flemish Community) has implemented a new pathway for students at the tertiary level. Latvia has implemented policies to align its higher-education system with the labour market, as well as to promote mobility activities to attract students and academic personnel from abroad. Slovenia has implemented a strategy that addresses a broad range of internationalisation aspects, such as international mobility.

Japan has put in place a policy that aims, among other things, to provide incentives to international students to study in Japan and remain in the country after graduation. Finland has also implemented measures to make Finnish higher education more attractive to international students.

Policy focus

Between 2009 and 2013, **Belgium's Flemish Community** implemented a national qualifications' structure that includes measures such as short-cycle tertiary education (*Hoger beroepsonderwijs* [Higher Vocational Education], HBO5 or SCHE EQF level 5). This new level was added to expand access to higher education and meet labour market needs. The qualifications structure will be further expanded with the systematic definition of the competences of professional qualifications to be obtained through schooling. This process is carried out by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training in co-operation with employers and representatives of the different business and industry sectors.

- **Progress or impact:** The 2011 results of the pilot project pointed out that the new level corresponds to a paradigm shift, which requires major efforts to move from adult education to a higher education programme at SCHE level 5 (Kirsch and Beernaert, 2011). In 2016, a concept note was put forward by the Flemish government on the expansion of the HBO5 (short-cycle/associate degree). In 2017, a framework on the new HBO5 education transformation (*Kader Toets Nieuwe HBO-5 Opleiding Omvorming*) was published. It aims to provide clarity on the quality guarantees, standards and criteria, which should be used as a basis to judge the quality of converted HBO-5 programmes. More specifically, the framework includes all the criteria for a HBO-5 decree: educational content and process, material facilities, quality of staff and internal quality assurance (NVAO, 2017).

In recent years, **Finland** has been working on strategies for internationalisation to further improve its position in the global market for higher education. The goals outlined in the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland (2009-15) include increasing the quality and attractiveness of institutions. Targets include almost doubling the number of non-Finnish students enrolled in higher education over the period of the plan (from 3.5% in 2007 to 7% by 2015), and increasing mobility of teachers and researchers (Ministry of Education, 2009). The new International Strategy for Higher Education and Research (2017-25), published in 2017, aims to strengthen the quality, visibility and attractiveness of Finnish higher education and research by introducing new measures, such as a programme to enhance international interest in Finnish research, and facilitating access to education and employment in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, 2018).

- **Progress or impact:** According to evidence from the Finnish National Agency for Education, total numbers of international degree students have been increasing annually, from 10 066 in 2006 to 21 061 in 2016, and the target of a 7% overall share of international students in higher education degree programmes was achieved in 2016.

Japan has been undertaking different efforts for the internationalisation of its Higher Education sector. In 2014, the Government of Japan issued the Report by the Commission on Improving Living Environment for International Students, with the target of having 300 000 international students in Japan. The Revitalisation Strategy, implemented in 2013 and revised in 2015, aims to increase the numbers of overseas students in Japan and Japanese students studying abroad. Based on these reports and strategic plans, the government is providing support to international students to find accommodation, communicate with Japanese students and find employment after graduation. It is also increasing scholarships to make studying in Japan more attractive. The government also targeted worldwide strategic priority regions from which to attract promising international students. The Go Global Japan programme (2012) and the Top Global University Project (2014) also provided priority support and financial assistance to universities that are making thorough efforts to encourage internationalisation.

- **Progress or impact:** From 2016 to 2017, the number of international students increased by 11.6% to 267 042 (JASSO, 2017).

Latvia is working on its higher education system to promote conformity with labour market needs (including STEM) and employability of students. This is primarily being done by modernising the technical base of higher education institutions and making more effective use of resources. Financial support is provided by EU funds from 2014 to 2020 for the promotion of appropriate and modern study environments for STEM subjects and the development of joint doctoral study programmes and study programmes in the EU languages. The Latvian Government also recognises the importance of reducing the fragmentation of study programmes, promoting the consolidation of resources, and developing joint study programmes and strategic specialisation of higher education institutions.

- **Progress or impact:** In order to introduce the new competence-based education standard, a total of five computer science programme pilot projects were offered to schools for trial during the 2015/16 school year, and 157 schools participated. The pilot project on computer science was successful for all participating schools during the first academic year and stimulated significant interest among pupils and teachers. The launch and implementation of the computer science education programme are supported both financially and in terms of organisation by Foundation IT Education Fund, with the international company Accenture (Latvian branch). Within this project, a portal, Start(it), was created that provides learning and methodological material for each class that can be used by any education institution. The computer science programme will be implemented in all schools during the 2018/19 school year (Government of Latvia, 2017).

In 2015, to further strengthen the quality assurance of the higher education system, **Latvia** passed a regulation to transfer the function of accreditation and licensing to the Academic Information Centre (AIC)*,* which has established the Quality Agency for Higher Education to carry out these functions in Latvia. The AIC ensures licensing and accreditation of study programmes and monitoring and evaluation of their quality (EC, 2017c). The Centre intends to be included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education by 2018, before the next large accreditation round scheduled for 2019 (EC, 2016b). The overall budget was set at EUR 1.5 million for capacity building with a contribution of EUR 1.27 million from the European Structural and Investment Funds (Government of Latvia, 2015).

- **Progress or impact:** This is part of the World Bank's evaluation of internal governance, funding systems and human resources policies of higher education institutions. The World Bank will make recommendations for the design of structural fund programmes, which then may allow for more qualitative tertiary education in the future. The World Bank study is to be completed in April 2018 (EC, 2017g).

As part of its Internationalisation Strategy (2015), **Latvia** aims to attract academic personnel from abroad. For example, it plans to develop joint programmes in the EU languages and joint doctoral programmes. The 2015 Erasmus+ activity for International mobility of students and personnel includes mobility activities of 3-12 months for students, and from five days to two months for academic and general personnel of higher-education institutions. To improve visibility and promote Latvian higher education abroad, the government has set up websites (www.studyinlatvia.eu and www.studyinlatvia.lv), and Latvia is represented at different venues abroad designed to attract potential foreign students.

- **Progress or impact:** In 2016/17, 8 137 foreign students were in Latvia, and 1 738 Latvian students participated in exchange programmes. Twelve joint programmes were developed with higher education institutions from abroad, and the number of foreign academic personnel working in Latvia increased to 244. EC evidence indicates that in 2016, the share of foreign-born graduates of tertiary education (62.4%) was much higher than the share of native-born graduates, which was (42%), compared to the EU averages of 35.3% of foreign-born graduates of tertiary education and 39.9% of native-born graduates) (EC, 2017c).

A reform is expected to enter into force in 2018 to provide greater flexibility to the higher education system in the **Slovak Republic**. The 2013 amendment to the Higher Education Act resulted in stricter rules for reaccreditation of most universities within the "complex accreditation" process. It also took into account internal systems of quality control. Complex accreditation is a process under which, every six years, the Accreditation Commission reviews and evaluates education and research and development activities of individual universities, along with corresponding personal, material and technical information. The intention of the next reform is to simplify the accreditation process, opening it up to applicants from abroad or to those who have been professionally active in the industry segment relevant to the field of study, and to reinforce the staff and competence of the Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is proposed to be awarded based on fields of study rather than programmes of study. Academic titles will be cancelled, and only the corresponding functional positions retained (OECD, 2015).

- **Progress or impact:** In 2017, reforms to the Accreditation Committee were put forward: to fulfil international standards; to become a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); and to increase the transparency and independence of accreditation (granting accreditation to study fields rather than study programmes) (EC, 2016c; EC, 2017h). According to the European Commission, aiding the Commission to become a member of the ENQA could help to improve the work of the Commission (EC, 2015c). It was found that, although there is consensus on the need to fulfil European guidelines on accreditation, stakeholders have divergent perspectives on how to approach it. The Higher Education Council and the Rectors Conference have expressed dissatisfaction with the legislative proposal (EC, 2017h).

In 2016, **Slovenia** adopted the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Slovenian Higher Education (2016-20) with five key areas: international mobility; quality international co-operation in research and development; promotion of intercultural competences; targeting priority regions and countries; and promotion, support and monitoring of implementation of the Strategy.

- **Progress or impact:** According to government information, the implementation action plan covers 25 goals and over 50 measures, with a total budget of EUR 57 million, of which EUR 18 million is dedicated to international co-operation in research and development. An example of the measures is the Study in Slovenia webpage (www.studyinslovenia.si), which aims to promote Slovenia as a study destination.

Improving student transitions across education pathways and the labour market

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Box 5.4. Policy pointer: Supporting transitions across education pathways and the labour market

Successful transition of students from education into the labour market can be achieved by addressing the length and quality of schooling, labour market conditions, the economic environment and culture (OECD, 2017a). Countries are increasingly confronted with changes in skills needs that, if left unaddressed, can leave students facing skills mismatch and employment shortages (OECD, 2016a). Education systems therefore need to design systems that establish links with the labour market to equip students with relevant skills demanded by employers and society (OECD, 2017a).

- **Policy priorities identified (OECD):** 1) Reducing high levels of skills mismatch. 2) Facilitating school-to-work transition for students. 3) Decreasing levels of youth unemployment and NEETs.

- **Principles of action identified (OECD):** 1) Make vocational education and training more relevant to labour market needs by building stronger links between employers and education providers and ensuring and supporting possibilities for lifelong learning. 2) Ensure more employer engagement and work-based training to better bridge the transition from education to the labour market, and provide students with more information about education pathways and labour market needs. 3) Facilitate the transition from education to work, give students more orientation guidance and favour policies that encourage students to go back to school.

- **Summary of policy trend identified:** There has been stability in terms of the topics addressed by the policies still in place and those more recently implemented. Policies to improve transitions have intended to strengthen the links between education qualifications and the labour market, foster the connection of employers with job seekers, implement funding techniques to help individuals gain better access to training, reintegrate NEETs into the labour market, and generally increase co-operation and co-ordination between tertiary education and stakeholders. More recent policies focus on similar policy areas.

- **Examples of policies:**

   - **Establishing new possibilities for training and reactivating the skills of adults:** AUS, FIN, IRL, ITA, LVA, NZL, SVN

   - **Connecting employers with job seekers:** CAN, IRL, SVN

Note: See Annex C, Boxes C.18, C.19 and C.20 for a summary of education systems where addressing skills mismatch, decreasing levels of youth unemployment and NEETs and improving transitions to the labour market are identified as relevant policy priorities, as well as selected related policies.

Evidence shows that some factors that influence student success in the transition from education into the labour market are the length and quality of schooling, labour market conditions, the economic environment and culture (OECD, 2017a).

Today, countries are faced with considerable changes in skills needs, which can evolve into skills mismatch and shortages if left unaddressed (OECD, 2016a). As discussed in Chapter 4, international evidence and countries' responses on policy priorities show the importance of addressing skills mismatch to facilitate transitions. Among the participating countries in the 2016 OECD Survey of Adult Skills (OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), the OECD average on field-of-study mismatch was 40%, while qualification mismatch was below 40% and literacy mismatch was below 20% (OECD, 2016b). In another OECD study in 29 countries in 2016, the majority of employers reported that they were unable to find workers with the skill sets needed by their companies (OECD, 2016a). At the same time, a considerable share of graduates in these countries reported having difficulties finding jobs that fit their qualifications (OECD, 2016c). Education systems therefore need to design systems that equip students with the skills demanded by the labour market and society (OECD, 2017b).

As previously discussed, policies on student dropout, improving VET education and enhancing tertiary education are also related to improving transitions. However, the focus of this section is on policies aimed at facilitating transitions by offering incentives to pursue further education, and engaging with relevant stakeholders by connecting employers with the potential job seekers.

Education policy continuity and reform across the OECD, 2008-17

Responses to the EPO Survey 2016-17 and the EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 demonstrate that improving student transitions across education pathways and the labour market also continue to be an area of policy action for many OECD countries, with comprehensive policies reported across the period analysed. Two-thirds of the reported key education policies are still in place in the participating countries. Overall, the policies aim to increase engagement between students, employers and other stakeholders, improve curriculum and standards to reflect student and labour market needs, and emphasise careers in technical and innovative sectors.

Older key education policies (i.e. those implemented between 2008 and 2014) reported as still in place aim to strengthen links between education qualifications and the labour market, as in Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Korea and New Zealand. In the same way, Canada, Ireland and Finland are also working to strengthen the connection of employers with job seekers. Australia has implemented funding techniques to help individuals gain better access to training. Other policies focus on the reintegration of NEETs into the labour market, as in Italy, Latvia, Portugal and Slovenia. Another policy focus is increasing co-operation and co-ordination between tertiary education and stakeholders, as in Ireland and Slovenia. Austria has a policy in place to keep students in the system, while also preparing them for higher education.

Other participating OECD education systems reported some recently implemented key education policies (i.e. starting in 2015) that address the establishment of better links between educational levels and the labour market, as in Belgium (French Community), Canada, Finland and France. The French Community in Belgium also allocated funding to support projects related to both professional teaching skills and students transitioning into the labour market. Other policies focus on updating qualifications to provide education orientation to adults to allow for lifelong learning, as in Austria, Latvia and Portugal, or transitions from lower to upper secondary education, such as in Turkey.

Table 5.4 classifies the key education policies reported to the OECD according to their scope of intervention: 1) **Comprehensive** (overarching general strategies using various policy tools); 2) **Content** (specifically related to content knowledge); and 3) **Targeted** (focused on a specific recipient or approach). It also indicates whether policies are: 1) **S**till in place (continued since the 2015 Education Policy Outlook comparative report and/or policies implemented between 2008 and 2014); 2) **M**odified (e.g. content, scope, coverage); replacing an older policy); or 3) **R**ecent (implemented as of 2015).

Table 5.4. Policies to improve transitions between education and the labour market, 2008-17

Code	Comprehensive policies	Code	Comprehensive policies	Code	Comprehensive policies
	GENERAL STRATEGY		**YOUTH GUARANTEE**		**QUALIFICATIONS**
S	**Australia**: National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (2012-17)	S	**Finland**: Youth Guarantee (2013)	S	**Austria [SN]**: New Upper Level Scheme (2012)
S	**Belgium (FI) [SN]**: An Agreement between the Flemish Government and the Social Partners on Professional Careers (2012)	S M	**Italy**: Youth Guarantee (2014)	R	**Austria [SN]**: Federal Act on the National Qualifications Framework (2016)
R	**Canada [SN]**: Increase employer engagement for improved job opportunities and outcomes for apprentices (2016)	S M	**Latvia**: Youth Guarantee (2013)	R	**France [SN]**: Reforms of upper secondary education terminal examination in general and technological tracks and the transformation of upper secondary education (2018)
S	**Germany [SN]**: Education Offensive in the Digital Agenda (2014-17)	S	**New Zealand**: Youth Guarantee (2010)	S	**Korea [SN]**: The National Competency Standards (2013)
S	**Iceland [SN]**: Adult Education Act (2010)	S M	**Portugal [SN]**: Youth Guarantee (2013, 2016- 20)	R	**Portugal [SN]**: The Passport Qualifica (2016)
S	**Ireland**: Springboard programme (2011)	S M	**Slovenia**: Youth Guarantee (2014)	R	**Turkey [SN]**: New system for transitioning to upper secondary education (2017/18)
S M	**Ireland**: Action Plan for Jobs (2012)				**ACCESS AND LABOUR MARKET RELEVANCE**
S	**Ireland**: Regional clusters (2014)			R	**Belgium (Fr) [SN]**: Allocation of funds to projects aiming to equip young people with relevant skills and support their transition into the labour market (2015)
R	**Latvia [SN]**: Action Plan for 2016-20 Development of Adult Education Provision and its Governance Model			R	**Belgium (Fr) [SN]**: Decree on higher education defined an alternative pathway for the acquisition of higher education qualifications in specific areas leading to jobs where there are skills shortages (2016)
				S	**Canada**: Job Bank website (2014)
				R	**Finland [SN]**: 19 measures to promote the well-being of children and young people, prevent exclusion and reduce the number of NEET youths (part of the Government Action Plan 2017-19)
				S	**Slovenia**: Creative Path to Practical Knowledge (2007-13, 2014-20)

Notes:

1. **[SN]**: Policy information was only included as an additional policy of potential interest to other countries in the country snapshots (Chapter 7).

2. See Annex B for information on policies reported in the previous cycle for which no further details were available.

Sources: EPO Survey 2016-17 and EPO Country Profiles published in 2017 for Austria, Belgium (Fl, Fr and Dg), Italy and Sweden (see the Reader's Guide).

Establishing new possibilities for training and reactivating the skills of adults

Some OECD education systems have implemented comprehensive policies to train people with the skills needed in the labour market, as in Ireland, and to align overall qualifications to the labour market, reduce duplication and facilitate transfers between programmes, as in New Zealand. Other programmes aim to advance access to training and participation in the labour market, as in Australia, Finland, Italy, Latvia and Slovenia. The Youth Guarantee has also been implemented as a policy across EU countries (based on a commitment of EU countries in 2013) in order to provide the population under age 25 with better opportunities for employment, continued education, apprenticeships and traineeships within the first four months after leaving formal education or becoming unemployed (EC, 2018).

Policy focus

Australia's National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (NP, 2012-17) aimed to improve access to training and participation in the labour market. The NP outlined the targets and structures of intergovernmental VET funding and reform, from 2012-13 to 2016-17 (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2015). Under the NP, all jurisdictions were required to provide access to training subsidised by the government at Australian Qualifications Framework level 3 to unqualified working Australians of any age. All jurisdictions were also required to support the expansion of the Commonwealth's income-contingent loan policy, which helps to reduce tuition costs. The Australian Government provided funding to state and territory government training systems through funding associated with this agreement. The NP expired in June 2017, and discussions are underway with the states and territories on a new National Partnership Agreement for the Skilling Australians Fund (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017b).

- **Progress or impact:** Performance reporting on the NP states that it was on track in 2016 (PM&C, 2017). The 2015 Review of the NP identified results, such as increased accessibility and choice, compared to the baseline years of 2008-09, while course numbers declined (the improvements seem partly due to the establishment of entitlements in every state and territory). Positive developments were also identified in transparency actions, although it was found that further data has to be collected in future to achieve significant advantages. At the same time, some difficulties were encountered in assuring quality, as the number of training sessions increased. In regard to VET training outcomes, the national target of 375 000 completions was already surpassed in 2013. Recommendations for reforms in training systems include implementation based on industry and student demand (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2015).

Finland's Youth Guarantee (2013) aims to help young people complete post-basic qualifications and find employment. The guarantee provides everyone under age 25 and recent graduates under age 30 a job, a traineeship, a study place, a workshop or a labour market placement within three months of becoming unemployed. Finland presented the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan in 2014. A key feature was the rollout across the country, starting in 2015, of One-Stop Guidance centres for young people, which provide all relevant assistance in one location (EC, 2017i).

- **Progress or impact:** According to EC evidence, results of monitoring show that the scheme reached 71.2% of all NEETs under age 25 in 2015, an improvement of more than 4 percentage points over 2014 (67.1%). While the share of NEETS in Finland increased between 2013 and 2015, there was a decrease in the rate of inactive NEETs, which may have been as a result of engagement with the Youth Guarantee process. Finland's remaining challenges include ensuring stable funding and further improving the skills and employability of young people (EC, 2017i). In 2016, NEET rates decreased by more than 1 percentage point over 2015 levels (13.2% in 2016 compared to 14.3% in 2015).

Since 2011, the Springboard Programme in **Ireland** has funded free part-time courses in higher education for unemployed individuals in areas with labour market skills shortages.

As of the academic year 2017-18, homemakers and employed people can also participate in the programme (HEA and Department of Education and Skills, 2017). Since 2015, the programme also includes skills conversion courses in information and communication technology (ICT), as well as Springboard courses under the umbrella of Springboard+ (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). The ICT Conversion Courses were introduced under the joint Government-Industry ICT Action Plans. The Action Plans, published in 2012 and 2014, contain a range of measures to build the domestic supply of ICT graduates, including the roll out of a full-time intensive ICT skills conversion programme designed and delivered in partnership with industry. Since 2016, the ICT skills conversion programme is available on a part-time basis, enabling those in employment to upskill or reskill in this area. In addition, employed people who wish to upskill or reskill in the Biopharma/Med-tech sector, as well as homemakers, are eligible to apply to participate in Springboard+ 2017. Further expansion to allow all those in employment to access Springboard courses on a free or heavily subsidised basis is planned under Springboard+ 2018.

- **Progress or impact:** An evaluation of the Springboard+ programme of 2011-16, states that since 2011 the average participation rate per year was 6 129, with 88% of the available places taken. Springboard+ 2016 provided an additional 5 825 places, and 6 471 places were provided under Springboard+ 2017. From 2011 to 2014, the completion rate of Springboard+ courses was 72%. A significant proportion of the 28% who did not complete courses did so due to taking up employment. The outcomes of 2011-14 show that of the 76% reported outcomes of participants 3-6 months after graduation, 53% were in employment, 19% pursued further study and 28% were looking for work. The highest employment rates were found among participants of the ICT skills conversion classes of 2013 (78%) and 2014 (73%) (HEA, 2016a). The number of graduates from ICT-related programmes at levels 8 to 10 increased from 2 362 in 2012 to 3 341 in 2014, as reported in the 2nd System Performance Report for Higher Education. Also, through Springboard+ and ICT Conversion Courses, more than 3 500 graduates achieved ICT qualifications at levels 6 to 9 in 2014 and 2015 (HEA, 2016b).

As part of the Youth Guarantee initiative (*Garanzia giovani*, 2014), which aims to provide a good quality offer of employment, education or training to young people who are not in employment or education, **Italy** is aiming to re-engage 15-18 year-olds into education and training, with a focus on those who have left school without qualifications, by consolidating their basic knowledge and fostering their subsequent integration into the labour market. Approximately EUR 1.5 billion has been allocated for this objective (OECD, 2017g) to further stimulate incentives for labour market activation of youth in Italy. This is in addition to social insurance exemptions already in place for employers to hire young people who meet certain criteria, such as those participating in the Youth Guarantee, those from certain regions that are lagging behind, or those who have completed compulsory internship periods and work-based learning in upper secondary education (OECD, 2017f). Starting in 2018, high tax incentives will be granted to private employers to enhance employment of youth on permanent contracts (EC, 2017b).

- **Progress or impact:** Recent evidence suggests that the Youth Guarantee has triggered positive developments, such as standardisation and more individualised tailoring of many services, and has lowered barriers to companies employing young people. Registration and take-up of available training, employment opportunities and other active employment policies has increased from 900 000 young people registered by the end of 2015 to 1 205 000 in 2017. By 2017, 982 000 of those registered in the programme had received an offer. According to OECD evidence, in 2017, despite recent improvements to the apprenticeship system, no specific criteria existed to evaluate the quality of apprenticeship training offered by companies (OECD, 2017g). The 2017 OECD report further found that these issues could be addressed through stronger engagement and collaboration with employers, and also that, although better co-ordination had improved implementation at the regional level, regional differences persisted, and information was not always available on the number and quality of measures delivered at the local level (OECD, 2017g). Aside from the challenges identified then, the number of measures delivered at local level stabilised around the national average of 81.5%. (ANPAL, 2017; EC, 2017j; OECD, 2017g)

In 2013, **Latvia** began participating in the Youth Guarantee to provide free training opportunities in more than 90 different careers to young people until 2018. Since 2014, it has implemented various initiatives to target young people, particularly NEETs age 15-24. Youth registered with the State Employment Agency (SEA) and working with a counsellor or another specialist can learn more about their strengths and relevant employment opportunities based on their individual profiles. A State Education Development Agency (SEDA) project offers short vocational education programmes (1-1.5 years) that give young people the opportunity to acquire qualifications in 68 professions. KNOW and DO, a project of the Agency for International Programmes for Youth 2014 aims to develop the skills of socially at-risk young people and to facilitate their involvement in education and/or vocational learning, Youth Guarantee activities, active employment, or preventive unemployment reduction measures provided by SEDA or in non-governmental organisations or youth centres. The total 2014-18 total funding amounts to EUR 72.9 million, primarily financed by the ESF and the Youth Employment Initiative. Funding for the Youth Employment Initiative will continue until the end of 2018 (Government of Latvia, 2017).

- **Progress or impact:** In its most recent progress report submitted to the EC, Latvia reported that from 2014 to 2016, all youths aged 15-29 that obtained registered unemployed status from the SEA in Latvia (111 000) received support as a part of the Youth Guarantee programme. During the same period, 92 400 youths were engaged in the employment-seeking support measures within the Youth Guarantee programme, and 65 000 youths found employment (58% of all the unemployed youths registered with the SEA). Also, between 2014 and 2016, of all the participants in the Youth Guarantee programme aged 15-24 (60 890), 27% (14 932) found employment within the first four months from the date they received unemployment status or submitted application to Youth Guarantee, and 20% (12 429) started training (Government of Latvia, 2017). EC evidence also shows positive results attributed to this: the share of young NEETs decreased significantly (to 13.8% in 2017, below the EU average of 14.7%) (Eurostat, 2018). The Latvian Government acknowledges, however, that challenges persist. The programme has been slow to start up, and its visibility across the target group remains low. The government intends to tackle these challenges by reaching out to young NEETs who are not registered at the public employment service. Support measures are also being provided to imprisoned youth, allowing them to acquire skills and competences that are necessary for successful employment.

New Zealand's Youth Guarantee (2010) also focuses on improving transitions. Overall, it includes a suite of initiatives developed and progressively implemented since 2010, mainly to provide a wider range of learning opportunities, better use of the education network and clearer pathways from school to work and further study. Some specific programmes target students who are at risk of not achieving in school or making poor transitions after leaving school or those interested in VET.

- **Progress or impact:** The overall participation rate of 18-year-olds in Youth Guarantee programmes was 16.3% in 2014. Of this, 12.1% were in fee-free places and 4.9% were in secondary-tertiary programmes. From 2011 to 2014, the overall participation rate increased by 5.3% (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2016). As can be seen in the policy sections below regarding VET and tertiary education, the different Youth Guarantee programmes aid in the transition from education to the labour market.

In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities set up the Youth Guarantee (YG, 2014) to guarantee a job, formal education or a training opportunity to any 15-29 year-old registering in Slovenia's Employment service. Slovenia has allocated EUR 87.7 million for the YG programme for 2014-15 and plans to allocate EUR 300 million for 2016-20. The target population comprises those who are currently unemployed, as well as the 37 000 people in that age range who register annually for this service. In 2016, Slovenia adopted a second Youth Guarantee Action Plan for the period 2016-20. It includes new measures to combat age segmentation in the labour market, based on the proposal of youth representatives (e.g. information and guidance activities and strengthening the capacities of supervisory authorities). In addition to fast activation,

another new element is a special focus on long-term unemployed youth. Moreover, the lifelong career orientation has been strengthened within the Public Employment Services (PES), not only for those registered as unemployed, but also in primary and secondary schools, with the aim of offering early career guidance.

● **Progress or impact:** A European Commission study found that youth unemployment decreased the most when compared to other age groups in Slovenia. Thanks to the Youth Guarantee programme, outflows from unemployment to employment increased. Compared to those who did not participate in this programme, participants were found to receive 40% more referrals for job vacancies, ten times more meetings with employers and 70% more involvement in training (EC, 2017k). The 2016 Youth Guarantee Action Plan (2016-20) was adopted based on an update of the 2013 PES analysis, Youth on the labour market 2015. In co-operation with the working group for monitoring, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities prepared a report on the results of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan for 2014-15 (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2018).

Connecting employers with job seekers

OECD education systems have taken multiple measures to improve the connection between employers and job seekers, such as establishing job bank partnerships, as in Canada. Similarly, programmes have been put in place in Ireland to create jobs by improving connections with employers and, more specifically, reviewing the current apprenticeship training model. An additional policy in Ireland aims to facilitate co-operation between higher education and relevant stakeholders. Slovenia implemented an initiative that allows students to engage in practical challenges in work environments.

Policy focus

The Job Bank website in **Canada** replaced "Working in Canada" in 2014. It is the country's national online employment service to connect employers with job seekers. Through partnerships with many of the largest third-party job boards, the Job Bank aims to post a consolidated view of available jobs searchable by occupation, location and other factors. It also permits job seekers to register their skills and employers to register their requirements. This enables automated matching and notification. The site also features a comprehensive section on the labour market that combines information from over 30 sources, where users can explore careers by learning about trends in the labour market, as well as details on specific occupations. Information available includes wages, outlooks, skills, training, licensing and certification requirements, and training and education options.

● **Progress or impact:** In October 2017, the Job Bank website listed more than 95 000 jobs (Government of Canada, 2017b).

Ireland's Action Plan for Jobs (APJ), introduced in 2012, is the government's annual plan to rebuild the economy and create jobs. With over 270 actions by 15 government departments and 36 state agencies, it presents a number of measures to strengthen education and its links to the labour market, including a review of the apprenticeship training model initiated in 2012. This plan is ongoing, with updates published annually, as well as quarterly progress reports. The latest APJ, introduced in 2017, focuses on seven strategic goals covering regional development, boosting innovation and productivity, and attracting high-quality talent to the Irish labour market, with the aim of having up to 45 000 additional people at work in Ireland by the end of 2017 (Irish Department of Business, Enterprises and Innovation, 2017a).

● **Progress or impact:** In 2014, the OECD published a preliminary review of the APJ. By then, it was found that both the APJ target of 100 000 new jobs by 2016 and the long-term goal of 2.1 million people employed by

2020 were within reach (OECD, 2014c). The employment rate has been increasing in Ireland. Over 2 800 actions were implemented during the previous APJ of 2012-16. Also, Ireland created more than 200 000 jobs from 2012 to 2017. The 2017 report of the Monitoring Committee stated that 81% of all projects slated to be completed in the first quarter of 2017 were accomplished (Irish Department of Business, Enterprises and Innovation, 2017b).

In 2012, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in **Ireland** proposed regional clusters of higher education institutions to increase collaboration and co-ordination between higher education institutions and engagement with stakeholders, with implementation beginning from 2014. The first priorities of this strategy are improved academic planning and student pathways. Ireland implemented nine regional Skills Fora to increase engagement and improve matching between skills needs and education provisions. These involve further education and training and higher education providers, as well as other government departments and agencies and employer representatives (HEA, 2016b).

- **Progress or impact:** The Higher Education System Performance 2014-2016 report points out that progress has been made in academic and student pathways, with variations in performance between the different clusters of institutions in the country. In 2015, the HEA engaged in consultation with the institutions to discuss future steps. (HEA, 2016b).

In **Slovenia**, the Creative Path to Practical Knowledge initiative was carried out with the support of the European Social Fund from 2007 to 2013. It encouraged students to become team members in small interdisciplinary research projects to develop creative and innovative solutions to practical challenges in the corporate sector. Mentors from the education and corporate sectors offered support to each team during implementation of the projects. The teams carried out projects in various working environments, such as medical and chemical laboratories, classrooms and production facilities. By directly participating in the work process, students gained specific professional and generic experience, as well as social competences, which are important for employability.

- **Progress or impact:** From 2013 to 2015, more than 3 400 students and over 500 organisations participated in this programme. Co-operation between education institutions and employers improved, as did students' employability. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport will invest an additional EUR 11.7 million in a similar programme and EUR 7.3 million to further strengthen co-operation between higher education institutions and local communities from 2014 to 2020.

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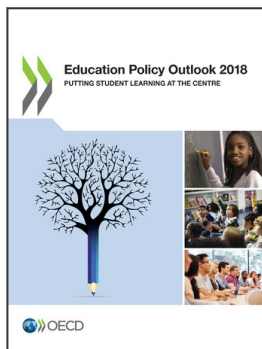
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