Chapter 1
The VET System, Its Subsystems and Their Links with the Labour Market: Strengths, Weaknesses and Challenges of VET in Spain

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Abstract This chapter provides the reader with the historical and political background to understand the rest of the book, and it also focuses on the key issues affecting VET in Spain in recent times while assessing the quality of VET rather positively. I explain the parallel development of three different subsystems and their approaches and efforts to reintegrate them. I also show conflicts over control upon VET governance and the role of national and regional governments as well as employers and union representatives in the design of qualifications. Transitions between education and employment, careers guidance and the connections of VET to social policies are also addressed.

Keywords Educational policy · History of education · Education-work relations · Transitions · Governance

1.1 Introduction

This book is about vocational education and, to a lesser extent, vocational training in Spain. By doing so, it includes the most recent research conducted on VET by Spanish scholars. The country is officially the Kingdom of Spain, a parliamentary constitutional monarchy since 1978, after 40 years of a Dictatorship that followed a coup d'état which, on its turn, finished a Republic which lasted from 1931 to 1939, the last 3 years of which in the middle of a civil war after that *coup*. Nowadays, there

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are approximately 45 million inhabitants in the country, of which more than 22 million form the active population, almost 19 million being employed and more than 3.5 million unemployed.

In 1986 Spain joined the European Union (at the time still known as the European Communities), which was part of the political effort of modernization, affecting all domains of everyday life, from family to religion or from economy to education. This political change implied not only a change in terms of internationalization at a time when globalization was starting to become a dominant feature of societies, but was also part of a huge internal development that meant a move out of a highly centralized power (mandated in each of the 50 provinces) into a decentralized regional division, where 17 regions named autonomous communities (and two autonomous cities, those of Ceuta and Melilla, both located in Northern Africa) have achieved political autonomy in most areas of legislation, as well. Three of these regions (the Basque country, Navarra and Cataluña) claim a historical legitimation for their autonomy. This is remarkable, for Vocational Education is highly respected and promoted in all three of them.

The changes referred above can be summarized in the following axis around which VET developments search for a stable position:

First, the struggles over education between conservative and social democrat ideas, that have also had VET in its scope, where the technical and professional dimensions of VET sometimes compete with the fostering of a citizenship where the notion of work is at its core. Furthermore, conservatives and social democrats have different expectations about the future direction of the productive model and the industrial development in the country. These disputes have an impact upon VET, though the model as a whole has remained largely untouched since the consensus agreed around the turn of the century.

Second, there is a never-ending debate between centralization of and decentralization of education, and vocational education is also part of it. The regions claim their right to have a major say in designing their own curricula, while the Spanish Government has to cover for nationwide recognition and the setting of minimum common standards. Even those regions that enjoy most decentralized powers, like Catalonia and the Basque country, rely upon statewide curricula to implement their own VET policies.

Third, the balance between the Department of Education and the social actors, unions and employers. VET has reached far more consensus than collective bargaining along the country, and it has brought more concertation than conflict, except in the case of CVET, as explained in Chap. 3.

Fourth, it is relevant to understand that formal vocational education in Spain started developing right after the first oil crisis, in 1973, whose effects merged with the political crisis through which the country shifted from a dictatorship in 1975 to a democracy in 1977. It was then that an agreement was reached to allow the birth of this democracy at a time of cyclical financial crisis – the so-called *Pactos de la Moncloa*, an overall agreement between employers and unions and all political parties. This agreement linked economic progress to political advancement, and it has marked the direction of the Spanish democracy along the past 40 years.

Vocational Education, as part of the education system, is ruled by a central legislation, as the qualifications it awards have a nation-wide recognition and the regula-

tions behind them apply all over the country. Almost all regions, and not only the three mentioned above, have partial control over the mandated curriculum, with less than two thirds being ruled by the Central Government. This is the case for primary, secondary and the academic post-16 education. However, when it comes to vocational education, most regions rely upon the Department of Education of the Spanish Government. It takes a huge effort to design the curricula for a vocational offer which is much larger than that of academic education: while there are only four academic post-16 choices, the offer of vocational ones consists of over 150 different qualifications organized around 26 different occupational areas.[1] The amount of students enrolled in each vocational degree is also much smaller than the enrolment in post-compulsory academic choices. Therefore regions do not make the effort to produce their own vocational curricula.

As shown in Chap. 2, the current vocational education system was firmly established in 1990 (LOGSE), evolving from the foundations set in 1970 (LGE), which had made a school-based system out of it. Three main features changed in 1990: first, the upgrading of the entry requirements, as vocational education became an equal option to the post-16 academic pathway, hence ceasing to play the role of compensatory education. Second, the introduction of a compulsory module of work placements (FCT) that was to be performed in real companies by students, not apprentices. Third, the decentralization of the system, which allowed for regional adaptations, impulses and reforms that have been as varied as the regions.

1.2 Three Parallel VET Subsystems Struggling Towards Mutual Recognition

In the previous paragraph, I have referred to formal vocational education, the one which is part of the education system, delivered in vocational schools, taught by teachers and which will be addressed in most chapters in this book. The late development of vocational education in the country can be explained by several factors: first, the slow process of industrialization of the country, whose economy strongly relied upon agriculture until the first third of the twentieth century; second, the late start of the population growth by the end of the nineteenth century; and, third, the civil war in the 1930s and the protectionism and isolationism that followed it. As a result of this, Spanish vocational education often lacks the reference to its 'technical' feature which is widespread in other countries.

Access to formal vocational education between 1970 and 1990 demanded no GCSE (GESO). Since 1990, however, access requirements were upgraded and as demanding as access to the Baccalaureate, the academic post-compulsory choice. Such a restriction contributed to the improvement of the quality and prestige of VET, as well as to its further specialization. Formal VET is divided into two levels,

[1] http://todofp.es/dam/jcr:7d9bb80f-db71-47df-a82d-b2e15489c6d5/configuracion-actual-del-catalogo-de-titulos-de-formacion-profesional-logos-pdf.pdf

Table 1.1 Own elaboration, upon data from Riviére et al. (1988), MEC (2006) and MECD (2016)

	School year				
Students[a]	1975/1976	1985/1986	1995/1996	2005/2006	2015/2016
VET	305,254	738,340	722,723	498,679	767,528
Baccalaureate	818,393	1,238,874	1,310,341	640,975	694,224

[a]In school years 1975/1976 and 1985/1996, VET lasted 2 + 3 years and the baccalaureate 3 + 1 years. After the reform in the 1990s, VET lasts between 1 and 2 years (according to lower or higher level of qualification), while the baccalaureate lasts 2 years. However, in school year 1995/1996, both systems still coexisted

as explained in Chap. 2, the second of which gives access to University studies. Such access has been legally possible since 1990, but it became a real option after the reform was introduced in 2011, which allowed direct access for students who had finished their CFGS. The consequence of this has been a change in the profile in many University degrees, who now welcome many VET graduates.

In the past decades, vocational education has increased its offer, but it has only been recently that a similar amount of youth attends the vocational pathway as the academic one at the post-compulsory level. Data on enrolment in post-compulsory[2] education are shown in Table 1.1.

Such a development also has several reasons: the first one, families, young people and society as a whole held the hope in the 1970s that education would be academic and not vocational, with work being a better alternative to vocational education, because of its lack of tradition. Such a belief has changed as the prestige of VET has increased along these decades, starting 1984 with the choice for VET students to enjoy work placements in companies. Second, the school system had an academic orientation and both infrastructures as well as teachers were easier (and cheaper in terms of resources) to manage by the educational administration in the academic pathways. Third, VET was understood in the 1970s as a second chance for those who had failed in compulsory education. The voluntary work placements of VET students in their fifth year after 1984 (through the so-called alternance training scheme) together with the increased level in the entry requirements improved the esteem of VET in society, and it came accompanied by the effort taken by the Department of Education to increase the VET offer as well as to improve its specialization (Marhuenda 1994). Third, demographic development has also had a strong impact, after the baby-boom generation of the 1960s and early 1970s was replaced. The school system regained registration again partly through the arrival of immigrant population from South America and North and South-Sahel African countries as well as Eastern European countries, who represented 530,954 in school year 2005/2006 and 715,409 in school year 2015/2016 (MECD 2016, 9). More than half of students of migrant origin attended a VET qualification level, as immigration was

[2] I refer here to post-compulsory and not post-16 because in school years 1975/1976 and 1985/1996, compulsory education finished at the age of 14, which changed after the reform in the 1990s, when it moved to 16.

caused mainly by economic reasons, and the search for qualified work has a value that academic higher education does not have.

Chapters 2 and 5 as well as all chapters in Part II in the book except Chap. 10 refer to formal vocational education and hence explain in detail the Spanish vocational education system.

But vocational education was only part of the offer. A second one was that of vocational training (FPO, employment training or vocational adult education, as it is called in other contexts), which had started in the 1960s, promoted by the Department of Labour. That decade implied a strong inner migration from rural areas to the cities. This movement had two manifestations, the first one being people from rural areas moving into the main cities of each province, while the second one meant moving from villages into the large and growing cities in the country; Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao and Seville being the main receivers nation-wide. These migrants were young adults who had already work experience and working habits, but whose occupation, learned on-the-job, was not useful in urban areas. The Department of Labour promoted then short training courses in specific occupational areas addressed to these young adults, often illiterate, who had to learn a new trade but who were willing and needed to work and make a living. Training centres were set up in all main cities of each province, and they played a major role for a decade and a half.

In the early 1980s, the country had changed dramatically, unemployment and particularly youth unemployment was very high, and the network of centres of the Department of Labour was used to deliver training. Large amounts of money were also invested in funding private training offer, most of it subsidized, because there was a payment for the unemployed people attending training courses. However, the dynamics of this training had not changed: it consisted of training delivery, where assistance was encouraged, but there was no assessment of learning and, therefore, no qualification provided once the training had finished. The role it played was different to that of the 1960s, though the infrastructure remained the same: from being a measure to qualify the workforce, it turned into a policy towards social cohesion and linked to unemployment subsidies. In 1986 Spain accessed the European Communities, large sums of money from the European Social Fund were invested in more training offer, which in fact implied the opening of a training market. Private institutions were competing with public institutions at the time, but new actors joined this market, varying from municipalities to employer federations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and even institutions who specialized in applying for external and international funds in order to develop their own network of training locations, trainers and resources. Training became a business of its own.

By the end of the 1980s, vocational training had become a market in parallel to the vocational education provided within the education system. It offered initial vocational training, short-term, without acknowledgement nor qualification, but practice-oriented. Unemployed young and adult people attended this training offer as this was a means to earn the dole, while attendance to vocational education schools reported no immediate benefit, other than learning and the qualification. Young people who had left the education system without successfully completing compulsory education had in vocational training an alternative choice, which turned

into the only one once the 1990 reform was passed and declared access to vocational education ISCED 3-4 which restricted to those who had achieved their GESO. Nonetheless, also students registered in post-compulsory and university education could attend and benefit from this training offer (and the subsidy behind it) insofar one was also registered as unemployed.

In opposition to formal vocational education, which budget comes through the Department of Education, vocational training has several sources of funding which may overlap and which have diversified along the years. The first being the Department of Labour through the vocational training quote[3] which is a small percentage of every labour contract, but already in the mid 1980s in competition with other sources like the European Social Fund (through national, regional or local governments) as well as saving banks in their social provision against unemployment, also through own funding sources, sometimes even related to social welfare. A diversification in funding sources comes together with a clustering of requirements and legal conditions, each of them set by every funding mechanism. This has resulted along the years in a wide array of vocational training offer which is not recognizable, not officially known, not recorded by public institutions, not registered in any institutional terms, lacking supervision or evaluation (Marhuenda 2009). That is the reason why there is no specific chapter about it in this book, because there is no way to gather all that information, which cannot be fully traced, not even in basic statistical terms. This training market still exists nowadays.

Chapters 4 and 5 in the book cover the complexities of the accreditation of prior learning when it comes to all the non-formal training provision provided within this subsystem along the years, as well as the education required to trainers within this subsystem, significantly loose with regard to that of vocational teachers.

The third subsystem was only developed in the early 1990s, and it is an impulse driven by economic reasons rather than by a strong belief in the training culture. Both employers and trade unions noticed the rise in the training market in terms of vocational training for the unemployed, the subsystem I have just referred to above. Both employers and trade unions had joined this market too. And it was then that they realized that the funding of almost all vocational training since the mid-1960s and until the entry in the European Communities had been paid by them, as it came out of the vocational training quote that comes out of every labour agreement signed in the country and which represents around 0.70% of the gross wage.

It was then, in 1993, that both employers and unions reached an agreement, together with the Department of Labour, to reinvest that quote into themselves, in what was known as the First National Agreement on Continuing Vocational Education. Continuing education for all working sectors was born then, and it has evolved ever since in a third parallel vocational training subsystem. In opposition to the two previous ones, this cannot be considered initial vocational training, as it is offered to an adult population who is not only active but also employed. Continuing training is intended to update the skills of the workforce to comply with new

[3] http://www.seg-social.es/Internet_1/Trabajadores/CotizacionRecaudaci10777/Regimenes/RegimenGeneraldelaS10957/InformacionGeneral/index.htm

requirements of the labour market, be it due to changes in labour organization, in technologies of work or in competencies needed to increase competitiveness or productivity. But continuing training is also aimed to satisfy the needs for further education of the workforce, insofar it is to some extent related to its professional development but also to the personal growth of the worker's needs or interest.

Chapters 3 and 10 in the book cover this subsystem in in-depth detail, and they explain the basis, the features and the developments within the subsystem.

Therefore, along the past five decades Spain has seen the rise of three different subsystems of vocational education and training and it was by the turn of the century that the country decided it was time to bring them closer, to facilitate recognition of each other, to make better use of all resources, material, financial and personal, invested in vocational education: to make all vocational education and training offer a valuable investment in terms of qualification, useful for individual workers, for all of the active population, as well as responsive to the needs of the productive system and to improve the nation's economy. Since 2002 all centrifugal forces in terms of VET had to be reset and the move has been done towards a unified VET system in which centripetal forces take over and readdress the historical trend: a law was passed in the Spanish Parliament ruling vocational education and vocational training, both initial and continuing, the Law on Vocational Qualifications and Education. This has been the only law on education that has gathered consensus around it and which has not been contested by employers nor trade unions either. Given that Spain has passed four laws on the education system since 1990 and three laws on university governance, the law on VET can be considered both exceptional and unique. Unifying or even approaching the subsystems is not an easy work, but it is indeed an arena demanding the attention of politicians, practitioners and researchers.

1.3 Conflict over the Control of VET

The history of the three subsystems explained above entails the struggle over the power of VET and the control of the different institutions, regulations and funding mechanisms. The Departments of Education and Labour have held a constant and balanced fight over vocational education and training at national and regional level. This struggle has been subject to the interest of the political parties holding control over national and regional governments, but it has been also a question of the model of VET and what could the society in general and the productive system in particular expect from VET in terms of appropriate qualifications to satisfy the demands of local and economic growth.

On the side of the Department of Education, the key issue has been to retain control over the accreditation of qualifications, in order to guarantee their official value nation-wide. Qualifications are therefore linked to requirements in terms of education and training locations, resources, teachers and trainers as well as education or training hours. It is the mandated curriculum which rules, like elsewhere in

the education system in Spain, the awarding of the qualifications, and these are published in the Official Bulleting of the State and registered in the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications (CNCP). Chapter 4 provides a good account of this Catalogue and its use.

The Department of Labour, on its own side, is in favour of major flexibility of the training provision in order to be able to provide quick replies to the needs expressed by employers and the industry. Its major claim is that the long term taken by a mandated curriculum to be designed and implemented make it outdated by the time the first cohorts come out of the system. It also claims that a system functioning as civil service does not allow the ability to hire, relocate or dispose of the teaching workforce that is no longer useful in terms of what the market demands.

These struggles are not just typical of Spain but of many other countries and are not attributable to the current changing context but could also be found along history (Molzberger and Wahle 2015; Marhuenda 2017). In the case of Spain, however, there are two sources of obstacles (Marhuenda 2012). The first one being the involvement of the two administrations of education and labour, which hold different models and that also search for control over the budget on vocational education and training. A struggle that is held at each governmental level (national, regional and sometimes also municipal) and for which attempts have been made in order to solve it through an institution able to mediate among both of them. That institution has been the National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL), which was first set in the mid-1990s and which after shifting from one department into another was finally allocated to the Department of Education as it was responsible for awarding qualifications. Nevertheless, we can now find regional qualification institutions in almost all regions, and they are dependent of different administrations according to decisions taken at the regional level.

The work of such an institute, which is explained in more detail in Chap. 7, is not simply conducted by the administrations. A lesson well learned in the late 1980s, which gave birth to the reform in 1990, was to get employer associations and federations as well as trade union representatives involved in the design and development of the curriculum and the training delivery of vocational education. This had already happened through the sectoral commissions which agreed on the qualification levels and the occupational profiles of each occupational domain. These commissions took control over the curriculum, in an exercise of devolution of power to those who have the expertise, something extraordinary in a country used to take all decisions on education within the offices of the department of education. One may complain about the slow pace of updating the qualifications, but since 1990 no one can dare to say that vocational education is away of the needs of the labour market, for the main actors in the labour market have been invited and called to define their needs and to decide how to provide appropriate answers to them. As a matter of fact, since 1990, employers and trade unions are the ones who decide both the structure and the content of the VET curriculum of any VET qualification, with the educational administration assisting them in this process.

The work of those committees set up the basis for the duty of INCUAL in order to define the qualifications for the non-formal vocational training offer, be it for the

unemployed or for active employed workers, the two non-formal subsystems to which I referred in the previous section of this chapter.

Hence, we can also find relevant institutions set up to give an expert opinion in whatever reforms are introduced related to VET. The clearest one is the National Council on Vocational Education and Training (CGFP), where employers, trade unions, regional and national Departments of Labour and Education are represented and come together to have their democratic say upon VET policies. Again, like in the case of INCUAL (which depends of this Council), such participatory councils have been also reproduced at regional level. This being said, the National Council on Vocational Education and Training has not gathered to a single meeting between 2010 and the end of October 2018!

This sometimes results in complex situations, not always easy to understand. That is the case of my own region, Valencia, which has happened to start in 2017 at least two parallel processes of reconsidering vocational education and training policies, one by the General School Council and the second one by the Directorate General on Vocational Education and Special Training: different directorates of the Department of Education struggle to have an impact while practitioners and some researchers wonder why the designed authorized actors, those of the Regional Council for Vocational Education and Training, have not been called once and that Council is forced to remain silent. All of these take place in a highly bureaucratized administration, not only at the national level but indeed at the regional level.

1.4 Qualifications and Actors in the Vocational Education *System* and the Training and Labour *Markets*[4]

The productive system in Spain is not so different, regarding the size of the companies, from the European average. It entails a large amount of micro-companies, more than half of which have no employees. In 2017, the fabric of the productive system is as follows (Table 1.2):

Table 1.2 Size of Spanish companies in 2017, by number of employees and their share in the total amount of registered workers

	Micro	Small	Medium	SME	Large	
No employees	1–9	10–49	50–249	0–249	>250	Total workforce
1.821.901	131.2141	120.397	20.485	3.274.924	4196	3.279.120
55.6%	40%	3.7%	0.6%	99.9%	0.1%	

Source: Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad. (2017, 1).

[4] I use here italics in order to stress that formal vocational education is structured as a system, while non-formal vocational education takes the shape of a market, hence submitted to different rationales, as I explain in the text.

In terms of vocational education and training, as we have seen in the previous section, structure, funding and practice are so scattered that we have a highly ruled vocational education system coexisting with a highly deregulated vocational training market, even if both sometimes share institutions, resources, trainers and trainees.

The best example for this is probably the introduction of a dual modality of formal vocational education in the system (see Chap. 11) that has ignored the already existing apprenticeship system as long as 1980, with the approval of the Statute of Workers, which set up the basis for labour relations in modern democratic Spain.

Indeed, I have mentioned apprenticeship. Like in other countries, apprenticeship was the entry-level job for young people willing to access the industry in those areas where it had developed, often related to national companies, like the national airline (Iberia), railway (Renfe) or car (SEAT) companies. But as the vocational education system was rooted to the school in 1970, traditional apprenticeships were called to disappear. However, the Statue of Workers made room for them as a proper way to have access to the labour market with the aim to achieve professional knowledge and qualification. We have always had apprenticeships in Spain. Nevertheless, they have been disconnected from the educational system, and it has been the Department of Labour that has ruled and controlled them.

Perhaps that control has not been as effective as it should have, as there are no data at all on the qualifications to which apprenticeships have led (CCOO 2017), covering around 1% of the contracts without huge variations between the 1990s and year 2006 (Gómez, Contreras and Gracia 2009). *Apprenticeships*, as well as *training* and *practice* contracts (the three different legal figures that have been used along the past three and a half decades), have not accomplished their legal aims. Instead, they have been used as cheap labour, with no emphasis on providing a qualification, on retaining apprentices once they had improved their abilities and knowledge, without giving them a career prospect. Apprenticeships in Spain have not been considered as a training mechanism generally speaking (Coscubiela and Rojo 2012) and they have not been used for their original purpose (López and Cueto 2017).

Therefore, apprenticeships in Spain do not have any relevant impact upon training nor qualification. Nevertheless, national and regional governments since 2012 have fostered or supported the introduction of a dual modality which is promoted, managed and led by the education system and not the labour market and which does not necessarily imply nor require a labour relation, hence under the role of students instead of being considered trainees or apprentices.

To what extent can we speak about a training culture among Spanish companies? This is a question that is addressed in several chapters in this book, namely, all those that have FCT as an object of study (Chaps. 2 and 7). The issue was also raised by the Cedefop (2015) in a research report where data from Spain were compared to those of other countries.

Nevertheless, as Chap. 6 points out, the vocational education system and its network of schools is struggling to reverse this situation. There are nowadays three kinds of vocational education schools, two of which intend to play a role in the economic and local development of their region. These are named Integrated schools

(CIFP, 162 scattered throughout the country[5]) and are currently offering both vocational education as well as vocational training, hence serving the needs of different kinds of population (traditionally separated audiences of both vocational educational system and vocational training market) and keeping close contact with employers both as partners as well as customers whose demands schools are ready to listen to. The connection with the productive fabric and the involvement of these schools in their context make them institutions which demand an autonomy that the education system is not used to allowing and which implies entrepreneurial as well as innovative practices by teachers and students. There are also the national reference VET schools (CRN, 49 in the whole country[6]), highly specialized in an occupational domain and that have also close contact with the employers in that sector. It is worth noting that CRN are promoted not only by the Department of Education but also by the Department of Labour, and the last ones were approved in 2013.

The third kind of VET schools, however, are ordinary VET schools which share buildings with secondary compulsory education and with the post-compulsory academic paths. This means that these schools are more used to follow the traditional behaviour of the educational administration, which has been mainly driven by an academic, not a vocational drift.

This being said, over the past four decades, a multitude of actors has taken part in the delivery of vocational training to young and adult people, students and workers, unemployed and employees; and employers and trade unions, municipalities, NGOs and private providers have been part of those developments. Qualification policies have been designed and implemented with the agreement of the administrations of Education and Labour but with the relevant input of employer and union representatives. They have developed their own network of training institutions, sometimes parallel to vocational schools and sometimes in relation and close cooperation to them. They have fostered a flexible body of vocational trainers who have specialized in this role and who have been trained and even accredited towards this aim, as is described in Chap. 5. Several forms of light training have also been provided, by the Chambers of Commerce, to workers in charge of vocational students during their work placements (FCT). Vocational education teachers have had the chance to work in their occupational fields as well as to be in contact with their respective industries in order to plan and assess learning in those work placements.

While this cooperation happened in the field of practice, both in formal vocational education and in non-formal vocational training, as explained in Chap. 6, a similar dialogue was being held in the domain of policy-making, employer and union representatives, administration representatives and teacher representatives, all of them have been involved since the late 1980s in consultative committees like the CGFP established in 1986 as well as in technical committees that have resulted in legislation, the key one being the 2002 Law on Qualifications and Vocational Education and later in 2009 the Decree on Accreditation of knowledge acquired

[5] Source: http://todofp.es/sobre-fp/informacion-general/centros-integrados/nuevos-centros.html

[6] Source: http://www.todofp.es/dam/jcr:a43ff405-b7b0-4bcf-b4e4-f7dc9720df40/crnfpenero-2013-pdf.pdf

through experience, as well as in relevant technical tools, like the National Catalogue on Vocational Qualifications. Chapter 4 describes and discusses these tools and their limited impact.

The time when employers complained that vocational policies were not responsive to their needs has long ago passed, as they have been and are nowadays active part of the design and development of vocational curricula, both formal and non-formal, as well as co-responsible of their delivery, be it through FCT, Dual VET or through their own institutions and networks.

This is a panorama of close cooperation that has been the rule in the system and which has no way backwards, despite the misuse and abuse that has been made of continuing vocational education, to which there is reference in Chap. 3. The record of bad practice around the management of Continuing VET, which has been addressed in a couple of occasions along the past 25 years, was shifted radically in 2015, through the new Law ruling vocational training for employment and which meant the withdrawal of employers and unions from the management of continuing training, in favour of its privatization and the increase of the market conditions for VET planning and delivery. The implications of such a legislative change are relevant for they are a breakdown in the consensus around the principle of participation of all agents involved. Such a measure is hard to understand, particularly given that it also comes at a time when formal vocational education is demanding the involvement of those actors in the planning and delivery of dual VET. Dismissing relevant actors from the management of CVET while demanding their cooperation with initial VET has impacts upon the commitment of actors, as Chaps. 3, 6, 7, 10 and 11 discuss.

1.5 Transitions Between Education and Work, Guidance and Careers

With the large numbers of unemployment, as well as the large number of youth unemployment in the country, transition from education into work has been a relevant issue of study, reaching a peak over 50% youth unemployment in 2013. Chapters 8 and 9 take it as their object and they look at it from the confronting perspectives of success and failure; and data on unemployment are shown in Table 1.3.

Both the data as well as the evolution of unemployment show developments in huge contrast with European averages and trends. Even if the crisis in 2008 had a severe impact upon the labour market, like elsewhere, the evolution in the precedent decades was also variable and not easy to explain (Serrano and Soler 2015). It is worth highlighting the decade between 1996 to 2006, when unemployment decreased significantly based upon the increase in tourism and construction. However, lowering youth unemployment contributed along that decade to the increase of early school leaving, as young people left their studies as they were attracted by low qualified employment chances (CES 2009).

Table 1.3 Unemployment in Spain

Year	1975	1985	1995	2005	2015
Unemployment	3.7%	21.5%	22.8%	8.7%	21.2%
Youth unemployment	10%	38.8%	>40%	18.62%	46.24%

Own elaboration
Source: https://elpais.com/elpais/2015/11/18/media/1447871942_778264.html
Sources: I had to refer to several sources here, for desegregation of data has been difficult. I have used the following three: García (2011, 4), Cachón (1997, 54–55) and INE (http://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Tabla.htm?t=4247). Data are estimated for the different consideration of what is youth unemployment along these decades as well as variations in age range

Taking these figures into consideration, it is clear that what has been a problem all throughout the history of recent democratic Spain is the difficult transitions from education into work for young people. First, we can see a combined process of displacement and overqualification. Some have blamed the system of vocational education, without taking into account that far more students were attending Baccalaureates and higher education than VET. Furthermore, it has not been considered that the labour market itself was making use of the hiring mechanisms and regulations in order to employ a workforce whose skills did not match the requirements of the workplace, in some cases due to overqualification, in some others for the lack of qualification required for the workplace, which in certain regions and sectors was interpreted as an invitation to leave school early (Homs 2009; Fernández Enguita et al. 2010; VVAA 2010).

The fact is that the only known vocational education offer, the only one relatively stable, is that of the education system, school-based VET; while all the non-formal vocational training offer is subject to changes in terms of sectors, training providers, places available as well as the very calendar of the training offer. There is a lack of joint, coordinated and proper advanced planning; and this is twofold. On the side of formal VET, the offer is stable but slow to adapt to demands of the productive system. On the side of non-formal vocational training, the offer is provided in such a short-term that it is often inefficient in terms of responding to the demands of the market as well as it is not easy to have it addressed to the population which might make the most out of it. Furthermore, due to the different funding sources, there are huge variations in the months in which the offer is made available, often the offers overlap and they are not even known until almost the beginning of the training sessions. Public advertising is also a factor against the efficient functioning of the guidance process which, in the end, is very weak as it lacks the mechanisms to provide a good service: information on the trends in the market so that young people can plan a career, as well as information about the offer in the short and medium term so that people may plan their transition.

I speak of a guidance process and not system because there is no systematic career guidance in the country, no stable structure behind it. As explained above, guidance is mainly of academic nature, and it has often supported the idea of families and society that young people should keep studying and making progress towards university. More importantly, vocational education is far more complex

than academic education and the offer is much wider, resulting in an imbalance between choices. This happens in a country[7] where mobility has always been low and emancipation from parents' home happens at a much later age than in most European countries (Benedicto 2017). Furthermore, if we add the lack of publicly available information on the vocational training provision, the result is that most guidance happens only within the educational system and is addressed towards the educational system itself.

It is impossible to provide good guidance into vocational training provision and into the world of work when there are no stable professionals devoted to these tasks and where there are no public institutions which are supporting such a role, other than some municipalities or some trade unions. Even these institutions and the professionals working in them, who have the will and determination to conduct such a practice, lack resources as well as specific training and, what is more relevant, they have to work with last-minute information, all of which hinders effective guidance (Chisvert 2014). Guidance professionals lack appropriate structure and they are often entering the unemployment, whenever the funding for guidance is delayed or neglected, as it is not guaranteed for its lack of development, even if it was conceived as such in the 2002 Law.

1.6 Successful and Effective VET

'The end of VET as we know it' is the name of the congress called by the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training in 2019.[8] If such a question can be raised in a country famous for its long and well established dual system, think of the questions we can make about VET in Spain: it could be *vocational education without work?* or *vocational education without career prospects?*, given the disconnections between VET and the labour market which do not necessarily mean lack of responsiveness of the VET subsystems, as I have tried to explain in the pages above and as the authors of the different chapters will explain.

Instead, looking back to look ahead, there are good reasons to be satisfied about the current status of VET, particularly of formal VET, school-based VET. Let me point to them.

Since the mid-1980s, a consensus around the value of vocational education and training and the need to improve its worth has grown in Spain (UCEV 2015). This consensus is established upon a previous development of the system: VET had taken the form of remedial education by the application of the Law approved in 1970. However, in 1984 VET students started to take work experience in real companies as a voluntary module after completion of the vocational curriculum. Companies started then to acknowledge the quality of VET, and its prestige grew thanks to the

[7] http://www.cje.org/en/our-work/empleo/actividades-y-campanas-del-cje/observatorio-joven-de-emancipacion/

[8] https://www.sfivet.swiss/vet-congress-2019

quality work of these students. Towards the end of the 1980s, sectoral committees were promoted by the Department of Education of the Spanish Government to which employer and union representatives were also invited, in an immense attempt to review and adapt all of the VET curricula towards the needs of the labour market. Such an attempt to devolve the control upon curriculum design to the social agents had never happened before to such a massive extent, and it had a relevant positive impact: first, establishing different competency levels as well as grouping all occupations within 26 professional branches, and, second, designing the curriculum upon the selection of the relevant professional competencies and as the result of agreement within those sectoral committees.

The efforts taken resulted in further agreements: in 1993, as Continuing Vocational Education was agreed for the first time between unions and employers, the First National Plan on VET was approved, then renewed in 1996. It was in 2002 that the only law on education that has not been contested in the past 40 years in the country was approved, the Law on Qualifications and Vocational Education. This is a unique case, considering that all education laws except this one have been either replaced or reformed by the political parties in the government. Since the early 1980s, education is still one of the main arenas for ideological dispute between conservatives and social democrats. Even though, they have been able to agree upon VET. Furthermore, the 2002 Law gained the esteem of all employer confederations and the largest trade unions, with hardly any social contestation. We can certainly talk about a wide consensus.

Nowadays one can still find traces of the myths about the 'pains' of Vocational Education in Spain. However, these are not but myths, as the quality of VET is without a doubt for almost three decades now. The consensus around VET has been altered by two measures developed by the Conservative party in Government between Winter 2011 and Spring 2018 the early 2012: on the one side, the incorporation of basic vocational education *within* compulsory schooling, and not after it, therefore prior to achieving the GESO (Marhuenda 2015) and, secondly, the introduction of a schooled dual VET (see Chap. 11) that was not demanded by social actors.

Employers, trade unions, VET teachers and the chambers are quite satisfied with current VET and they want to see improvements in non-formal and continuing vocational training. They have agreed on the qualifications, their definition, design and level. They feel responsible for vocational education and they have been working towards the integration of the three subsystems. Of course, there is room for reform and improvement potential, within the limits set by the 2002 law. Social recognition of VET can improve, but it has run a long way since the early 1980s. After the implementation of the 1990 reform, entry into the labour market for VET qualified workers has been significantly faster, easier and better than for university graduates (Cachón 1997; Monreal 2002; Homs 2009; Generalitat de Catalunya 2017), long before the erratic introduction of the dual type of VET.

VET in Spain functions indeed well, by no means worse than the post-16 academic path. It would be great if VET in Spain could keep on evolving upon the basis set up in the past decades and to the full achievement of the pillars established in the Law in 2002. Development and improvement rather than reform and change would make VET even better.

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