

## A three-year study “The shift to learning outcomes; rhetoric or reality?” commissioned by Cedefop

### 1. What is the context and purpose of the study?

**Cedefop** is one of the decentralised agencies of the EU. It works with the European Commission, Member States and social partners and supports the promotion, development and implementation of the Union policy in the field of vocational education and training (VET) as well as skills and qualifications policies. In the last couple of decades, Cedefop has invested heavily in supporting the use of learning outcomes in the design and delivery of VET, including qualifications, curricula, learning methods, assessment and validation. Continuing this work, Cedefop has commissioned **PPMI/3s/Ockham consortium** (together with national experts) to conduct a three-year **study on ‘The shift to learning outcomes; rhetoric or reality?’**.

Practically all European countries are now actively using learning outcome (or competence) statements to define, review and refine their qualifications, curricula, and programmes. However, mere definition of learning outcomes does not by default trigger change in teaching, assessment and learning. In fact, **little is known about the actual impact of learning outcome statements** on teaching, assessment and learning practice in vocational schools and apprenticeships. Moreover, there is a tendency to underestimate the variety of factors influencing the take up and successful application of the approach.

Therefore, this study **aims to explore** (1) how the shift to learning outcomes influences teaching, learning, and assessment; (2) what factors and how hinder or facilitate the transformation of intended learning outcomes into actual learning achievement (considering stakeholder awareness, ownership, guidance and support, ideology, learning context, etc.). The **focus is on initial VET**, including both schools and apprenticeships. The study is intended to support further Cedefop’s work towards higher quality and relevance of VET in Europe.

### 2. What does the study comprise?

The study consists of **5 work assignments** that will explore the influence of learning outcomes in four distinct areas:

- the influence of learning outcomes on **pedagogical theory and tools**, i.e., how teachers perceive the learning outcomes-based approach and their ability/readiness to apply it, how the learning outcomes-based approach is embedded in teacher training and perceived, supported by teacher training providers, and how the national/regional policies and administrative arrangements frame and inform the presentation of learning outcomes to current and future teachers;
- the influence of learning outcomes-based curricula on **teaching practices** (in school-based programmes), i.e. how learning outcomes-based approaches play out for learners in the classroom, how learning outcomes-based curricula and related pedagogies are shaped by VET schools and vice versa, and what national/regional policies, practices and administrative arrangements frame and shape learning outcomes-based approaches;

- the influence of learning outcomes-based curricula in **company training** (part of apprenticeship programmes that takes place in companies), i.e., how externally imposed learning outcomes influence interactions between VET teachers, trainers/company instructors, work colleagues and apprentices, how teachers/trainers/instructors interpret learning outcomes and adapt them to the workplace, and what the overall impact of learning outcomes on workplace learning is;
- the influence of learning outcomes on **assessment**, i.e., the relationship between curriculum statements/intentions and assessment processes, how teaching and learning are steered by assessment criteria, the role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment, the influence of online and hybrid teaching and learning on assessment, and how complex learning outcomes are assessed.

As part of the work assignment five, we will also analyse factors that enable and hinder the use of learning outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment in initial VET, and develop policy choices and guidelines for practitioners.

### 3. What are we going to do? How are we going to do it?

As part of the study, the research team will carry out **10 country case studies**, covering Bulgaria, Finland, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia. This will include carrying out **literature review, desk research, scoping interviews, a survey, site visits to VET providers** (schools and companies, including some additional interviews, focus groups and observation in each) and **workshops with national and EU level stakeholders**. The combination of these will allow us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the use of learning outcomes in initial VET.

Importantly, the study does not aim to assess individual student achievement. Instead, our goal is to explore the use of learning outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment in IVET, and this way answer the main research question on whether the shift to learning outcomes in Europe has become a reality or has remained a rhetoric.

Below we describe data collection methods that will require the support and collaboration of national stakeholders.

#### a. Scoping interviews

National experts, guided by the central research team, will carry out approximately **7 scoping interviews per country**. The interviews will be semi-structured and target representatives of national or regional **authorities** in the field of VET who are responsible for or have a say in the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches (e.g. ministries, local governments, qualifications agencies, national VET institutes, curriculum commissions), as well as **social partner organisations** (especially employer representatives) and any **other relevant stakeholders**, for instance, VET provider associations, professional organisations for teachers, learner associations, etc.

The objective of these interviews will be two-fold: (1) ensure **stakeholder support and involvement** in the study and (2) explore **macro-level (national/regional policy) arrangements and the views** of authorities, social partners and other stakeholders in relation to the implementation of learning outcomes-based approaches. This will help us answer a number of research questions and contextualise findings on the influence of learning outcomes on

pedagogical theory, teaching in schools, in-company training and assessment as described above.

Potential interviewees will be contacted via email and interviewed via a videocall, phone call, or (in rare cases) in person. The interviewees will be provided with interview questions in advance to provide time for preparation.

**Indicative timing of scoping interviews: May – June 2023**

b. Survey

The survey will target **teachers, trainers (in schools and in companies), and school principals as well as school curriculum coordinators in VET**. The purpose of it will be to carry out a quick temperature check as regards learning outcomes, i.e., awareness of learning outcomes-based approach among school managers, teachers and trainers as well as its perceived usefulness and application in practice.

The survey will be **available in the national languages** of the 10 countries selected, including Bulgarian, Finnish, French, English, Lithuanian, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, and Slovenian. **One survey link for each country** will be generated. Same link will apply to all target groups of the survey, and respondents will be displayed different questions as they go through it, depending on how they identify themselves in the beginning. The questionnaire will include questions on whether school teachers and in-company trainers have been trained on learning outcomes as part of their professional preparation, perceived usefulness of learning outcomes, the use of learning outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment, autonomy, guidance and support on learning outcomes provided to teachers and trainers, as well as school level approach to using learning outcomes and school management views towards national level arrangements and guidance on learning outcomes.

The survey itself is **rather short** and asks questions that can be answered without prior preparation. It should take no more than **10 minutes to answer**.

The survey aims to reach the highest possible number of individuals that work in the field of VET. Thus, national stakeholder support with survey dissemination would be highly appreciated.

**Indicative timing of the survey: mid-May – June 2023**

c. Site visits

As part of the second, third and fourth work assignments, we will carry out **site visits to VET providers (schools and companies)**, two per assignment per country. Each site visit will take one to two days. Each site visit will include 2-3 interviews with school/company management, a handful of interviews or a focus focus group with teachers/trainers, observation of lessons/training, and follow-up interviews/discussions with learners. Selecting the schools and companies, we will attribute utmost important to their willingness to cooperate and join the study. We will visit the same schools twice (as part of the first and third round of the visits), and selected companies once (as part of the second round visits).

The purpose of site visits will be to explore **to what extent and how learning outcomes are embedded in everyday teaching, learning practice and assessment in VET**. The visits will also help gain invaluable insights on what school managers, teachers, trainers and learners

themselves think about learning outcomes, and what factors enable and hinder the use of learning outcomes-based approaches in Europe.

**Indicative timing of site visits: first round of visits (to schools) in autumn 2023, second round of visits (to companies) in second half of 2024, third round of visits (to schools) in second half of 2024**

d. Workshops with national stakeholders

Towards the end of the study, **ten workshops with national stakeholders** will be organised (one per country). These will take place **online**. The purpose will be to **present and discuss the main findings** of research and come to the final consensus on the conclusions and recommendations to be presented in the synthetic case studies. Additionally, **a co-creation session** will be part of the workshops where the participants will be provided with the guidelines on policy choices and those for practitioners, and will get the chance to examine, discuss, and refine them. The inputs of the participating stakeholders/experts will be crucial for developing and finalising the two sets of guidelines that are part of the study.

**Indicative timing of national workshops: end of 2024**