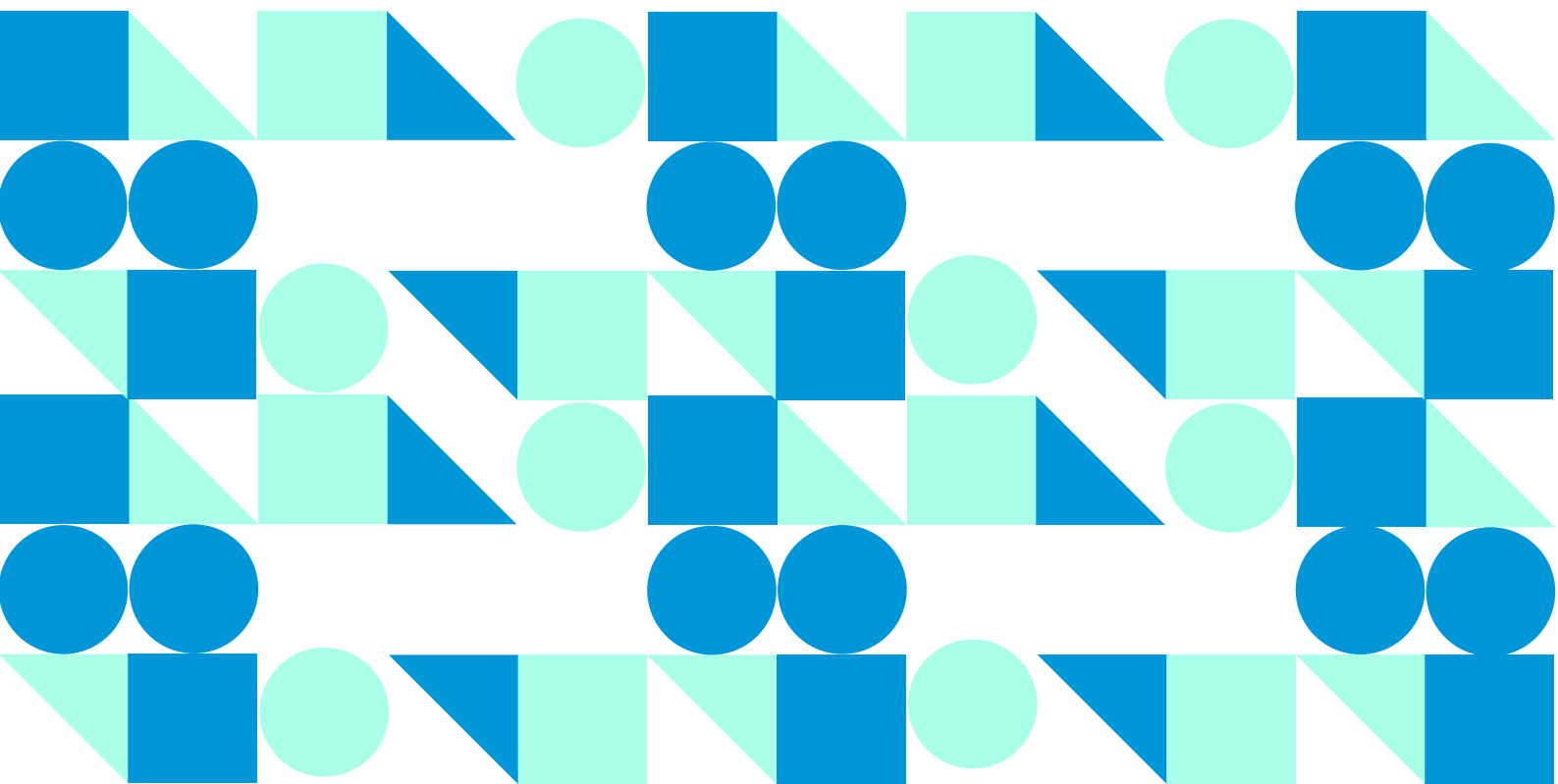




Research paper

# The influence of learning outcomes on assessment





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## Foreword

This publication was prepared as part of the Cedefop project 'The shift to learning outcomes: Rhetoric or reality?'. The purpose of this research is to analyse the conceptual, structural and political factors influencing the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes. It is considered a first step in a long-term research strategy aiming to better understand the conditions for providing high-quality vocational education, training and learning. The research focuses on initial vocational education and training (IVET), in schools and apprenticeships, in the 27 Member States of the EU, and Iceland and Norway.

The research is divided into five separate but interlinked themes:

- (a) addressing the influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools;
- (b) focusing on the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices (in school-based programmes);
- (c) examining the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula in company training (as part of apprenticeship programmes that take place in companies);
- (d) mapping and analysing the influence of learning outcomes on assessment;
- (e) developing suggestions for the future by supporting stakeholders and policymakers in addressing future challenges and opportunities in this area.

This publication aims to explore how the shift towards learning outcomes influences both formative and summative forms of assessment in IVET, as per theme (d) above. It reveals that in all the countries studied learning outcomes are a core element of national assessment regulations. Most countries define assessment criteria at the national level alongside intended learning outcomes, serving as points of reference for summative assessments, whether for modules or for qualifications.

Overall, the research undertaken shows that the use of learning outcomes in IVET assessments is widely valued by teachers and trainers, as statements of learning outcomes help set clear goals, making assessments and grading more transparent. Findings suggest that while formative assessment is recognised as valuable, it could be strengthened, along with learner self-assessment and peer assessment. However, students' perception of formative assessment depends on their motivation and attitude to learning, and the broader educational culture, including the extent to which learner-centred pedagogies are implemented. The study also highlights the importance of aligning intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and achieved outcomes, which most countries ensure through national regulations and quality assurance mechanisms.

We hope this publication and forthcoming research can serve as points of reference for continuous cooperation and exchange that could promote both learning outcomes and the key role they play, not only in the dialogue between education and training and the world of work, but also in the transformation of learning intentions – articulated through curricula or programmes – into actual teaching and assessment practices.

Jürgen Siebel  
*Executive Director*

Irene Mandl  
*Head of the Department for VET and  
Qualifications*

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The research was carried out by a consortium led by PPMI Group UAB (Lithuania), coordinated by Mariia Kolokolova, Donatas Pocius and Milda Venckutė-Jakštė. The consortium includes 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH (Austria), Ockham IPS (the Netherlands) and, as subcontractors, the European Institute of Education and Social Policy (France), INOVA+ (Portugal), Tomaž Deželan (Slovenia), Suzanne Gatt (Malta), Jouko Luomi (Finland) and Andrew McCoshan (Ireland).

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# Executive Summary

## Background and methodology

Assessment is an important component of the learning outcomes 'chain' in vocational education and training (VET), as its goal is to give feedback or make summative judgments on whether learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes, that is, the knowledge, skills and attitudes defined in curricula or other reference documents. Assessment criteria, further detailing or operationalising the intended learning outcomes, can be used as a reference point for designing assessment processes and making judgements on an individual's progress on and achievement of learning goals. The identification of gaps between learners' understanding and the learning aims can be used to adjust teaching, training and learning.

This publication aims to explore how the shift towards learning outcomes influences both formative and summative forms of assessment in initial vocational education and training. Hence, the publication aims to answer the following key questions.

- (a) What is the relationship between curriculum statements/intentions (intended learning outcomes), assessment processes and assessment results (achieved learning outcomes)?
  - (i) To what extent are these aligned and to what extent do they complement each other?
- (b) To what extent is the teaching and learning process informed and/or steered by assessment criteria?
- (c) What are the roles of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessments?
- (d) What is the influence of online and hybrid teaching and learning processes on assessment practices?
  - (i) To what extent does the context in which learning outcomes are acquired (classroom, company, etc.) influence assessment?
- (e) How are complex learning outcomes, notably transversal skills and competences, addressed and assessed?

This publication summarises the fourth strand of the study, 'The shift to learning outcomes: Rhetoric or reality?'. It follows a report on the first theme, which focused on the impact of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and teacher-training tools; a report on the second theme, which discussed whether and how learning-outcomes-based approaches are employed in teaching practices at VET

schools; and a third report analysing the influence of learning outcomes on work-based learning. The fifth and final report will bring together findings from all themes developed as part of the study to provide guidance for stakeholders and policymakers on future challenges and opportunities.

### **Methodological approach**

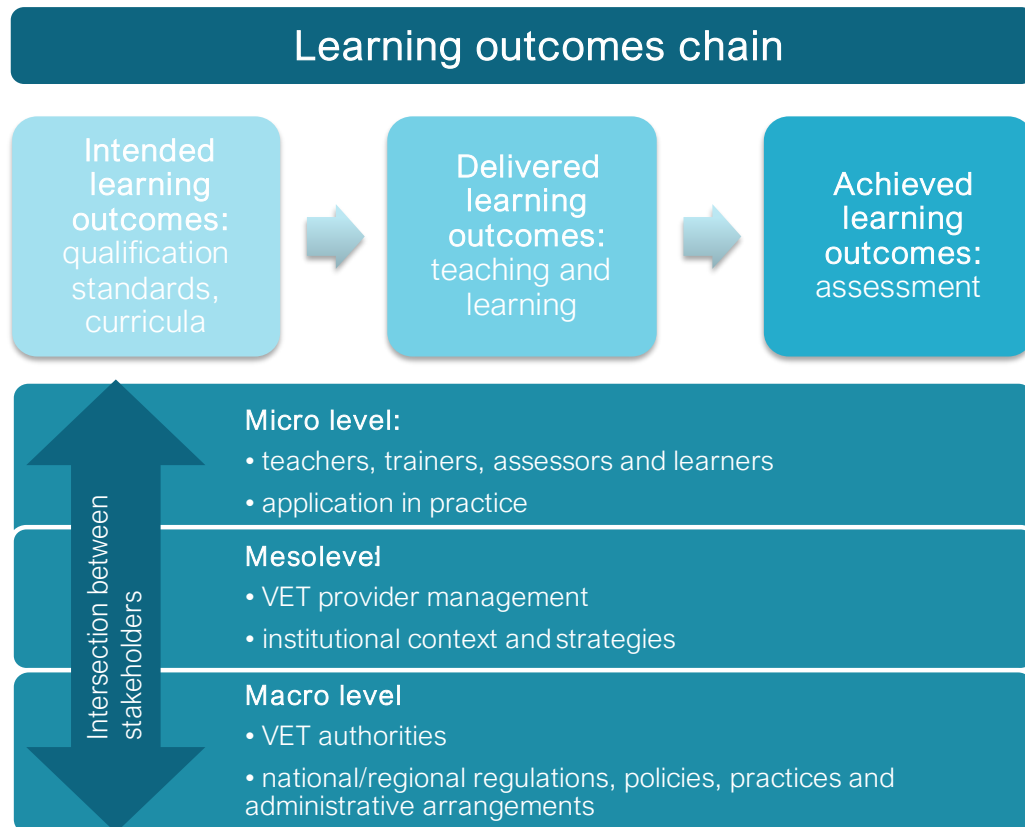
A multifaceted research design was developed, drawing on information from a range of sources:

- (a) a literature analysis examining the concepts addressed in the key research questions, forming the conceptual foundation for this strand of the study;
- (b) 10 country case studies (covering Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland) to explore the use of learning outcomes in assessment, including:
  - (i) desk research in the national languages of the 10 countries studied,
  - (ii) scoping interviews with key VET stakeholders at the national level,
  - (iii) site visits to VET providers (including interviews with school managers, focus groups with VET teachers and trainers, observations and focus groups or interviews with VET learners);
- (c) an online survey of VET practitioners, targeting VET teachers, in-company trainers, heads of VET providers and curriculum coordinators.

In each of the countries, only a few VET providers have been visited due to practical time constraints. Hence, the views and experiences described are of an exploratory nature and, while they provide indicative views, they cannot be seen as representative of national practices.

### **Analytical framework**

The analytical framework (as demonstrated in Figure 1), developed for the overall project, was adapted to the thematic focus of this study. It builds on three key perspectives. The first perspective concerns the logical steps required to move from intended to achieved learning outcomes. This perspective helps to define learning outcomes and operationalise their implications for their use in teaching, training, learning and assessment practice. The second perspective maps the levels – macro, meso and micro – at which actions are (or may be) taken to implement the learning-outcomes-based approach in assessment practices. Finally, the third perspective discusses the stakeholders involved and the key aspects of processes taking place at these three levels in relation to the use of learning outcomes in assessment in initial vocational education and training.

Figure 1. **Analytical framework**

Source: Authors.

## Key findings

### **Role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment**

Learning outcomes are a core element of national assessment regulations in all the countries studied. Most countries define assessment criteria at the national level alongside intended learning outcomes, with the learning outcomes serving as points of reference for summative assessments, whether for modules or for qualifications. However, in Ireland, the Netherlands and Slovenia, assessment criteria are not provided separately at the national level, leaving their development to teachers or teacher collectives. Formative assessment is less regulated; in some cases, teachers and trainers tend to use the more broadly formulated intended learning outcomes in assessments with formative functions (i.e. they are used for

supporting the learning process) but focus on more detailed assessment criteria when preparing students for summative exams.

Overall, the use of learning outcomes in VET assessments is widely valued by teachers and trainers, as learning outcomes help to set clear goals, making assessments and grading more transparent. Findings suggest that while formative assessment is recognised as valuable it could be strengthened, along with learner self-assessment and peer assessment. However, students' perception of formative assessment depends on their motivation and attitude to learning, and the broader educational culture, including the extent to which learner-centred pedagogies are implemented.

### **Role of assessment criteria in the teaching and learning process**

Assessment criteria, further detailing intended learning outcomes, play a crucial role in shaping the teaching and learning process, though their influence depends on how they are written and applied. In many countries, assessment criteria are formulated using action verbs and specific objects to ensure that they are observable and measurable. In some cases, broader formulations are used that do not refer to an observable action. These statements leave room for interpretation and offer flexibility on how to conduct assessment, but can lead to inconsistent assessments.

Teachers and trainers generally value assessment criteria for clarifying expectations for learners and supporting the evaluation of learners. However, in the teaching and learning process, teachers and trainers tend to use more broadly formulated intended learning outcomes, as these allow for more flexibility and greater openness for further, unplanned learning outcomes. From a learner's perspective, assessment criteria are often seen as a tool for exam preparation, as they help clarify teachers' expectations and key learning priorities. In some countries, learners indicated problems in understanding the criteria, stating that they were unfamiliar with the terminology and that the language was complex and not user-friendly.

### **Alignment of intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment results**

The study highlights the importance of aligning intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and achieved outcomes, which most countries ensure through national regulations and quality assurance mechanisms. Assessment criteria often act as a bridge between intended and achieved learning outcomes, but only in a few cases are they formulated for different achievement levels (i.e.

they are rarely written in a way that distinguishes between various degrees of performance or success).

Teachers and trainers recognise the importance of aligning learning outcomes with assessment criteria to support lesson planning and student evaluation. However, challenges arise when learning outcomes are too vague, requiring teachers to fill in the gaps. Students often struggle to understand the link between assessment criteria and broader competences, sometimes being more familiar with assessment criteria than with the intended learning outcomes. When assessment processes are documented and shared with learners, awareness of this alignment improves, though perceptions still vary, for example based on learning pathways and subjects.

### **Influence of the learning context on assessment**

The study highlights that learning outcomes provide flexibility in assessment approaches, allowing teachers and trainers to adapt to different vocational contexts. While assessments vary based on their nature (formative or summative), the occupational field, the types of learning outcomes being assessed and the intended use of assessment results have a stronger influence on assessment methods than the context in which the learning outcomes are acquired. In many cases, learning outcomes are assessed in the same environment where they are acquired, though this is not always possible.

In some countries, learning outcomes and assessment processes are closely linked to workplace requirements, ensuring that assessments align with real job tasks. Final examinations often require students to demonstrate their competences through complex practical tasks, regardless of where the skills are acquired. In addition, assessments at VET institutions often involve practical evaluations conducted in laboratories and workshops, designed to simulate real-world scenarios. The study also explored the impact of online and hybrid learning on assessment practices, but found limited evidence of the use of digital tools in the assessments applied in the VET institutions visited.

### **Assessing transversal skills and competences**

The study analysed how transversal skills and competences are addressed and assessed and found significant differences between the VET practices studied. While assessment criteria for these skills and competences are lacking in some country case studies, they may be developed and assessed implicitly through group work or oral presentations or may not be assessed at all. In some cases, transversal skills and competences may also be explicitly addressed in the assessment criteria and assessed separately from occupational competences, or

integrated into broader competence assessments. Transversal competences are emphasised particularly in the context of work-based learning, and some enterprises have developed indicators and tools to assess them. However, these competences are not always made explicit, leading to variability and inconsistencies in whether and how they are assessed.

The learners interviewed were not always familiar with the concept of transversal competences, and some found them difficult to assess and preferred informal recognition by teachers rather than formal evaluation. Additionally, the absence of predefined assessment criteria often creates uncertainty, particularly when transversal and occupational skills are assessed together.

## Policy recommendations

The success factors for the use of learning outcomes in assessment cannot be considered completely in isolation from the use of learning outcomes in VET in general, particularly for teaching/training and learning at the VET provider level (Cedefop, 2025) or in work-based learning environments (Cedefop, forthcoming). In some countries, this approach has already been part of daily practice for many years and this naturally has an influence on assessment practices and the use of learning outcomes. This should be considered in relation to the policy recommendations for improving the use of learning outcomes in assessments, developed based on the data collected and the lessons learned.

These recommendations relate to four aspects.

- (a) **Improving the clarity and relevance of assessment criteria.** Effective formulation of intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria is crucial for learners, teachers, trainers and assessors to provide clarity and avoid technical or bureaucratic language. Nationally defined criteria help to ensure consistency across VET providers, while flexibility in assessment methods and interpretation is key to catering for the individual needs of learners. Criteria that are too rigid can hinder understanding and adaptability, especially in work-based learning contexts. Adapting assessments to real-life workplace conditions requires active collaboration with labour market stakeholders and regular updates. To remain relevant, assessment criteria must evolve with changing occupational and transversal competence requirements.
- (b) **Strengthening assessment methods and practices.** Thoughtful selection and design of assessments is essential to balance thoroughness and feasibility. This also relates, for example, to weighing up the pros and cons of modular and integrated forms of assessment. Modular assessment offers flexibility but risks fragmenting competences and losing relevance in the

- workplace. Integrating assessments across multiple learning outcomes can reduce burden and improve relevance, but comprehensive assessments can become complex and risk overlooking certain skills. Overall, avoiding assessment overload and diversifying methods helps to maintain learners' engagement and quality of learning. Structured feedback, clear guidelines and continuous refinement of assessment practices are essential to keep pace with the evolving needs of the industry and digital learning environments.
- (c) **Enhancing learner-centredness.** Case studies highlight the need for clear communication and alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria to improve learners' engagement and understanding. Assessment should be a continuous, transparent process that helps learners to monitor their progress and identify gaps in their learning, rather than focusing on achieving the minimum requirements necessary to pass. Learner-centred approaches – such as self-assessment and peer assessment, individualised learning plans and continuous feedback – encourage reflective learning and meaningful engagement. Involving students in the design of assessment processes promotes ownership and supports the development of wider competences. Formative assessment and structured feedback, particularly in work-based learning, play a crucial role in guiding learners' progress and ensuring alignment with intended learning outcomes.
- (d) **Strengthening the assessment competences of and support for VET teachers and trainers.** The assessment competences of teachers, trainers and assessors are crucial for effective, fair and learner-centred assessment practices. Many educators, especially those trained before the shift towards competence-based approaches, need support in using learner-centred methods and in assessing complex or transversal skills. Structured training, peer collaboration and access to resources can increase assessors' confidence and the consistency of assessment. Collaboration within and between VET providers, including the development and sharing of common tools and professional dialogue, helps to harmonise procedures and improve the quality of assessment. In work-based learning, close cooperation between VET teachers and workplace trainers and structured coordination between trainers and learners improves support, fairness and the achievement of intended learning outcomes.

## Chapter 1.

# Introduction

### 1.1. Context and purpose of the study

In recent decades, the shift towards learning-outcomes-based approaches in education and in vocational education and training (VET) has gained significant attention at the national and international levels. This paradigm, which emphasises what learners are expected to know, understand and be able to do upon completion of a learning process, has been widely endorsed as a means to enhance the coherence, transparency and comparability of qualifications and learning programmes (Cedefop, 2016, 2022a, 2024b, 2024c).

Within VET, where the link between learning and occupational performance is particularly direct, the adoption of learning-outcomes-based approaches is seen as a way to ensure that programmes and qualifications respond better to labour market needs while also supporting learners' mobility and permeability and the recognition of competences (Cedefop, 2024c).

Alignment between intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessment approaches is crucial for the successful implementation of learning-outcomes-based approaches. The rationale behind this alignment is both pedagogical and systemic. Coherence between intended learning outcomes, assessment practices and pedagogical theories, strategies and methods (Cedefop, 2024a) supports more meaningful and effective learning processes, enabling teachers and trainers in VET to structure content delivery in ways that are responsive to the desired learning goals, and providing learners with clear expectations regarding their performance. For stakeholders such as teachers and trainers, learners, employers and quality assurance bodies, the alignment fosters transparency and facilitates the more consistent assessment of learning achievements across diverse educational contexts (European Commission, 2011).

Assessment serves as the principal mechanism through which achieved learning outcomes are appraised against the intended learning outcomes. In theory, outcomes-based assessment should entail a deliberate alignment with the knowledge, skills and competences articulated in qualification or programme specifications. However, despite growing policy attention and institutional investment in learning-outcomes-based approaches, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the actual impact of this approach on assessment practices.

Recognising this gap, this exploratory study aims to shed light on how representatives of VET providers, teachers and trainers interpret and implement outcomes-based assessment, and the challenges they face. It also aims to explore how learners perceive the use of learning outcomes in assessment. In addition, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how learning outcomes can be operationalised in ways that promote learner-centred approaches and more valid, reliable and meaningful forms of student assessment. The findings are expected to inform both policy development and practical improvements in curriculum design, teaching and training practices, and assessment methodology.

## 1.2. Overview

This publication was prepared as part of the Cedefop project '[The shift to learning outcomes: Rhetoric or reality?](#)', which maps and analyses the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes. The research focuses on initial vocational education and training (IVET), in schools and in workplaces, and seeks to understand the factors influencing the use of learning outcomes in actual teaching, learning and assessment processes.

The study covers four distinct themes over the course of three years.

- (a) The influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools (Cedefop, 2024a). It explores the influence of the learning-outcomes-based approach on pedagogical theory and the training of VET teachers and trainers, that is, how the learning-outcomes-based approach is embedded in and aligns with learning theories that are addressed in the training of VET teachers and trainers. More specifically, it looks at how the learning-outcomes-based approach is presented to VET teachers and trainers, whether and how such presentation is framed by national policies and administrative arrangements, and how it shapes the actual teaching, learning and assessment practices in VET.
- (b) The influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices (in school – based programmes) (Cedefop, 2025). This theme covers the application of learning outcomes specified in curricula in teaching, who is responsible for applying these outcomes, whether the use of learning outcomes is influenced by the teaching (and learning) environment, and what resources the shift to learning outcomes requires, how different ways of formulating learning outcomes can lead to conflicting teaching practices and whether students are aware of the learning-outcomes-based approach.

- (c) The influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on company training (as part of apprenticeship programmes that takes place in companies) (Cedefop, forthcoming). The focus in this strand is on whether and how externally imposed learning outcomes influence interactions between VET teachers, trainers (including in-company trainers), work colleagues and trainees; how teachers/trainers interpret learning outcomes and adapt them to their workplace; and the overall impact of learning outcomes on workplace learning.
- (d) The influence of the learning-outcomes-based approach on learner assessment. This theme is covered in this publication.

These four thematic strands of the study are covered in four publications, which will be followed by a fifth and final publication aiming to develop suggestions/lessons for the way forward to support VET practitioners and policymakers in addressing future challenges and opportunities in this area.

This report focuses on the fourth theme: the influence of learning outcomes on assessment. The report is structured as follows.

- (a) Chapter 2 presents the research approach, including the main objectives and research questions, the analytical framework and the methodology applied.
- (b) Chapter 3 examines the research questions and details the key concepts used.
- (c) Chapter 4 presents the national approaches to the use of learning outcomes in assessment in IVET in the 10 countries covered by this report.
- (d) Chapters 5–7 discuss the results of empirical investigations in the 10 countries, particularly, results from the site visits conducted. The chapters refer to the perspectives and practices of the VET providers / schools visited (Chapter 5), the perspectives of teachers and trainers (Chapter 6) and the perspectives of learners (Chapter 7).
- (e) Chapter 8 reflects on the data gathered and analysed and how they help to answer the key research questions. The chapter also outlines recommendations for improving the use of learning outcomes in assessment.

## Chapter 2.

# Research approach

### 2.1. Main objectives and research questions

The main objective of this study is to map and analyse how the shift to learning outcomes influences both formative and summative forms of assessment in IVET. The key research questions underpinning this study are presented in Box 1.

#### Box 1. Key research questions

- (a) What is the relationship between curriculum statements/intentions (intended learning outcomes), assessment processes and assessment results (achieved learning outcomes)?
  - (i) To what extent are these aligned and to what extent do they complement each other?
- (b) To what extent is the teaching and learning process informed and/or steered by assessment criteria?
- (c) What are the roles of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessments?
- (d) What is the influence of online and hybrid teaching and learning processes on assessment practices?
  - (i) To what extent does the context in which learning outcomes are acquired (classroom, company, etc.) influence assessment?
- (e) How are complex learning outcomes, notably transversal skills and competences, addressed and assessed?

*Source: Cedefop.*

### 2.2. Methodology

The study used a variety of sources and methods to help answer the key research questions and to collect evidence for the analysis of the influence of learning outcomes on assessment in IVET.

As a first step, the overall analytical framework of this project – introduced by Cedefop (2024a) – was adapted to the study on hand (see Section 2.3) and the concepts addressed in the key research questions were operationalised based on literature analysis (see Chapter 1). The main sources of information for this report are the case studies conducted in Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. The case studies built on the

findings and results from data collection activities in these 10 countries from other strands of this project, including the following:

- (a) The case studies built on desk research on the learning-outcomes-based approaches implemented in IVET in the country.
- (b) They also explored the research gained from interviews with key VET stakeholders (e.g. representatives of national educational authorities, teacher/training educational institutions and teacher associations).
- (c) They built on the findings from visits to VET providers / schools, conducted as part of the second strand of the study (Cedefop, 2025). The strand of the study that focused on the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices already included some relevant information related to points of reference used for (formative) assessments and assessment practices in school-based settings.
- (d) Finally, the case studies built on research from visits to companies' sites, conducted as part of the third theme (Cedefop, forthcoming). The strand of the study focusing on the use of learning outcomes in work-based learning was conducted in parallel to the strand covered by this report, and the site visits for both strands were closely coordinated. Thus, the site visits conducted as part of the third strand of the study could also be used to gather information on assessments conducted in work-based learning settings.

For the specific case studies of this strand, a mixed-methods approach was applied, including <sup>(1)</sup>:

- (a) desk research analysing national-level policy documents and regulations that govern assessments and describe how they are carried out in the Member State;
- (b) semi-structured interviews with national-level authorities responsible for VET and semi-structured interviews with other stakeholders (e.g. bodies responsible for (external) assessment in VET) to further explore policies, regulations and strategies for using learning outcomes in assessment;
- (c) site visits to two VET providers to conduct interviews (with management representatives) and gather observations (if possible) and follow-up reflections from teachers/trainers/assessors and learners (through individual or group interviews or focus groups).

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<sup>(1)</sup> To support data collection, research tools (guidance notes, case study templates) were developed and a briefing session for the country experts was conducted. The questions for the interviews were not pre-formulated but had to be operationalised by the country researchers and adapted to the respective target group. The basis for this was a predefined list of aspects to be covered in the case study. These can be found in Annex 1. Annex 2 presents the number of VET providers visited and the number of individuals consulted (individual and group interviews).

Another source considered for this report is a survey on learning outcomes (conducted from June to December 2023), which targeted VET teachers and trainers <sup>(2)</sup>, school principals and curriculum coordinators in the 10 countries. The survey was distributed through various channels, including through Cedefop's website, social media, European VET provider associations, national stakeholders and direct contact with VET providers. It was available in 10 languages. In total, 850 VET professionals responded to the survey across the 10 countries. This survey also included questions related to assessment practices, and the results are presented in the relevant chapters (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

Qualitative data gathered from observations, interviews and focus groups (presented in the case study reports) were analysed using thematic analysis. The themes were identified deductively (Braun and Clarke, 2006), as the data coding was guided by pre-existing theoretical concepts (as discussed in Section 2.3 and Chapter 1). Overall, the case studies were based on pre-defined research questions relating to the use of learning outcomes in assessment. They follow the same structure and, to some extent, use the same subject headings, which facilitated analysis and comparison across countries. However, to better consolidate related information, additional subsections have been used in some cases (which differ across the case studies). The findings of the case studies were summarised using a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Quantitative data from the cross-cutting survey were analysed using descriptive statistics (mainly frequencies), as the small sample sizes of most of the case studies did not allow the application of cross-tabulation and inferential statistics.

### 2.3. Analytical framework

To guide data collection and data analysis across all themes of the study 'The shift to learning outcomes: Rhetoric or reality?', a detailed analytical framework was developed (see Figure 2), illustrating the learning outcomes 'chain' (Cedefop, 2024a, p. 115). The analytical framework builds on three key perspectives; each is discussed in more detail in the sections below.

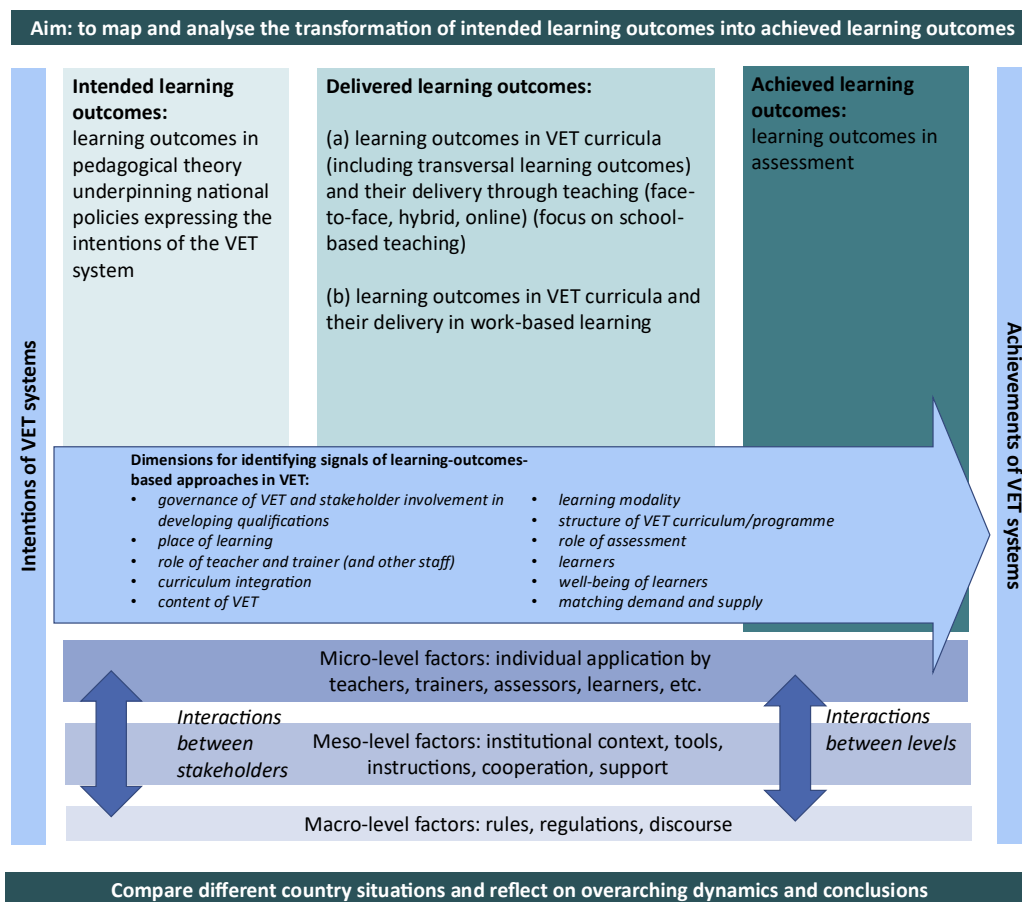
- (a) The first perspective concerns the logical steps required to get from intended to achieved learning outcomes. This perspective helps to define learning

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<sup>(2)</sup> Unlike the second theme of this study (Cedefop, 2025), which focuses solely on school-based programmes, and the third theme (Cedefop, forthcoming), which focuses solely on work-based programmes, the sample used here includes VET teachers and trainers working in the context of both school-based learning and work-based learning.

- outcomes and operationalise what their use in teaching, training, learning and assessment practice implies.
- (b) The second perspective maps the levels at which actions are (or may be) taken to implement the learning-outcomes-based approach. These three levels – macro, meso and micro – are discussed further below.
  - (c) Finally, the third perspective discusses the stakeholders involved and the key aspects of processes taking place at these three levels in relation to the use of learning outcomes in assessment in IVET.

Figure 2. **Overarching analytical framework of the study**



Source: Authors.

### **2.3.1. From intended to achieved learning outcomes, and the use of learning outcomes in practice**

Intended learning outcomes are written statements and expressions of intentions / desired targets of learning. They describe what learners are 'expected to know and be able to do and understand having completed a learning sequence, a module, a programme or a qualification' (Cedefop, 2022a, p. 18). Such statements are used in qualifications frameworks, qualification standards and curricula. Intended learning outcomes are 'delivered' in teaching and learning processes and assessed to confirm achievements. Thus, achieved learning outcomes are the outcomes that an individual learner demonstrates at the end of a learning process. These outcomes are determined as part of student assessment. They may or may not fully align with the intended outcomes, depending on factors like teaching effectiveness, learner engagement and assessment methods.

This part of the study focuses on the use and role of learning outcomes in (formative and summative) assessment, but is closely linked to other parts of the overall study, as it addresses the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and achieved learning outcomes. It also explores the influence of the teaching and learning context (school-based or work-based) and format (online, hybrid) on assessment practices, the extent to which the teaching and learning process is informed and/or steered by assessment criteria and how complex learning outcomes, notably transversal skills and competences, are addressed in assessment.

In the first part of the study (Cedefop, 2024a), a table providing signals of the use of learning-outcomes-based approaches in VET <sup>(3)</sup> was developed, with the 'role of assessment' included as a dimension. These signals are presented in Box 2.

#### **Box 2. Role of assessment and implications of using a learning-outcomes-based approach**

The key role of assessment is to determine to what extent the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Using a learning outcomes approach allows collecting evidence for comparing intended learning outcomes with the performance of a learner.

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<sup>(3)</sup> The table with signals is also included in Cedefop (2025) and Cedefop (forthcoming). In addition to the role of assessment, this table includes the following dimensions: 'governance of VET and stakeholder involvement in developing qualifications and delivering VET', 'place of learning', 'role of a teacher and trainer (and other staff)', 'role of a learner', 'curriculum integration and content of VET', 'learning modality', 'structure of VET curriculum/programme', 'inclusion', 'well-being of learners' and 'matching demand and supply'.

Assessment criteria provide a reference point for this judgement (learning outcomes approaches also imply greater use of criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced measures). Assessment results allow judgements on an individual's progress and achievement of learning goals. Thus, formative and summative assessment forms can be better combined (Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012) and learner's self-assessment is encouraged. As the intended learning outcomes are often more comprehensive and include transversal skills and competences, assessment is also carried out more comprehensively, measuring different types of learning outcomes. Therefore, skills demonstrations in the work context or other forms of practice-based assessment methods such as work assignments, portfolios or learning diaries are increasingly used.

Source: Cedefop, 2024a.

### **2.3.2. Levels at which actions are taken to implement the learning-outcomes-based approach in assessment**

This section discusses the meaning of these levels for this strand of the overall study:

- (a) At the micro level, the focus will be on the actual assessment practice, the context of assessment, the tools and instruments of assessment and the specific methods and assessment criteria used. The study explores the perspective of teachers/trainers, assessors and the learners being assessed.
- (b) At the same time, teachers/trainers work in the context of their VET institution (the meso level), which can also have a significant influence on how assessments are conducted. The precise nature and extent of this influence is likely to vary substantially according to how much general autonomy exists for VET providers within national/regional administrative arrangements. These arrangements determine, for example, how much 'room for manoeuvre' school managers and teachers/trainers/assessors have in conducting assessments (including the choice of assessment methods and the possibility to interpret assessment criteria). The spread of online and hybrid forms of assessment is also a factor and is taken into account.
- (c) Finally, at the macro level, the national/regional regulations, policies, practices and administrative arrangements that frame and shape assessments based on learning outcomes need to be examined. It is at this level that assessment approaches and criteria might be designed for use by teachers and trainers at a VET provider or in standardised exams (including external examinations designed or conducted by national assessment centres).

The approach of this study puts both VET teachers/trainers and learners at the heart of the analysis. This is because it is at the micro level where the use and influence of learning outcomes on assessment practices ultimately plays out, influenced by processes and structures at the level of the VET provider and at the level of both national and regional policymaking. In this sense, since teachers,

trainers, assessors and learners are at the centre of the analysis, the meso and macro levels are intended to frame and help explain what can be observed at the micro level.

### 2.3.3. Stakeholders involved and key aspects

In terms of stakeholders, assessment processes (including the development of assessment specifications and criteria) may involve VET teachers or trainers, VET providers, learners, and company or social partner representatives and qualification authorities. In order to analyse the influence of learning outcomes in assessment, certain aspects and stakeholders involved need to be distinguished; these are shown in Figure 3 and explained in more detail below.

Figure 3. Stakeholders involved and key processes



Source: Authors.

- (a) **Assessment criteria.** The assessment standards specify the requirements the candidate (in our case, the IVET learner) needs to meet, and the assessment criteria are used to determine the extent to which they have been met. They ideally relate to the intended learning outcomes as indicated for a qualification (or a part of it) or a specific unit of learning. They can also provide information on how a learning achievement is to be graded by expressing the levels of complexity and performance/mastery at which learning outcomes can be achieved. Depending on the purpose of the assessment and the degree of autonomy of VET providers, the assessment criteria may be set at the national level or they may be developed at the level of the VET provider or even by the

- teacher or trainer responsible for a particular unit of learning. An important aspect, however, is that they are understood by and are meaningful for the learners.
- (b) Purpose of assessment. Formative or summative assessment. Assessment criteria based on learning outcomes can be used for summative assessment, that is, to present a summary of students' learning and performance (mastery of tasks over a period) against a set of criteria. However, they can also be used as reference point for formative assessment during teaching/training activities.
  - (c) Scope/focus/content of assessment. An important aspect of the assessment process is the question of what is assessed. This refers to the types of learning outcomes (e.g. occupation-specific theoretical knowledge, occupation-specific practical knowledge/skills, general knowledge and transversal competences) and the contexts in which they have been acquired (e.g. online and hybrid teaching and learning processes, classroom settings, company settings).
  - (d) Assessment methods and tools. Evidence of learning achievements can be collected from several sources using various methods and tools. Their selection is determined by the purpose and focus of the assessment and, depending on this, different stakeholders may also be involved in their development and application.
  - (e) Assessment context and setting. In IVET, assessment may take place in the VET provider/school environment (in classrooms, workshops, laboratories, dedicated practical training centres that operate as simulated workplaces, etc.), in companies or in other workplaces. Moreover, it can take place face-to-face or online using digital tools, and in individual or group settings. In addition, assessment may be administered by dedicated assessment or examination centres.
  - (f) Assessors. The stakeholders involved in the actual assessment process might differ depending on the purpose of assessment, the focus of assessment (what is assessed), the methods and tools used and the assessment context and setting. For example, trainers or company representatives may be involved in assessing learning outcomes obtained in the workplace, or in formative assessment approaches learners themselves or their peer group may be involved in evaluating their performance. Formative assessment is usually conducted by VET teachers or trainers, whereas summative assessment can be conducted either by VET teachers or trainers in their role as assessors or by external assessors (e.g. in the case of standardised external examinations).

## Chapter 3.

# Literature review on the use of learning outcomes in assessment

### 3.1. Preliminary remarks

This chapter reflects on the key concepts underpinning the research questions for this study, including the concept of ‘alignment’, the role of assessment criteria, the use of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment, the influence of the context in which learning outcomes are acquired on assessment practices (e.g. work-based and practice-oriented learning, online or hybrid teaching and digital learning) and the assessment of complex learning outcomes, notably transversal skills and competences. It builds on and further complements the analyses and discussions related to assessment in IVET conducted as part of the [Future of VET project](#) (Cedefop, 2022b). The section on assessment in the revised Cedefop handbook on learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2022a) was also considered in this reflection. Before introducing these key concepts, we would like to briefly present our understanding of assessment and of the relationship between learning outcomes and competences.

First, we would like to point out that the following definition for assessment is used for the purpose of this study: ‘Assessment is understood as the process of establishing the extent to which a learner has attained particular knowledge, skills and competences against criteria such as learning outcomes or standards of competence’ (Cedefop, 2015, p. 21).

The goal of assessment in VET is to give feedback or make summative judgments on whether VET learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes, that is, the knowledge, skills and attitudes defined in curricula or other reference documents. Assessments identify gaps between learners’ understanding and their learning goals, enabling the adjustment of teaching, training and learning to help close those gaps.

The terms ‘learning outcomes’ and ‘competences’ are often used in the same discourse, but they can be clearly distinguished from one another. According to Mulder and Winterton (2017), competence refers to a person’s ability to perform a task effectively, in particular playing a role or completing a task or mission, or achieving a measurable outcome. It can be understood as comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes, and as a dynamic concept for taking action. The relationship between learning outcomes and competences is addressed in the European handbook on learning outcomes: ‘The focus on actually achieved learning

outcomes brings in the concept of competence, defined by Cedefop as the “ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, training, work or professional development)” (Cedefop, 2014, p. 47)’ (Cedefop, 2022a, p. 58). This indicates that competences ‘can be understood as actually achieved learning outcomes, validated through the ability of the learner autonomously to apply knowledge and skills in practice, in society and at work. Learning outcomes are validated by their relationship to competences (Cedefop, 2012, p. 35)’ (Cedefop, 2022a, p. 58). In this context, the assessment of learners’ competences is used to determine the extent to which learners can demonstrate mastery of the practical knowledge and skills and essential abilities required to perform tasks according to the stipulated (in curricula or other reference documents) standards in VET.

As already shown in the reports from the first strands of the overall study, in some countries learning outcomes are closely linked with the concept of competences, or the term ‘competence’ is a substitute for the term ‘learning outcomes’ (Cedefop, 2024a, p. 37). While these terms may be defined and interpreted differently in different countries and may have different theoretical underpinnings, leading to some confusion when operating internationally, we must acknowledge that these terms are used interchangeably in some of our case study countries (Cedefop, 2024a) <sup>(4)</sup>. When describing and analysing the approaches of the individual countries, we will use the English translations of the national terms as much as possible <sup>(5)</sup>. In our study, these competence-based approaches are regarded as examples of learning-outcomes-based approaches, as they also illustrate the shift from input to output orientation in VET (Cedefop, 2025).

### 3.2. The concept of alignment

At the outset, the following components of the transformative journey of learning outcomes, from identifying learning expectations to confirming the achievement of learning goals, need to be clearly defined. They are also key elements that need to be aligned.

- (a) Intended learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are increasingly used in qualifications and curricula to describe what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a learning process.

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<sup>(4)</sup> For further details on the use of both concepts in the national context of how the case study countries understand references to competences and competence-based approaches, please consult the overview table in Cedefop, 2024a, p. 37–39.

<sup>(5)</sup> For discussions on different notions and theoretical foundations of the competence concept see, for example, Le Deist and Winterton (2005) or Brockmann et al. (2008).

- (b) Delivery of learning outcomes. To ensure alignment, the teaching and learning process must take into account the intended learning outcomes. Assessment should be an integral part of this process and used as a means of supporting learning (formative assessment – see Section 3.4). It can also be organised separated from this process (which is usually the case with summative assessment). The latter also enables, for example, the validation of non-formal and informal learning or the recognition of prior learning experiences in general.
- (c) Assessment criteria. These criteria provide a reference point for this evaluation and indicate the basis on which learners are assessed to determine whether they have achieved the relevant learning outcomes, that is, they are specified to allow learners' performance to be judged (showing degrees of success or failure).
- (d) Assessment process. The assessment process is informed by the assessment criteria and includes the collection of evidence related to achieved learning outcomes; assessment results show the individual's progress and achievement of the learning goals. A key requirement is that the assessment measures what it is intended to measure to allow assessors to make appropriate inferences about students' learning.
- (e) Achieved learning outcomes. One of the functions of assessment is to determine to what extent these intended learning outcomes have been achieved.

The alignment of all components of the teaching and learning process is generally considered an essential part of successful learning-outcomes-based learning offers. This means that intended learning outcomes should not only be linked with delivery (teaching and learning, sometimes also called the enacted curriculum) but also with the other components of the process. The added value of the use of learning outcomes can only be realised if they are reflected consistently in the assessment process (e.g. if they are mirrored in the assessment tasks and criteria that are used to verify the learning achievements) and, finally, if they are in line with the learning outcomes to be achieved. This alignment (see, for example, Baker, 2004) ensures that the form of assessment and the assessment tasks provide another way to express or mirror the intended learning outcomes (they specify how they 'are elicited and deployed in context' (Biggs & Tang, 2008). Alignment is also seen as a method of increasing transparency for all stakeholders and of supporting meaningful and effective learning. Biggs (2003) coined the term 'constructive alignment' to characterise such an approach, which is also a basis for ensuring the validity of assessments.

The validity of assessment methods and instruments, a crucial feature of assessment approaches, is based on whether they measure the intended learning outcomes in an appropriate way, and whether the evidence fully supports the assessment. A distinction can be made between content validity and construct validity (Cedefop, 2022b, p. 47).

- (a) Content validity refers to the extent to which the skills and knowledge covered by the assessment method and tool constitute a representative sample of the intended learning outcomes; it ensures that appropriate content is assessed, a phenomenon that can directly and unambiguously be observed.
- (b) Construct validity refers to the extent to which certain psychological attributes, or constructs, that are not observable as such, are represented by performance in the assessment and entails gathering evidence to determine whether the assessment measures the attributes it is intended to measure or whether it is unintentionally influenced by other factors. Thus, construct validity ensures that knowledge, skills and competences that should be assessed are assessed, measuring performance indirectly and in relation to a theoretically constructed reference.

Pellegrino et al. (2016, p. 4) also use the term ‘instructional validity’ to describe ‘the extent to which an assessment is aligned with curriculum and instruction, including students’ opportunities to learn, as well as how it supports teaching practice by providing valuable and timely instruction related information.’

Particularly in high-stakes summative assessments, validity always goes hand in hand with reliability (and reliability would therefore also affect alignment), which indicates the extent to which assessment results are reproducible, stable and consistent (this is less of an issue with formative assessments embedded in the teaching and learning process). Validity and reliability are mutually dependent (see, for example, Cedefop, 2022b; Gupta, 2023) but cannot automatically be achieved to the same extent at the same time: sometimes a compromise has to be made and strengthening one may sometimes weaken the other principle. Therefore, both concepts should be considered together when designing high-stakes assessments in VET to ensure that they effectively support learning outcomes. This includes the establishment of clear assessment criteria, appropriate training of assessors (to be sure they have the same understanding of standards to be attained and of assessment criteria) and the use of different assessment methods to obtain a comprehensive picture of learners’ competences.

These principles must be reflected in relation to the learning outcomes to be assessed (e.g. whether they are observable or not) and the assessment method and instrument (e.g. whether oral or written examinations or multiple-choice tests are appropriate to capture the intended learning outcomes to be assessed or

whether other forms, such as demonstration of skills in the work environment, need to be used).

It should also be borne in mind that there is no linear or self-evident process between the development of statements of intended learning outcomes and the transformation of these intentions into achieved learning outcomes. This process requires interventions at several levels (i.e. at the national, regional, institutional or programme level), the involvement of different institutions, translation into different instruments and, finally, interpretation by different people (including assessors and learners) <sup>(6)</sup>. At all stages of this process, the intentions behind written statements on learning can get lost or may be interpreted differently, which can lead to different expectations regarding the assessment process and ultimately to the achievement of different learning outcomes.

The results of the VET provider survey conducted as part of the [Future of VET study](#) (Cedefop, 2022b; Scarpato and Hogarth, 2023) indicate – at least to some extent – a coherence between intended learning outcomes, delivery and assessment in European VET systems. However, previous studies have also shown that such coherence – even if highlighted in policy documents – may still sometimes be absent in practice. On the one hand, learning outcomes integrated into curricula are sometimes more comprehensive and also include, for example, transversal skills and competences, while existing assessment processes often do not measure all types of learning outcomes equally. On the other hand, there can be inconsistencies between learning outcomes included in VET programmes (which can be written in a broad way) and the granularity of the assessment of competences at the central level (which can be much more detailed, and/or very focused on technical knowledge), as observed in the case of Lithuania (see Cedefop, 2025).

Another aspect to be considered in this context is the breadth of how intended learning outcomes are defined: are they defined broadly enough and do they provide room for interpretation so that they, along with the assessment criteria, can be adapted to the needs of specific target groups, such as learners with additional support needs, for example those with physical disabilities (see Cedefop, 2022b, p. 115)? And are the intended learning outcomes formulated in a way that provides guidance and a stimulus for learning? In general, assessment criteria tend to be more specific than intended learning outcomes. As the learning outcomes of

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<sup>(6)</sup> The issue of interpretation of assessment outcomes is more pertinent to open assessment questions, that is, closed multiple-choice examinations are easy to interpret and don't require any effort to develop a shared meaning, which is why they are important for ensuring reliability. However, to ensure the validity of assessment in VET, other forms of assessment, such as skills demonstrations in the workplace or other assignments close to the workplace, are also important.

qualifications in IVET, and in particular the assessment criteria, are often also a reference point for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, particular attention needs to be paid to how they are formulated. This includes reflection on whether they show an appropriate balance between specificity and breadth to support the validation of individual learning achievements from outside the formal system.

Finally, a rule of assessment is that no single assessment can measure everything; assessments need to take varied formats and to be carried out over time. However, there are also certain limitations to the extent to which assessment can measure the intended learning outcomes if they are formulated in a very broad and future-oriented way, focusing on what is expected from a graduate at the future workplace: 'Assessment can never completely verify a candidate's ability to work as a professional. This would only be possible if assessment referred to a long-term work period carried out by the applicant under real work conditions, and this would imply an anticipation of professional life that, in practical terms, cannot be provided. Considered under this aspect, assessment is always imperfect' (Psifidou, 2014, pp. 143–144).

### 3.3. The role of assessment criteria

Assessment standards, criteria, methods and tools explicitly or implicitly express the key objectives of VET, since they give 'signals about what learning is important, and what aspects of learning merit and require more time and effort' (Siarova et al., 2017, p. 34). They aim to enhance the transparency of the assessment process and can directly influence the actions of teachers and trainers, along with learners, since they may pay close attention to the explicit and implicit de facto priorities set by tests and examinations.

Assessment criteria can, for example, be used in the communication between teachers or trainers and learners, as teachers or trainers might share the criteria with learners in the form of a rubric or in presenting learning aims and how they will be judged, possibly including different performance levels. One can even say that assessment criteria make the curriculum visible or that for learners 'the assessment is the curriculum' (Ramsden, 1992), as they may focus their learning on what they expect to be assessed. This may not be an issue if there is an alignment between intended learning outcomes as stated in the curriculum and the learning outcomes mirrored in the assessment tasks and expressed in the assessment criteria, as described above. But if the key objectives of the VET curriculum do not match what is measured, then assessment may communicate different objectives.

It is also important that the intended learning outcomes reflected in the assessment criteria are not too narrowly defined and that the learning outcome statements and the assessment tasks are 'open-ended' and 'allow for unintended but desirable outcomes' (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 5, in: Cedefop, 2022a, p. 73) <sup>(7)</sup>.

This can be achieved, for example, by striking a balance between the use of assessment criteria that are formulated as observable and measurable learning outcomes (using action verbs, objectives of the verb and specifications of the depth and breadth of learning to be demonstrated and the context) but that also allow for individual and contextual adjustment. Too rigid a focus on very specifically defined assessment criteria gives teachers less flexibility in organising lessons and might even narrow down the learning process. This may be the case, for example, when teaching and learning processes are too closely focused on assessment criteria that specify the minimum requirements to be met by the candidate (Cedefop, 2022a, p. 91). Thus, by focusing too much on what is more easily measured, there is a risk of losing sight of desirable outcomes that cannot be measured (Biesta, 2009). Another risk, particularly in high-stakes assessments, is too strong a focus on a single examination, which cannot measure all intended learning outcomes across an entire curriculum.

Overall, the focus of externally defined assessment criteria (and what they intend to measure) may have either a positive or negative effect on the teaching and learning process. For example, if examinations measure discrete competences rather than higher-order thinking skills and the curricular aims are to nurture these higher-order skills, this may have some influence on the teaching process. On the contrary, teachers may use more learner-centred pedagogies (e.g. that support learners to work develop their ability to think critically and solve complex problems) if final examinations measure higher-order skills.

Another aspect to consider is the way in which assessment criteria are constructed and presented. It is not sufficient to design criteria based only on solid pedagogical theories and constructs, as they also need to be meaningful for those using them (assessors and IVET learners). For example, if assessment criteria are written in rather technical language, they might not be understood by learners. In general, it needs to be acknowledged that, at the beginning of a learning process, learners may have a limited understanding of the expectations expressed by the intended learning outcomes or the assessment criteria presented as learning outcomes. For IVET learners who are novices in the specific field or who are not yet familiar with a certain subject, assessment criteria may therefore be less informative, as they are for more experienced learners (Erikson and Erikson, 2019,

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<sup>(7)</sup> However, this depends on what is being measured. Sometimes close-ended questions (e.g. about specific, discrete bits of knowledge) are appropriate.

p. 2297). Overall, the inclusivity or learner-centeredness of assessment and the criteria used should be considered (see, for example, Tai et al., 2021).

To sum up, assessment criteria can shape the teaching and learning process, and they are essential to ensuring alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment. Conversely, their poor or incorrect use can significantly weaken this process.

The previous study on assessment in VET (Cedefop, 2022b) observed an increasing use of assessment criteria to underpin assessment processes, likely due to the shift towards learning outcomes for describing qualifications, programmes and curricula. As mentioned above, evidence collected in this previous study also shows that national-level stakeholders see the importance of the alignment between intended learning outcomes, the assessment approach and assessment criteria, and try to achieve this, for example by mapping assessment content to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

### 3.4. The role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment

Two forms, roles or functions of assessment are frequently defined<sup>(8)</sup>: assessment for learning, or formative assessment, focuses on learning processes in order to influence them positively, while assessment of learning, or summative assessment, primarily serves to record the learning outcomes achieved in accordance with the learning units used to obtain them. These two forms are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Assessment for learning or formative assessment (see Cedefop, 2022b, p. 19) is used to support learning and help learners to improve their performance (serving both pedagogical and didactic functions). It is typically part of learner-centred pedagogies, as it supports learners to have an active role and take control of their own learning process. It is used to identify the gap between what the learner understands and is able to do, on the one hand, and the intended learning outcomes, on the other hand. It can be understood as a 'two-way reflective process' between teachers/assessors and learners to promote learning and to assist individuals to learn by identifying 'learning needs and to adapt teaching accordingly' (Psifidou, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, it can include learner self-

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<sup>(8)</sup> Some researchers even distinguish a third approach towards assessment: 'assessment as learning' (see, for example, Hayward, 2015). It extends the role of formative assessment for learning and is 'a process through which pupil involvement in assessment features as an essential part of learning' (Dann, 2002, p. 153).

assessment and peer assessment. This way, formative assessment is an integrated part of the teaching and learning process (and in this sense is an important tool for the delivery of learning outcomes), but some might even call it a 'teaching modality' 'aimed at bridging learning gaps between current student knowledge and what they should know next' (Yusop et al., 2022, p. 11) and not just an assessment form. Formative assessment approaches can be much more than simply providing feedback, particularly if they involve dialogue and project design, etc., focusing on eliciting evidence of learners' understanding: 'Formative assessment is not one specific practice, but rather an approach to teaching and learning. It may be best seen as a conceptual approach – a dynamic process which teachers adapt according to conditions and needs' (Clark, 2010, in: Looney, 2017, p. 23). These approaches might also include learners' self-assessment (see, for example, Panadero et al., 2019; Van Loon, 2019) and peer assessment. Usually, formative assessment is used to provide feedback during the learning process, but it can also be conducted before the start of a learning unit to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses, or what they already know or think they know (diagnostic assessment). It can also be used to inform teachers' or trainers' interventions, to guide lesson and curriculum planning, and to inform the individualisation of instruction and learning support (e.g. to identify which learners need more time or support, which ones are already more advanced and can be given additional challenges). The use of formative assessment strongly relies on teachers' understanding of the concept and their belief in feedback (Sandal, 2023). Black and William's definition, which is perhaps the most widely cited in this field, emphasises formative assessment as a process (Black and William, 2001, in: Looney, 2017, p. 23): 'Those activities undertaken by the teacher, and by their students in assessing themselves (that is, students' assessment of their own work as well as their peers), which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes "formative assessment" when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs.' Allal and Mottier-Lopez (2005, in: Looney, 2017, p. 23) also highlight formative assessment as a process embedded in teaching and learning: 'Formative assessment is integrated in each instructional activity (rather than a discrete event on completion of a phase of teaching).'

Assessment of learning or summative assessment is usually used to present a summary of students' learning and performance (in other words, the mastery of tasks over a period). The results usually entail real consequences for the learner – such as grading, ranking or selection – and can sometimes have consequences for the VET teacher or trainer, or the VET provider (as assessment can also have regulative and quality assurance functions). The consequences for learners

usually relate to decisions regarding the student's future, such as progression to the next grade, entrance into the labour market or – based on high-stakes examinations – entrance into higher education. Assessment for qualification and certification is a specific form of summative assessment and plays an important role in IVET because of the strong signalling function of formal qualifications. For example, this kind of assessment shows potential employers or other/higher education institutions the knowledge, skills and competences that holders of a certain qualification possess. In many countries, final examinations leading to the award of qualifications are designed as 'standardised forms of assessment that are the same for all learners in terms of method, context, and assessment criteria. [...] At the other end of the spectrum are individual and flexible forms of assessment. These allow the [decision on the type of] assessment to be adapted to the individual circumstances and needs of the learners and are used especially for formative, but sometimes also for summative, purposes' (Cedefop, 2022b, p. 85).

While summative assessment is typically conducted against a predefined performance standard or a set of criteria that can be expressed in terms of learning outcomes, the reference point for formative assessment is not always so clear. However, formative assessment can use the same standards and criteria as reference points. The question is in the uses of the results – as a way to identify learning needs and next steps in the learning process – or to make a summary judgement. Formative assessments that are used to support learners in obtaining a VET qualification or in progressing in their VET programme and that consider intended learning outcomes can also be perceived as a much more student-centred approach than summative assessment. At the same time, formative assessment may also refer to learning achievements that go beyond intended learning outcomes or assessment criteria as specified for VET qualifications or programmes.

Some experts even criticise the dichotomy between formative and summative assessment: if both formative and summative assessment refer to the same standards or learning outcomes, then they are two poles of a continuum. As pointed out by Black and Wiliam (2018), any assessment can be formative or summative – it depends on how the evidence collected is used. If the assessment during the learning process is used for determining the final grade of this learning unit, it can be considered summative; if it is (also) used to give the learner feedback about what they need to improve, then it is (also) functioning formatively. Bennett (2011, p. 7) therefore underlines that performance assessment, if done well, should be able to adequately fulfil one of the two purposes primarily, but also the other secondarily. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD) has also been emphasising for years the integration and coordination of or alignment between summative and formative assessment (see, for example, Foster, 2023; Looney, 2011a, 2011b, 2017).

The previous study on assessment in VET (Cedefop, 2022b) observes a growing emphasis on formative assessment and, at the same time, a continuing strong focus on summative assessment approaches. However, it also points out that it is not always clear whether and to what extent the emphasis on formative assessment approaches and learner-centred pedagogy in general are not just political intentions or lip service, or the extent to which they have gained ground in practice.

### 3.5. The influence of the context in which learning outcomes are acquired on assessment practices

The context in which learning outcomes are acquired can strongly influence assessment practice. This is because different learning contexts 'help to develop different knowledge representations' (e.g. see Michaelis and Seeber, 2019) and have different goals, expectations and resources, and therefore require or enable different types of assessment. Similar to teaching or training and learning, assessment can take place in different contexts, such as in the classroom, in workshops, in the workplace, or in online or hybrid environments. This is illustrated by the following examples:

- (a) Classroom context. In a traditional classroom setting, assessment of learning outcomes may focus on the knowledge and skills taught in the unit of instruction and may take the form of (written or oral) exams, quizzes or projects.
- (b) Workplace context. In a company or other work environment, assessment may focus on the practical application of skills ('action competence') and take the form of performance assessments, competence assessments or portfolios.
- (c) Online context. In an online learning environment, assessment may focus on self-regulated learning and take the form of online tests, discussions or other assignments.

The following paragraphs discuss assessment in the workplace and assessment using digital tools (Cedefop, 2022b).

Work-based and practice-oriented learning is gaining prominence in IVET across many countries, as confirmed by Cedefop (2023). A key trend is the increased use of skills demonstrations in real work environments, enhancing the

authenticity of the context ('authenticity' here refers to proximity to the world of work) (see Cedefop, 2022b, p. 36) and validity of assessment, as it is about collecting evidence to support 'judging the ability of learners to be competent in a given work situation' (Psifidou, 2014, pp. 144–145) against a set of intended learning outcomes (that may or may not be complemented by assessment criteria). Feedback from supervisors during work-based learning serves as valuable formative assessment. Using workplaces as assessment sites entails advantages and disadvantages, and they may not be suitable for all occupations or high-stakes assessments, as pointed out by Deutscher and Winther (2022, p. 309). Therefore, assessments in VET should draw on both school-based and workplace contexts, as each fosters distinct yet complementary 'knowledge representations' (Michaelis & Seeber, 2019, p. 13).

The increasing use of online or hybrid teaching and digital learning is also evident in many countries and was even strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online and hybrid teaching and learning can influence assessment in various ways, with positive or negative connotations. Digital forms of assessment offer greater flexibility (including self-paced and asynchronous evaluations), accessibility and creativity through tools like online quizzes, simulations and interactive games. This also includes computer-aided instruction, which 'refers to software that delivers a personalised, interactive, adaptive learning experience to students [...]. The software can use various mediums (video, audio, games, quizzes) and can collect data from student interactions (such as, assessment results and software interactions) which can be used to select which materials should be delivered to the student' (Kaye and Ehren, 2021, p. 83). Technological advancements, including virtual and augmented reality, game-based learning and e-portfolios, support both formative and summative assessment approaches<sup>(9)</sup>. Artificial intelligence (AI), for example, is said to have the potential for detecting reading difficulties in learners; it can increase precision, efficiency and consistency in applying the same criteria across learners and can provide immediate and detailed feedback on performance. AI-based technologies can also be used to provide feedback to learners (Foster, 2023, p. 14) and can, thus, increase individualised learning<sup>(10)</sup>. These technologies enable more individualised, inclusive and engaging assessment experiences, particularly in work-based

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<sup>(9)</sup> This can be used, for example, for supporting learners in monitoring their own learning process during work-based learning (see, for example, van der Schaaf, 2019).

<sup>(10)</sup> For example, intelligent tutoring systems, computerised learning environments that incorporate AI, simulate one-to-one tutoring and help engage students in dialogue, can also be used for assessment and can adaptively identify and select the next skill for learners to work on (Wang et al., 2023).

learning. When designed ethically and effectively, digital assessments can also reduce costs and increase efficiency (European Commission, 2020, pp. 65–66).

The integration of digital technologies in learning and assessment is crucial for keeping VET systems up to date amid rapidly changing technical skills requirements. However, challenges persist, particularly regarding the reliability of such technologies, the transformation of knowledge gained into action <sup>(11)</sup>, and the bias of AI in high-stakes assessments, which can compromise exam validity. Indeed, Aloisi (2023) points to three unresolved issues regarding AI (unreliability, low explainability and bias) and discusses how each of these elements would compromise the interpretation and use of exam results (i.e. exam validity). These issues are also recognised in a recent EU regulation, the 'the Artificial Intelligence Act' (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024, p. 127). Other concerns include technical issues, lack of personal interaction <sup>(12)</sup>, unequal access to digital tools and risks to academic integrity – especially with the use of AI-based tools like ChatGPT, which can generate inaccurate content or evade plagiarism detection (Lo, 2023). While digital tools have great potential to support both educators and learners, their adoption in assessment often lags behind their use in teaching. Nonetheless, a growing shift towards technology-based assessments is evident, as highlighted by findings from the VET provider survey conducted as part of the Future of VET study (Cedefop, 2022b, p. 93; Scarpato and Hogarth, 2023, p. 19).

### 3.6. **Assessing complex learning outcomes: transversal skills and competences**

As explained above (see Section 3.1), competences are understood in our study as achieved learning outcomes applied in a given context. Complex learning outcomes refer to the ability of learners to coordinate and integrate separate aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudes in their performance and to apply them

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<sup>(11)</sup> For example, a study on the impact of virtual-reality-based learning in the social and healthcare context made the following observation: 'The results show that the VR [virtual reality] learning session trains the learners for a systematic approach. The learners achieve knowledge about systematic treatment of COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease] patients, and they develop professional self-confidence. However, they do not experience that they alter their performance in practice' (Aarkrog, 2021, p. 15).

<sup>(12)</sup> Although for some learners, digital technologies are better at providing immediate feedback (at least at a certain level), than human beings.

to different contexts. Transversal skills and competences can be linked to complex learning outcomes.

There are many different definitions and classifications related to transversal skills and competences, often developed for different purposes and contexts. For example, at the European level, the concept of 'key competences' is used for competences that are considered relevant in any kind of work, learning or life activity (European Commission, 2018). The OECD frequently uses the term '21st century competencies', referring 'to the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be successful for living and working in the 21st century global knowledge economy, to participate appropriately in an increasingly diverse society, to use new technologies effectively, and to adapt to change and uncertainty' (Foster, 2023, p. 32). In the multilingual classification European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), the following definition is proposed: 'Transversal skills and competences (TSCs) are learned and proven abilities which are commonly seen as necessary or valuable for effective action in virtually any kind of work, learning or life activity. They are "transversal" because they are not exclusively related to any particular context (job, occupation, academic discipline, civic or community engagement, occupational sector, group of occupational sectors, etc.)' (European Commission and Cedefop, 2021b, p. 4). Six categories are used for structuring these skills within the ESCO classification system: core skills and competences, thinking skills and competences, self-management skills and competences, social and communication skills and competences, physical and manual skills and competences, and life skills and competences.

Several approaches, methods and tools are used (often in combination) to capture the development of such complex competences, including performance-based assessments, such as projects, simulations or role play (see, for example, Bauer et al., 2019; Braun et al., 2019), and authentic work-based assessments, which allow for assessment in real-world contexts and provide a more nuanced picture of students' performance. Rubrics, which typically also set out criteria for assessment at different performance levels, can also be used to support performance-based assessments, to clearly define and communicate complex learning outcomes and provide a structured framework for assessing performance<sup>(13)</sup>. Another type of tool is the portfolio, which can be used to showcase student progress and evidence of learning in different areas. In addition, learner self-assessment can be an effective approach for dealing with complex learning outcomes, as it gives learners the opportunity to reflect on their own skills and competences and demonstrate their progress. Similarly, peer assessment can

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<sup>(13)</sup> For more information on the important role of language in formulating learning outcomes, see Cedefop (2022a).

be useful in this context, as students can give each other feedback on their skills and competences, providing a more comprehensive picture of their performance.

However, assessing complex competences and skills can be challenging, because transversal skills and competences are not necessarily addressed separately from occupation-specific ones in teaching and training or in assessment processes<sup>(14)</sup>. Moreover, ensuring 'construct validity', which 'measures performance indirectly and in relation to a theoretically constructed reference' (European Commission and Cedefop, 2021a, p. 5), is crucial in assessment, including of complex and, in particular, transversal skills and competences. This is because, in this case, the aim is often to 'assess an aspect (construct) that is not directly visible, but that is assumed to exist and has theorised characteristics' (Schuwirth et al., 2011, p. 228). Construct validity is achieved if, in this case, the assessment designed to measure the construct 'transversal skills' really provides evidence that it measures transversal skills. Content validity is important here as well (European Commission and Cedefop, 2021b) and can be attested if an increased emphasis on transversal skills in VET programmes and qualifications (intended learning outcomes) were reflected in assessment standards and criteria. This means that the content of an assessment has to be evaluated and checked to 'determine to what extent this content is representative of the construct of interest' (Schuwirth et al., 2011, p. 228). The careful selection of assessment tasks also plays an important role in this context: they should be relevant and adequately complex (possibly representing or mirroring the complexity of a real work situation and ensuring process-orientation)<sup>(15)</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, what needs to be considered in this context is to what extent and how teachers, trainers or assessors are trained and prepared to assess complex (non-observable) learning outcomes and which resources are actually available to define constructs for capturing such competences.

Although it is difficult to provide hard evidence to support a trend towards the greater embedding of transversal skills in curricula (see Cedefop, 2023), the VET provider survey conducted as part of the Future of VET project clearly points to a

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(14) Moreover, Foster (2023, p. 35) identifies six major interconnected assessment challenges in relation to measuring or capturing the attainment of '21st century competencies'. These six challenges are '1) defining constructs and learning progressions; 2) generalisability; 3) task and item design; 4) interpreting and scoring evidence; 5) reporting; and 6) validation.' The challenges of addressing transversal competences in validation practices and in particular in the assessment phase are addressed in the [Transval-EU project](#).

(15) The distinction between content and construct validity of assessment is also of particular relevance when assessment criteria specified in terms of learning outcomes are used for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

stronger emphasis on transversal skills in VET programmes and qualifications in many countries over the past years, and this is expected to increase in the coming years (Cedefop, 2022b, p. 66; Scarpato and Hogarth, 2023, p. 18). However, this increase appears to be more related to formative assessment, which is conducted internally at the VET provider level, and less to summative assessment or externally conducted assessment.

## Chapter 4.

# National approaches to the use of learning outcomes in assessment in IVET

### Key findings

- (a) Formative assessment is generally less regulated at the national level, allowing VET providers more flexibility in choosing assessment methods.
- (b) Summative assessment is used for awarding modules/units (usually by VET providers) and qualifications (often by external assessors) and is generally more stringently regulated.
- (c) In six countries, assessment criteria are specified at the national level; in two countries (Ireland, Slovenia), they are drafted by the teachers (assessors) responsible; and in one case (the Netherlands), the intended learning outcomes are also used as reference points for assessment.
- (d) Assessment criteria are usually more detailed than the intended learning outcomes and are formulated in a learning-outcomes-based manner, with an action verb and an associated objective (often in combination with a modifier) referring to an observable action. In some cases, broader formulations are used – for example, consisting of a short noun phrase and a modifier – which leave more room for interpretation by the assessors.
- (e) Only in a few cases are assessment criteria specified for different levels of performance; however, grading scales are often used to indicate the degree of fulfilment of the assessment criteria.
- (f) Countries emphasise the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes (including criteria) and results (achieved outcomes), typically establishing this alignment during programme or qualifications design and with quality assurance mechanisms.
- (g) Stakeholders need to strengthen systematic and consistent national-level support and guidance to ensure effective implementation of learning-outcomes-based assessment.

This chapter explores national approaches to the use of learning outcomes in assessment in IVET in the 10 case study countries. It addresses aspects related to national policies and regulations on the organisation of assessment in VET systems, the specification of assessment criteria and the autonomy granted to VET providers / schools and support provided for conducting assessment, along with current discussions or reform plans regarding assessment. The main sources include an analysis of relevant documentation, such as legislative acts, regulations and national policies related to assessment and the use of learning outcomes in assessment, along with information from interviews with representatives of relevant national authorities.

## 4.1. Assessment in VET

The analysis of data shows that case study countries utilise both formative and summative assessment as complementary approaches to assessing learning outcomes in VET. As outlined in Section 3.4, formative assessment emphasises the learning process, offering insights into students' ongoing progress and the learning gaps to be addressed. As a result, the boundaries between assessing, teaching and learning become fluid and indistinct. In contrast, summative assessment focuses on evaluating whether the intended learning outcomes of a module (unit) or an entire qualification have been achieved. Grades or observations from the formative assessment can be included as part of the evaluation.

The following subsections present the extent to which or the way in which summative and formative assessment (and the use of learning outcomes), or the autonomy granted to VET providers in this context, is addressed in the national regulations of the countries.

### 4.1.1. Summative assessment

Summative assessments and the points of reference to be used (e.g. learning outcomes and assessment criteria) are clearly regulated at the national level in the VET systems of the case study countries and they are strongly formalised, for example through external quality assurance procedures. A distinction can be made between (a) summative assessment leading to the award of a module/unit and (b) summative assessment leading to the award of a qualification. The former is typically carried out by VET providers, including schools and companies (e.g. work-based learning), while the latter is very often conducted by an examination board or jury with external examiners.

In most cases, it is specified whether a qualification is awarded solely based on the assessment of individual parts of the qualification or whether (additionally) a comprehensive assessment is carried out at the end of the programme. In two countries, different options or modalities exist. This is presented in Table 1, and the sections below consider these distinct approaches in detail.

Table 1. **Awarding of qualifications**

Qualification is awarded based on...	Countries
The assessment of individual parts	Ireland, Malta, Finland
(Additional) comprehensive assessment at the end of the programme	Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia
Different options or modalities	France, the Netherlands

*Source:* Authors, based on country case studies.

#### 4.1.1.1. *Summative assessment of modules (units)*

Depending on national regulations, the structure of the qualifications, the learning process and possibly other factors, summative assessment can be carried out at various points: the end of a single module (unit), the end of a block of modules during the programme, the end of the semester and/or the end of the school year. In particular, the assessment of modules or units can be organised for a group of students or for individual students. In some cases, a qualification can be obtained in this way without a comprehensive final assessment that covers all the intended learning outcomes of a qualification.

This is the case in Finland, for example, where the competences per unit of a qualification are assessed through a competence demonstration in the workplace. This is the only assessment method to formally determine whether a student has achieved the intended learning outcomes. These competence demonstrations have to be in line with the national vocational qualification requirements, which define the content, educational objectives and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes. A competence demonstration for a particular unit is planned together with the teacher, the student and the work-life representative and carried out in practical tasks in real work situations, preferably in the workplace. This is followed by an assessment discussion (including a self-assessment by the student) in which the assessors compare the competences demonstrated by the student with the assessment criteria and the assessment scale<sup>(16)</sup>. Assessment decisions (on grades) are jointly made by the VET teacher and the working-life representative (assessor).

Similarly in Ireland, obtaining a further education and training (FET) qualification typically does not involve a final comprehensive assessment, and this is supported by the structure of FET qualifications. They include major awards, which comprise a number of minor awards (modules) (QQI, 2021)<sup>(17)</sup>. To earn a

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<sup>(16)</sup> The assessment of learning outcomes evaluates the level of competence, mainly expressed in grades obtained from an assessment scale (from 1 = satisfactory to 5 = excellent).

<sup>(17)</sup> For further information on award types, see QQI, 2021. For more information on how learning outcomes are embedded in FET, see Cedefop, 2025.

major award, learners must successfully complete all minor awards. Each minor award consists of specific learning outcomes that must be assessed and achieved to complete the module. FET operates with a high degree of autonomy at the local level, as a significant degree of the responsibility for teaching and assessment is entrusted to local entities such as education and training boards (ETBs), further education colleges/institutes and individual teachers. Assessment criteria and methods are designed at the individual teacher level but are in line with national- and/or ETB-level guidance. Teachers are designated as internal assessors for Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) awards and are responsible for expanding on assessment briefs and marking schemes in line with the guidance for programme modules issued by ETBs (see Box 3).

**Box 3. Assessment brief – example from Ireland**

An assessment brief is the set of instructions given to the learner that outlines the requirements and assessment/performance criteria of each piece of assessment. In particular, it includes information on the assessment technique and the assessment activity, and the (group of) learning outcomes to be assessed. Additionally, it also includes the weighting of the assessment and a clear description of what the learner is required to do in order to complete this assessment activity and what evidence is needed. Briefs are required for every assignment, project, portfolio / collection of work, learner record and skills demonstration.

The assessment brief also includes a marking scheme, devised by the assessor. It is a detailed breakdown of how the marks will be allocated to the assessment criteria or parts/elements of each question.

The assessment brief is signed by the learner and the assessor.

*Source: Authors, based on the Irish case study.*

When devising assessment briefs and marking schemes, teachers/tutors have the autonomy to draw on the widest possible variety of assessment methods, 'written, oral, graphic, audio, visual or digital evidence or any combination of these' (Tipperary ETB, 2012). It should also be noted that, regarding the guidance on assessment contained in programme modules, while each learning outcome has a suggested assessment technique(s), it is stated that this 'should not restrict an assessor [the teacher or tutor in most cases] from taking an integrated approach to assessment' (Tipperary ETB, 2012, p. 11). This means that a single assignment or examination can contribute to more than one learning outcome. This was found to be a common occurrence in the colleges visited during the case study visits. Teachers can also add content, which was mentioned in the context of the need to update QQI awards. As one interviewee highlighted, 'we teach for the assessment and then what you really need in the real world'. External assessors will also take into account changes in the industry, just as teachers do. While the information in

programme descriptors and programme modules is not mandatory, interviews revealed that, in practice, most teachers use the stated methods because it is easier to do so.

In the Maltese post-compulsory IVET system, for instance, at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and its institutes<sup>(18)</sup>, the assessment process applies to units of study at the same qualification level, with the completion of all units leading to a full qualification. In contrast, the assessment of VET subjects in secondary schools can result in certification at different levels of the national qualifications framework (NQF) (level 1–3). Each VET subject at the secondary level is composed of three modules, one to be covered and assessed in each of the last three years of secondary education. The syllabi are based on learning outcomes identified for the three modules or units, accompanied by assessment criteria identified at NQF levels 1, 2 and 3 with respect to knowledge, comprehension and application. Each unit targets three to six learning outcomes, which are assessed against assessment criteria, with different marks and weighting allotted to each. The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board<sup>(19)</sup> sets out a standardised approach to carrying out the assessment. It stipulates that each unit is assessed by a ‘take-home task’, which accounts for 26–34 % of the total score for the unit, and a ‘practical assessment’, which accounts for a further 26–34 %. At the end of the unit and the school year, there is a summative assessment, known as the ‘controlled assessment’. It accounts for 38–42 % of the assessment points for the unit. The summative assessment is carried out in a controlled environment (under examination conditions) as an overall assessment over the three years of learning in VET and up to the end of secondary school. While students in different schools may have different assessments at home and in practice, the controlled assessment at the end of each unit is the same for students in all secondary schools in Malta. This controlled assessment is designed by the MATSEC Examinations Board and implemented through their appointed examiners, lasting between one and two hours in a written format.

In Lithuania, in addition to an overall assessment at the end of the training, assessments are conducted at the end of a module and based on the assessment criteria set by the national VET programmes. However, VET schools have the

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(18) MCAST is a self-certifying provider, which houses a number of different institutes that offer IVET to older students (16+ years) at different levels, from the foundation NQF level 2 to a masters in VET at European qualifications framework / NQF level 7, in a number of sectors.

(19) The MATSEC Examinations Board is Malta’s national assessment body based within the University of Malta. It draws up syllabi and regulates, monitors and implements the assessment processes for these certifications.

autonomy to determine how summative assessment is conducted. This can be based solely on interim diagnostic assessment, where grades from formative assessments are recorded digitally. Alternatively, it may involve both a theoretical test and a practical final task or may be based on either one of these components. If the module assessment includes a task demonstration, learners should conduct a self-assessment. The assessment should cover both occupational and key competences, and all module teachers, along with employers, if possible, should participate. The assessment of work-based learning in companies depends on how the learning is organised. If work-based learning is part of the compulsory module 'Introduction to the labour market', only three learning outcomes are specified (and no assessment criteria), with assessment methods determined jointly by the VET school and employer to reflect real work situations. In apprenticeships, employers take greater responsibility, delivering 70 % of the module content and, in consultation with VET teachers, assessing learners, designing tasks and providing feedback.

Similarly in Slovenia, summative assessments of modules are conducted by the VET provider. They are carried out by the teachers of vocational modules and by the mentors in the workplace organisation in the case of traineeships. The compulsory methods of assessment for individual subjects and vocational modules are set out in the general part of each educational programme, defined at the national level. In most cases, for vocational modules the compulsory method of assessment is a product or service and a defence. However, the regulations on the assessment of knowledge in secondary schools (Republic of Slovenia, 2018) specify that teachers and mentors may also assess the achievement of knowledge standards and learning objectives by means of, for example, exercises, seminars and other assignments; defences; performances; and achievement portfolios. In addition to the legal framework that regulates the testing and assessment of knowledge at the national level, at the school level it is also regulated by the school's internal act – or the school's assessment rules – and the assessment plan developed by each teachers' collective (in the apprenticeship form of education, employers/mentors are also involved in the preparation of the assessment plan). The regulations on the assessment of knowledge in secondary schools specify what should be included in the assessment plan: the minimum standard of knowledge for the vocational module, the criteria and methods for assessing knowledge during the school year, and the deadlines for the written assessment of a vocational module, which should be set by the teachers' collective no later than 14 days after the start of the first assessment period. The regulations also state that teachers must inform pupils at the beginning of the school year about their learning objectives, the scope of the learning content, the forms and methods of

assessment, the criteria for assessing knowledge, the learning aids they can use and the deadlines for written assessments. Moreover, the regulations require teachers and mentors to analyse the results of the assessment with the pupils in groups or individually. The final mark for a vocational module is decided by the teacher; in the case of traineeships, it is based on the mentor's opinion. Workplace learning is not assessed; the school enters a 'pass' mark on the pupil's report card based on the information about the obligations fulfilled.

#### 4.1.1.2. *Comprehensive summative assessment for awarding a qualification*

In several case study countries, summative assessment includes an overall comprehensive assessment at the end of the study period or cycle and results in the awarding of a qualification. It is often conducted in addition to the assessment of single modules (units). The final comprehensive assessment usually consists of a theoretical component and a practical component. It can be implemented by the VET provider, either with the involvement of external stakeholders (e.g. Portugal) or without (e.g. Bulgaria), or with a stronger external component (e.g. in Lithuania and Poland).

For instance, in Portugal, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are included in the curriculum for each qualification, and also published in the national catalogue of qualifications. Students must take a professional aptitude test or a final evaluation test at the end of the course. The results are assessed by a committee, which includes representatives of the VET school and from the labour market. The overall grade of the programme is determined by combining the assessment of individual training components (modules) with the final assessment <sup>(20)</sup>.

In Bulgaria, for each VET qualification, there is a national examination programme (NEP), approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. This defines the assessment content of the theoretical and the practical part of the exam, along with the methods and assessment criteria to be used in the final comprehensive assessment that leads to the award of a qualification. Learning outcomes as such are not included in the NEPs but, according to the regulations, NEPs and, in particular, assessment criteria, should build on the intended learning outcomes specified in VET standards and national VET curricula. The theoretical

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<sup>(20)</sup> Modules in all IVET programmes include sociocultural training, scientific training, technological training and work-based learning. The weight of the final assessment varies across programmes: it is highest for apprenticeship courses (25 %), while professional courses allocate 23 %, and education and training courses assign only 6 % (with 20 % of the grade for education and training courses coming from a work-based learning component).

part is a written work or a multiple-choice test. It takes place at the VET school and covers one examination topic from the NEP. An examination commission, appointed by the headmaster and consisting of VET teachers from the school, assesses the results. In order to sit the practical exam, students need to achieve a certain number of points in the theoretical assessment. The practical exam is an individual assignment (task completion) usually conducted at the VET school. It is assessed by an examination commission, which is different from the commission of the theoretical exam. If students are in an apprenticeship programme, one of the members must be a company representative (though not necessarily from the company where the student was an apprentice).

The summative assessments in Lithuania and Poland are organised in a similar way and include an external assessment component (Box 4).

**Box 4. External summative assessment – example from Lithuania**

External summative assessment in Lithuania includes a **theoretical test** conducted centrally through the electronic testing system administered by the National Agency for Education. It aims to assess learners' acquired knowledge. If learners achieve at least 50 % of the total points, they pass the test. If a learner fails to pass the exam, they are not allowed to take the practical exam afterwards. VET providers select VET teachers who specialise in the qualification being assessed to grade the theory exam. The questions included in the exam are based on the intended learning outcomes in occupational standards and national VET programmes. Their complexity is based on Bloom's taxonomy <sup>(21)</sup> and is grouped into six levels. Each level includes intended learning outcomes to be assessed, with a specific verb representing the level; for example, 'know' is the lowest level and 'evaluate' is the highest. The number and level of questions in the exam depend on the qualification level being assessed.

The **practical assessment** is conducted at a training establishment or in a workplace. The practical part of the assessment lasts for up to six hours and is evaluated on a 10-point scale. The final score for the assessment consists of two parts: 40 % of the evaluation is based on the average scores received from the practical training tasks throughout the duration of the VET programme and its modules and is assessed by the VET teacher. The remaining 60 % is derived from the evaluation of the practical skills demonstration task and is assessed by the commission, which consists of at least three assessors. Two of them must be VET teachers who did not teach the learners being assessed, with at least two years of experience as VET teachers. At least one assessor must be delegated by an accredited competence assessment institution (e.g. employer associations).

*Source:* Authors, based on the Lithuanian case study.

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<sup>(21)</sup> Bloom's taxonomy is one of the most important theoretical influences on thinking about learning outcomes and learning progress. It represents a hierarchical categorisation of cognitive learning, ranging from basic skills to increasingly complex skills (see Cedefop, 2022a, p. 62).

In Poland, the external vocational exam (*egzamin zawodowego*) is a 'form of assessing the level of knowledge and skills acquired by candidates in a specific qualification within a profession, as defined in the core curriculum for vocational education. The exam tasks are based on verification criteria established in the core curriculum' (Poland. Ministry of National Education, n.d.). Students who have completed part of the curriculum for a given qualification are required to take the exam. This consists of a written component (a one-hour computer-based test with 40 multiple-choice questions) and a practical component. The practical part involves completing tasks described in the exam sheet and lasts between two and four hours. It is assessed by qualified examiners (e.g. experienced teachers, representatives of employer organisations), who are registered in the examiner database maintained by regional examination boards.

Similarly, in Slovenia, external assessments are carried out at the end of a specific educational period or programme, with knowledge standards set at the national level. There are two key forms of external examination in the Slovenian system: the final examination (taken at the end of vocational secondary education) and the vocational baccalaureate (taken at the end of secondary vocational or technical education, enabling pupils to obtain a professional qualification while completing their higher education or vocational education programmes). Learning outcomes play a key role in both, as they are clearly defined in knowledge catalogues. These catalogues define the competences that pupils should have mastered at the end of their education and form the basis for the design of examination tasks and assessment criteria, ensuring that the tasks are relevant and aligned with the needs of the labour market and further education (Bahovec et al., 2006; Ermenc, 2014; Mikulec, 2016).

#### 4.1.1.3. *Different options for organising summative assessments in view of awarding qualifications*

In France, VET providers / schools must comply with national-level policies and regulations regarding assessment (e.g. diploma frameworks), but they have the autonomy to design and administer assessments. Although diploma frameworks vary in structure, they universally include such key details as the sector of activity, required competence blocks, assessment modalities and assessment criteria. These frameworks provide guidance without being overly prescriptive, granting teachers and trainers the flexibility to evaluate learners' competences according to the specific context. The approach allows for a 'holistic assessment, as opposed to a more instrumental, i.e. checklist assessment', as highlighted in the case study. The assessments to obtain the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (professional aptitude certificate [CAP]) and the *baccalauréat professionnel* (professional

baccalaureate [Bac Pro])<sup>(22)</sup> consist of seven compulsory examinations and comprise two modes. As highlighted by Eurydice (2023), depending on the type of candidates (school pupils, apprentices, trainees in continuing education) and the category of the institutions:

- (a) the examination can be organised in a global format (the candidate takes all the exams during the same session) or progressive format (the candidate chooses the exams that he wants to take at each session);
- (b) the method of evaluation can be one-off or take the form of a *contrôle en cours de formation* [assessment during training].

The one-off examination (*épreuve ponctuelle*) takes place at the end of the year or at the end of the overall cycle, while the *contrôle en cours de formation* (CCF) is an ongoing assessment of competence blocks (modules) during training. The latter is seen as an opportunity to provide feedback to learners during their training. This benefit was emphasised by one case study interviewee who pointed out that ‘learners who have made good progress and are able to have their competences validated during training can move on to something else or go deeper’. These exams take place both at school and in the workplace. In public VET schools (and private institutions in agreement with the Ministry of National Education) the CCF is used to evaluate several competence blocks (modules) included in the professional diploma.

The one-off examinations are written, practical and oral. Learners studying for CAP and Bac Pro qualifications must deliver an oral presentation of their *chef d’oeuvre* (France. Ministry of State et al., n.d.)<sup>(23)</sup>, showcasing the results of their work throughout the duration of their studies. The presentation is delivered in front of an assessment committee comprising two teachers, one from general education and the other from a VET subject.

The Netherlands is a special case within this overall study, as no separate assessment criteria are developed at the national level. Instead, the learning outcomes associated with the core tasks and work processes, as defined in the qualification files, are to be used, and summative examinations can vary in scope

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<sup>(22)</sup> IVET qualifications/diplomas in France include the CAP, the professional brevet and the Bac Pro.

<sup>(23)</sup> The *chef d’oeuvre* is a project in which all learners aiming for a CAP or a Bac Pro participate, regardless of whether they are apprentices or attend a *lycée professionnel*. It is a collective project or individual piece of work that allows learners to showcase their skills in relation to their future profession and to demonstrate and highlight the competences they have developed. The *chef d’oeuvre* is developed over two years for the CAP and one year for the vocational baccalaureate and is assessed at the end of the cycle as part of an examination (France. Ministry of State et al., n.d.).

and cover either individual core tasks / work processes or a combination of them <sup>(24)</sup>. Moreover, they can take place at the end of learning blocks (as specified by the VET provider) or at the end of the VET programme <sup>(25)</sup>. VET schools are responsible for organising summative assessments, including when learners are (partly) learning and being assessed in the workplace. The summative exams are conducted by external assessors who use validated examination tools. VET schools have three routes for selecting an assessment tool that meets validity requirements (Validering Examens MBO, 2018):

- (a) route 1 – purchase exams from a certified exams provider, such as [Stichting Consortium Beroepsonderwijs](#) or [Prove2Move](#);
- (b) route 2 – self-construct exams based on specific conditions;
- (c) route 3 – organise external validation of self-constructed exams.

An important feature of all those options is that external assessors are involved, together with representatives of VET schools and employers. These exams usually include a large workplace component through a demonstration of skills.

#### **4.1.2. Formative assessment**

Evidence from the case studies (see Chapters 5–7) shows that formative assessment is typically conducted by VET teachers and trainers. In classroom settings, this may include individual or group assignments, report writing, presentations or participation in round-table discussions with peers and teachers, or (teacher-designed) written or oral tests. In workplace settings, school labs and specialised classrooms, assessments tend to be more practical, involving demonstrating competences with real tasks and taking up responsibilities that reflect the students' future job roles.

VET providers / schools (teachers and trainers) from the case study countries typically use formative assessment to monitor learners' progress, inform students about their educational achievements (what has been done well or not) and indicate directions for further work. Formative assessment can also guide instruction and help teachers and trainers adjust the learning process so that more students can meet the intended learning outcomes. Additionally, formative assessment may involve teachers observing how students develop knowledge,

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<sup>(24)</sup> However, as one interviewee pointed out, although the learning outcomes approach is embedded, practitioners don't really use the term: 'Learning outcomes is a pedagogical term, so they don't use the word, but they work with the concept.'

<sup>(25)</sup> If the summative assessment relates to parts of the core tasks and work processes – and the vocational schools and examination offices can decide for themselves how to structure these – it might be regarded as a formative (intermediary) assessment.

skills and competences on an ongoing basis, that is, during the semester or school year. These observations are then implicitly factored into the final grade of the subject/module later, as noted in the Bulgarian case study.

In contrast to summative assessment, formative assessment is usually not subject to specific regulation at the national level, as legislation in the case study countries often only outlines the main objectives and more general principles. This affords VET providers (teachers and trainers) greater flexibility in the choice of assessment methods and possibly in the inclusion of additional learning outcomes in these assessments, with the caveat that the methods and content are generally in line with the intended learning outcomes or the assessment criteria in the national reference documents.

For example, in the Netherlands, there is no national-level instruction on how schools and companies should structure and organise formative assessment. VET schools can design and implement formative assessments that cater to their specific educational contexts. Teachers have the flexibility to create assessment tasks that reflect the intended learning outcomes of their courses, fostering a personalised and tailored approach to evaluating students' performance.

Similarly, in Poland, legislation entrusts schools with the responsibility to establish the rules, methods and tools for internal assessment, applied to both summative and formative assessment. VET teachers can design assessment tools (e.g. tasks and tests) that refer to the verification criteria for learning outcomes specified in vocational education core curricula.

Additionally, in Portugal, VET schools and centres also have the autonomy to define their internal policies, processes and practices for formative assessment, but these must align with the learning outcomes specified in the national curriculum. Thus, VET providers can modify or add learning outcomes and assessment criteria, but only when curriculum-defined outcomes and assessment criteria are also considered and included. Moreover, VET providers have the flexibility to select pedagogical theories and approaches for assessing trainees, and to design the process for and determining the timing of assessments throughout the training programme.

In several countries, such as Ireland, France and Lithuania, guidelines for formative assessment are set out at the national level, but the link to learning outcomes is rather implicit. For instance, the guidance on implementing a universal design for learning in Irish further education and training promotes learner-centred formative assessment with a 'focus on showing how learners are meeting milestones and building new skills on good foundations' (SOLAS, 2021). The Lithuanian guidelines on facilitating the design and implementation of modular VET programmes (QVETDC, 2021) explain the characteristics of formative

assessment, for example that it is systematically carried out during each lesson and is based on the observation of learners and discussion of their mistakes and positive achievements. However, they do not address the use of learning outcomes.

In Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal and Finland, self-assessment of VET students is promoted as part of formative assessment. For example, in Finland, self-assessment (closely linked to the assessment criteria specified in the vocational requirements) and teacher guidance are used to prepare students for summative assessment (competence demonstrations). In Ireland, self-assessment is promoted 'by providing checklists and encouraging learners to develop their own assessment criteria and mechanisms' (SOLAS, 2021). In addition to self-assessment, formative assessment can also include peer assessment, as in the case of Portugal. In France, efforts are being made to engage learners in future-oriented assessment processes by using competence-based assessment 'so that they themselves recognise what they are able to do at a given time, what progress they have made and what they still need to do to reach the level of performance expected to obtain a diploma', as one interviewee explained.

In two countries (Bulgaria and Malta), assessments that are considered formative are numerically graded, and this sometimes contributes to the final grade of a subject/module. This indicates that the consideration of an assessment as formative or summative depends on the function of the assessment (as discussed in Section 3.4). Although such an approach serves to provide learners with feedback on their performance and opportunities for improvement, and thus has a formative function, it also has a summative function as it is used to determine the final grade for that learning unit. For instance, in Bulgaria the average grade obtained from formative assessment (i.e. ongoing assessment during the school year related to the skills that the students have obtained during lessons) makes up students' grades for the semester and then their annual grades for subjects. For formative assessments, teachers can consider assessment criteria as defined in NEPs and/or assessment criteria defined in State educational standards (SESs) for VET. In Malta, formative assessment is often understood as frequent testing at school. As mentioned earlier, VET secondary education certificate (SEC) subjects<sup>(26)</sup> are structured into units and assessed each year through one 'take-home assessment' and a 'practical assessment', assigned by the teachers There

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<sup>(26)</sup> VET SEC subjects are IVET programmes at European qualifications framework / NQF levels 1–3 that lead to a certificate. The curriculum is built on three separate units, one covered in each school year. Taking health and social care as an example, VET SEC units focus on (1) effective communication, human development and holistic care; (2) anatomy, physiology, health and safety in health and social care; and (3) equality, diversity and quality of care.

are no assessment criteria developed at the school level, and teachers have the autonomy to design these assessments. However, they need to ensure that the target assessment criteria are included in the national VET curricula (e.g. the MATSEC syllabi) <sup>(27)</sup>.

In other countries, grades are not required by law but can still be used. In Lithuania, cumulative points (marks) can be awarded for active participation in class, creativity, initiative, homework completion and attendance. In Poland, numerical grades are commonly used for ongoing classroom-based summative assessments (although they are legally required only for end-of-year and graduation assessments). Alongside summative assessment, teachers also apply formative assessment during lessons and practical training, primarily by providing students with feedback and guidance to support their skills development and knowledge expansion, while also monitoring their progress in achieving intended learning outcomes.

## 4.2. Characteristics of assessment criteria

Assessment criteria are supposed to be used as reference points for assessment and – similar to intended learning outcomes (see Cedefop, 2025) – can differ in terms of the level they are developed at or the linguistic structure and granularity of the statements used. In most of the countries, assessment criteria are specified at the national level in the case study countries; exceptions in this regard are Ireland <sup>(28)</sup>, the Netherlands and Slovenia. This section will explore national-level assessment criteria and other approaches in detail.

Common features of assessment criteria in most countries include the structuring of the statements with an action verb and a related object (often combined with a modifier), specifying the focus of learning and clear indicators of the performance level achieved <sup>(29)</sup>. Usually, the statements refer to an observable action; verbs that refer to learning objectives (e.g. ‘know’ or ‘understand’) are rarely used. For some countries (including the Netherlands and Finland), it is also

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<sup>(27)</sup> The MATSEC Examinations Board is responsible for setting the syllabi, determining assessment processes and issuing certifications of learning at the SEC level achieved by the end of compulsory schooling and at matriculation level (similar to a baccalaureate) for entry into university. Assessment processes for SEC are implemented at the national level.

<sup>(28)</sup> An example of assessment criteria developed by teachers is available in Section 6.2.3.

<sup>(29)</sup> This is closely in line with Cedefop’s guidelines on defining and writing learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2017, 2022a).

emphasised that the reference points for assessment are highlighted as being directly tied to workplace practices. In some cases, there are broader formulations of assessment criteria used without this linguistic structure (e.g. in some assessment criteria in Bulgaria and France). Such statements, for example those composed of a short noun phrase and a modifier, leave more room for interpretation by assessors.

Assessment criteria also differ in whether they are specified for different levels of achievement (e.g. in Malta and Finland, and often in Slovenia). Specification is achieved, for example, by choosing verbs for expressing different levels of learning (e.g. incorporating elements of Bloom’s taxonomy) or by further explaining the object or the context. Assessment criteria may specify whether they are intended as a threshold (e.g. in Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal). In this case, too, grading scales are often used to indicate the extent to which the assessment criteria have been fulfilled.

Table 2 indicates at which level assessment criteria in the 10 case study countries are specified, before they are presented in more detail in the following sections.

Table 2. **Specification of assessment criteria**

National level	Other
Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ireland and Slovenia: assessment criteria developed by teachers</li> <li>• Netherlands: intended learning outcomes used as reference points for assessment</li> </ul>

*Source:* Authors, based on country case studies.

#### **4.2.1. Assessment criteria specified at the national level**

The assessment criteria used for the competence demonstrations in Finland have a strong link to the workplace. The national vocational qualification requirements are structured into units and include vocational units, which are directly tied to workplace practices, and common units (related to general subjects) <sup>(30)</sup>. Each unit is broken down into assessable components with clearly defined competence requirements and assessment criteria structured by levels of achievements linked to grades (1 = satisfactory; 5 = excellent) (see Box 5). The vocational competence requirements – expressed as activities of the occupational area and activities in work – can be understood as intended learning outcomes that indicate what learners know how to do and are usually formulated with an action verb and an

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<sup>(30)</sup> Social skills and key competences for lifelong learning are integrated into both vocational and common units. Depending on the VET provider’s practices, common units can be assessed as independent subjects or can be integrated into the assessment of other competences.

object related to that verb. The assessment criteria provide more detail by indicating, for example, in what way, in what context and with what degree of autonomy the learner is able to complete the task.

**Box 5. Vocational qualification in restaurant and catering services – cafe services module (unit): example from Finland**

Examples of vocational competence requirements include the following.

Students know how to:

- prepare for customer service situations;
- serve customers and sell and serve a cafe's food and beverage products;
- record sales and charge customers.

Assessment criteria for 'record sales and charge customers' include the following.

Satisfactory – grade 1

- Students label products with sale prices following instructions.
- Students, together with others, use the till or sales system and receive and handle the most common methods of payment securely.

Excellent – grade 5

- Students have mastered the product range, find the correct sales price in the pricing folder and label the products with prices independently and with initiative.
- Students are adept at using different till functions, including when in a rush, and can handle different methods of payment independently and work responsibly when using the till.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Finnish case study and Finnish National Agency for Education (2021).

The learning outcomes used in secondary-level VET in Malta are also formulated with an action verb and an objective related to the verb (Box 6). Here, the assessment criteria, specified by the MATSEC Examinations Board, specify levels 1, 2 or 3 in each case based on Malta's NQF. The purpose of these different levels is to support VET teachers in secondary schools in setting tasks that are appropriate to the different performance levels of their students. This also allows students to obtain different levels of certification based on their level of achievement. When formulating the assessment criteria, particular attention is paid to the verbs used, which reflect Bloom's taxonomy and the cognitive levels captured therein<sup>(31)</sup>. A distinctive feature of the approach in Malta is that the assessment criteria are organised into knowledge, comprehension and

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<sup>(31)</sup> For more information on Bloom's taxonomy, see Cedefop (2022a), p. 62.

application. This follows the same logic as assessment in traditional secondary school subjects.

**Box 6. Assessment criteria and learning outcomes in the health and social care syllabus – example from Malta**

Subject focus: principles of a baby's physical hygiene needs.

Learning outcome 2: follow the principles of bathing a baby.

Knowledge criteria are as follows.

- Assessment criteria (NQF 1). List the precautions that need to be taken into consideration when changing a nappy and washing the baby.
- Assessment criteria (NQF 2). Mention atypical signs to look out when changing a nappy and washing a baby.
- Assessment criteria (NQF 3). Outline infection prevention and control practices when changing and washing a baby.

Comprehension criteria: not specified for this learning outcome.

Application criteria are as follows.

- Assessment criteria (NQF 1). Prepare equipment for washing a baby mannequin.
- Assessment criteria (NQF 2). Prepare a baby mannequin for bathing.
- Assessment criteria (NQF 3). Dress a baby mannequin after washing.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Maltese case study and MATSEC (2025, p. 19).

A similar syntax formulation for learning outcomes can be observed in Lithuania (see Table 3), Poland<sup>(32)</sup> and Portugal<sup>(33)</sup>; however, the assessment criteria in these countries are not specified for different performance levels.

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<sup>(32)</sup> In Poland, the verification criteria for learning outcomes, specified in vocational education core curricula, outline what needs to be assessed to confirm that a learning outcome has been achieved (see Box 14).

<sup>(33)</sup> In Portugal, the learning outcomes and assessment criteria are structured around units of competence (see Box 7).

**Box 7. Vocational qualification ‘hotel accommodation technician’ – example from Portugal**

Units of competence: providing information about the tourism sector.

Learning outcomes related to the unit of competence include:

- (a) analysing the information required about the tourism sector;
- (b) informing the customer about the tourism sector and clarifying information.

Assessment criteria include:

- (a) contextualising the historical evolution of the tourism sector, the main milestones, and the emergence of expanding products and services;
- (b) adapting communication to the type and request of the interlocutor.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Portuguese case study.

In Bulgaria, assessment criteria for the final theoretical examination for VET qualifications are also formulated in terms of learning outcomes, with a verb and an objective <sup>(34)</sup> (see Box 8). There are 18 examination topics included in the NEP for a specific VET qualification and 5–8 assessment criteria are defined for each topic. Teachers assess students by allocating points relating to each assessment criterion, and the maximum number of points to be received per criterion are defined by the NEP.

**Box 8. Assessment criteria for the theoretical examination topic ‘logistics and logistics activity’ – example from Bulgaria**

Assessment criteria (and maximum number of points) include the following:

- (a) explains and differentiates between core and complementary activities related to logistics development (14 points);
- (b) defines and describes the rules for the implementation of logistics (16 points);
- (c) knows and describes the aims, objectives and principles of logistics (20 points);  
[...]

Maximum number of points: 100 points.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Bulgarian case study.

In contrast, the assessment criteria for the practical examination of VET qualifications are broader. They can, therefore, be used for practical tasks in

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<sup>(34)</sup> Assessment criteria for summative assessment (a final examination on the theory and practices of the profession) are defined in the NEP for VET and are mainly developed by VET school teams (appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science).

different areas of training and must be adapted by the examiners to the practical task in question. The assessment criteria relate, for example, to aspects such as health, safety and environmental protection regulations, effective workplace organisation, technological processes (work steps) and the quality of performance. The final two aspects have the greatest weight in the practical examination.

In France, while all diploma frameworks include information about the sector of activity, the competence blocks required and assessment modalities, they are not necessarily organised and written in the same way. In the following example, the competences to be assessed are listed first and then the assessment criteria that can cover some or all the competences. Similar to the example for the practical exam in Bulgaria, the assessment criteria are formulated in more general terms. They usually do not have the linguistic structure of the intended learning outcomes (verb and objective) but use mostly nouns and adjectives (see Box 9) <sup>(35)</sup>. The exam is used to verify whether these various criteria are met, and only the combination of all these criteria makes it possible to determine whether the competence has been acquired or not.

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<sup>(35)</sup> Another example with a slightly different structure is presented in Table 4 (see Section 4.3). In this case, nouns and adjectives are also used in the formulation of the assessment criteria, but these are more closely aligned with the detailed competences specified.

Box 9. **Assessment criteria for a CAP in cleaning and hygiene – example from France**

Test (EP1 – *enseignement professionnel* (professional subjects)): professional techniques for routine maintenance

Unit (UP1 – *Unités professionnelles* (professional units)): coefficient 8 (including 1 for health, safety and the environment)

Competences assessed

This test allows for the assessment of all or part of the following competences:

- C1: Select and decode information for professional purposes;  
C1-1: Select useful information for the activity at hand and identify people who may serve as a resource for further questions;
- C5: Implement manual routine maintenance operations;  
C5-1: Perform manual dusting;  
C5-2: Perform manual floor washing;  
C5-3: Perform manual washing of vertical surfaces and glass surfaces;  
C5-4: Perform manual washing of horizontal surfaces and equipment;
- C6: Implement mechanised routine maintenance operations;  
C6-1: Perform mechanical dusting;  
C6-2: Perform spray methods and/or polishing;  
C6-3: Perform mechanised cleaning;
- C10: Implement waste management operations;  
C10-1: Sort and dispose of waste and effluents from their activity;  
C10-2: Collect and store waste from their activity and the site of intervention;
- C12: Communicate with internal partners, users and clients;  
C12-1: Adopt a professional attitude.

Assessment criteria

The test assesses:

- the relevant selection of information;
- the correct choice of equipment and products;
- compliance with hygiene, safety and ergonomics rules and the implementation of eco-friendly practices;
- mastery of techniques;
- adherence to the allotted time;
- conformity of the result with the work assigned;
- professional attitude and communication competences.

Source: Authors, based on the French case study.

#### **4.2.2. No separate assessment criteria specified at the national level**

In Ireland, in the Netherlands and in Slovenia (for school-based assessment), no separate assessment criteria are provided at the national level. While in Ireland (Box 15) and Slovenia assessment criteria are developed by teachers, the intended learning outcomes are used as reference points for assessment in the Netherlands.

In Slovenia, a teacher or a teaching collective defines the minimum knowledge standards and the assessment criteria in the assessment plan for each professional module. Pupils are involved in this process as much as possible, and mentors are involved in the case of apprenticeships. The assessment criteria and the knowledge standards are based on the informative and formative learning objectives defined in the knowledge catalogue for each professional module <sup>(36)</sup>. Knowledge standards only refer to operational learning objectives that can be objectively assessed. For each module, at least the minimum knowledge standards must be prepared, that is, descriptors that meet a grade 2 (sufficient) score. However, it is considered more pedagogically appropriate to break down the knowledge standard into descriptors at four levels, for grades 2, 3, 4 and 5. It is up to the teachers to decide whether to use taxonomies for the formulation of the assessment criteria, with Bloom's taxonomy, Marzano's taxonomy and the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes taxonomy as the most frequently used (Breznikar, 2021). An example is presented in Box 10.

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<sup>(36)</sup> Informative objectives cover theoretical knowledge, content, theories, models, concepts and professional standards; formative objectives refer to working procedures, working methods, skills, use of tools, strategies and practical skills.

Box 10. **Business communication module (in vocational secondary education) – example from Slovenia**

Knowledge standards (including minimum knowledge required)

The pupil:

- (a) knows the basic concepts of business communication and can apply them appropriately in different situations;
- (b) distinguishes between formal and informal communication and is able to choose the appropriate form for the situation;
- (c) is able to compose a simple business letter and email in accordance with the rules of business correspondence;
- (d) is able to prepare and deliver a short oral presentation on a given topic;
- (e) knows the basic rules of etiquette in a business environment.

Assessment criteria

Sufficient score (grade 2)

The learner:

- (a) knows the basic concepts of business communication but uses them with occasional errors;
- (b) distinguishes between formal and informal communication, but has difficulty choosing the appropriate form for the situation;
- (c) composes a simple business letter or email, but with minor errors in formatting or content;
- (d) prepares and deliver a short oral presentation, but this is flawed in content or is delivered with major difficulties;
- (e) knows the basic rules of etiquette but does not always apply them appropriately.

Excellent score (grade 5)

The learner:

- (a) has an excellent knowledge of business communication concepts and applies them confidently in a variety of situations;
- (b) clearly and accurately distinguishes between formal and informal communication and always chooses the correct form according to the situation;
- (c) composes a business letter or email that is perfectly worded, clear, precise and relevant;
- (d) prepares and delivers an oral presentation that is in-depth, clearly structured, persuasive and confidently delivered;
- (e) knows the rules of etiquette and applies them consistently and appropriately to all situations.

Source: Authors, based on the Slovenian case study.

In the Netherlands, summative assessments evaluate whether learners have achieved the learning outcomes associated with the core tasks and work processes as defined in the qualification files <sup>(37)</sup>. The learning outcomes specifying the work processes and work tasks are composed of both an action verb and an object related to the verb (see Box 11). Moreover, the depth/breadth of learning that is required of the qualification holder and the relevant context(s) it can be applied to are described for each learning outcome (as minimal requirements). The assessments also contain numerical grades on the quality of the work. A grade of 6 means that the learner has fulfilled the minimum requirements, a higher grade means that the learner has exceeded the minimum requirements and has done additional quality work.

Box 11. **Intended learning outcomes (used as assessment criteria) in a specific module in an engineering VET programme at level 4 – example from the Netherlands**

B1-K1: designs products or systems

P1-K1: prepares work (P1-K1-W2)

B1-K1-W1: collects and processes design data

The student investigates the needs of the target group themselves or in consultation with experts. They collect design data (e.g. requirement specifications) and check if the design data are sufficient. They also process and record the data in accordance with applicable company regulations. They coordinate with the client and their supervisor to ensure that the design data recorded are complete and accurate.

The student can, therefore:

- generate information from data;
- break down information;
- identify needs and expectations;
- work in accordance with prescribed procedures.

P1-K1-W2: creates a drawing package

- As a technician, the student translates the production data collected into a complete drawing package consisting of working drawings and material lists. They refer to the design and project specifications for this. They also consult with their

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<sup>(37)</sup> The qualification files are structured into a basic part, '(B)', for all qualifications in that qualification file and a profile part, '(P)', an additional part for specific qualifications (e.g. at a higher level). Each basic/profile part consists of core tasks, '(K)', and each core task contains work processes, '(W)'.

supervisor and/or the execution team regarding the content and level of detail of the working drawings.

The student can, therefore:

- coordinate;
- apply job-specific manual skills;
- apply job-specific mental abilities;
- demonstrate spatial and directional awareness;
- work in accordance with prescribed safety regulations;
- work in accordance with prescribed procedures.

NB: These learning outcomes are also listed in the related national-level qualification file.

Source: Authors, based on the Netherlands case study and an internal document of Regio College (2021, p. 3).

#### 4.3. Ensuring alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and processes and assessment results

Evidence indicates that the case study countries assess learning outcomes with reference to grading rubrics or criteria, and that stakeholders make efforts to ensure the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes (e.g. context, tasks, methods and tools) and assessment results (e.g. achieved learning outcomes). Assessment results can be represented by feedback on an exercise (formative assessment), or by a grade for a subject at the end of a school year (summative assessment) or the awarding of a qualification at the end of a module (also summative assessment). As mentioned above, formative assessment emphasises the learning process, offering insights into students' ongoing progress, with descriptions of learning outcomes serving as a point of reference to varying degrees. As the findings from the case studies show, formative assessment tends to be linked to a certain degree with assessment criteria specified at the national level and sometimes also with grading. The regulation of summative assessment, by contrast, generally involves greater dependence on assessment criteria that are aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

Alignment in case study countries is primarily addressed during the design or review of programmes and the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms at the national level <sup>(38)</sup> or the provider level (e.g. MCAST in Malta), by carefully

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<sup>(38)</sup> Only in the case of post-compulsory IVET in Malta is the issue of alignment addressed at the provider level (see Section 5.1).

considering the relationship between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment criteria. Moreover, stakeholders have established specific quality assurance mechanisms, particularly for summative assessment. Most importantly, countries see formative and summative assessments as part of a complementary approach, which is another aspect of alignment. Assessment criteria (detailing the intended learning outcomes) serve as a bridge between intended and achieved learning outcomes. However, differences in assessment practice and grading between teachers and trainers affects reliability and, therefore, alignment. These differences may result in part from the degree of autonomy granted to VET providers in both formative and summative assessments, and it is mostly affected by the lack of opportunities for teachers and trainers to discuss criteria together and develop a shared understanding. These aspects are further illustrated in the following sections using examples from the case studies.

#### **4.3.1. National provisions for aligning intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria**

Several of the case study countries report a strong correspondence between the elements of the learning outcomes chain in the national regulations. In some cases, this relates more to the alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria or to specifications of the assessment process (e.g. in Ireland, Lithuania and Finland). In some countries the degree of alignment may also vary within a VET system (e.g. in France). These different national arrangements are illustrated by the following examples.

In Finland, the assessment processes are clearly defined so that alignment is ensured at all levels. VET legislation requires that students' achieved learning outcomes are assessed by comparing them with the competence requirements and assessment criteria specified in the national vocational qualification requirements, ensuring that all assessment practices align with national standards (Box 5). Students are required to co-design their competence demonstration plan with the workplace instructor and the VET teacher. Both the teacher and the instructor should review and ensure that the examination tasks included in the plan are aligned with the respective competence units and meet the qualification requirements. Additionally, in assessment discussions (following the competence demonstration), VET teachers reflect on the outcomes of the demonstration and compare them against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria defined in the qualification requirements. VET providers must have a licence from the Ministry of Education and Culture, which requires having plausible implementation plans for the assessment of competences. External evaluations, such as those carried

out by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, provide oversight and feedback on how effectively students achieve learning objectives and national vocational competence requirements.

The Irish case study also reports a strong alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment. The programme descriptors and programme modules produced by ETBs form the basis for teachers to develop their programmes and assessment methods. The module documents map each learning outcome against suggested assessment methods. Within these guidelines, teachers/tutors are responsible for preparing assessment instruments such as project and assignment briefs, examination papers and assessment criteria, and marking schemes. Moreover, all assessment activities must comply with the relevant ETBs' quality assurance policies, which incorporate QQI standards for assessment procedures. Nevertheless, variations in assessment practices and grading between different teachers and colleges seem to be an issue that could undermine the overall alignment in the system, potentially weakening the connection between intended and achieved learning outcomes. In terms of ensuring the quality of the alignment, ETBs are now required to have an overall strategy for assessment, and some are still in the process of developing one. Additionally, each ETB has a panel of external authenticators who verify that learning and assessment have been structured so that all learning outcomes required in a qualification have been covered adequately <sup>(39)</sup>. Furthermore, they use random sampling to check teachers' work as assessors and to uphold standards.

Lithuania is also among the countries that show a strong alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, as specified in national VET programmes. The example in Table 3 shows that assessment criteria are more detailed and comprehensive than the learning outcomes to which they are linked. They also contain, for example, further contextual information to specify the object related to the verb (e.g. description of the object by methods, tools) or the verb itself (e.g. to indicate the degree of independence to carry out an activity) (see discussion in Section 4.2).

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<sup>(39)</sup> Each learning outcome is often assessed more than once, so there is more than one way of achieving it. For example, a single learning outcome might be assessed as part of coursework and then also be assessed in an examination. This makes it more complex to keep track of which learning outcomes have been achieved.

Table 3. **Alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria: module for hairdressing occupations – example from Lithuania**

Learning outcome 'Learner is able to ...'	Assessment criteria
Cut women's hair using various techniques based on various shapes.	Independently perform various hair cutting techniques for women (finger cutting, layering, thinning, shaping, texturizing, graduating, thinning) and styles (round, square, elongated, triangular).
Select the techniques and tools used for hair styling after cutting.	Perform short-term hair styling after cutting using various techniques and tools (scissors, blow dryer, curling irons).

Source: Authors, based on the Lithuanian case study and the hairdressers' modular VET programmes published on the [QVETDC website](#).

As mentioned above, the way assessment criteria are presented in France differs across diploma frameworks. In the example in Box 9, the assessment criteria are listed at the end (see *critères d'évaluation*) and a more general approach is used, without a one-to-one link between competences and assessment criteria. The example in Table 4, however, shows a stronger alignment between the 'criteria and/or performance indicators' (the right column) and the 'detailed competences' or *compétences détaillées* (the middle column).

Table 4. **Alignment between competences and assessment criteria for a Bac Pro in aeronautics – example from France**

C02 – Prepare an intervention		
Data/information (*)	Detailed competences	Criteria and/or performance indicators
Identify the material context for intervention (runway, hangar, workshop, laboratory, aircraft, part of the aircraft, etc.);	Locate the intervention area; Prepare the intervention area (access methods and securing the area);	Demonstrate precise identification of the intervention area;
Identify the standard and specific tools;	Gather the necessary assemblies, sub-assemblies, elements, components, consumables for the intervention;	Demonstrate optimised demarcation of the area to be secured;
...	...	Demonstrate adequate preparation of the intervention area;
		Demonstrate compliance and appropriate securing of the intervention area;
		...

(\*) The context and resources are specific to each of the three options (avionics, systems, structure).

Source: Authors, based on the French case study.

#### 4.3.2. Quality assurance for alignment includes external component

In some countries, the alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment is not only ensured by internal quality assurance mechanisms but also

ensured by the external verification of exams, by providing centrally developed exams or by using other external quality assurance mechanisms (e.g. Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia).

In Malta, outcomes and assessment criteria are aligned from the beginning by the MATSEC syllabus panel<sup>(40)</sup> when the syllabi, including both the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria, are published. It is the responsibility of the VET teachers to ensure that assessment criteria and assessments themselves remain aligned in the case of the school-based assessment and the responsibility of the MATSEC examiners for the controlled (summative) assessment. School-based assessment is internally verified, often by teachers teaching the same vocational subject. The verification process takes place before the assignment is issued to students and involves checks relating to how much the task matches with the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria it targets. Internal verification is also implemented for the marking of assignments, ensuring fair assessment of students' work. The internal verifiers also go through a representative sample of corrected students' work to review the teacher's marking scores, moderating the standard of marking.

As mentioned above, there are no specific assessment criteria developed at the national level in the Netherlands. It is the qualification files that provide the basis for VET schools and companies to develop their VET programmes. These files also serve as a basis for exam providers (and VET schools) to develop summative assessments (Box 11). The Inspectorate of Education oversees the general assessment framework and conducts audits to ensure that VET providers adhere to national standards (Netherlands. Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Inspectorate of Education, 2024). Additionally, VET providers implement internal quality assurance mechanisms, including peer reviews and validation processes, to ensure consistency in assessments. Furthermore, national guidelines require independent bodies and/or industry representatives to externally validate assessments. These measures ensure that the assessment processes and results accurately reflect the intended learning outcomes, maintaining the reliability, fairness and relevance of the assessment system (Nusche et al., 2014). For occupation-specific learning outcomes, exams are created by exam providers, certified by external certifying organisations. VET schools have three routes for picking an assessment tool that meets validity requirements: (a) purchase exams from a certified provider, (b) self-design exams based on collective agreements and (c) externally validate self-constructed exams (Validering Examens MBO,

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<sup>(40)</sup> The syllabus panel of experts and teaching in the specific VET subjects is set up by the MATSEC Examinations Board. This panel takes on teachers' feedback and revise syllabi (learning outcomes, assessment criteria) periodically.

2018). Each route uses the same exams, whether purchased from exam suppliers or developed jointly by VET schools. A recent evaluation of the different routes indicates that they contribute to quality enhancement. However, there is still room for improvement through fostering new ways to verify whether learners master the core tasks and work processes, and there are more ways to offer greater flexibility in assessment (Markteffect, 2024). As highlighted in the case study, the process of translating national learning outcomes into exams for summative assessment may seem quite rigid. However, there is still some flexibility for teachers and trainers to engage in discussions about exam design. This flexibility can be partly attributed to the involvement of teachers in the development of national reference documents.

The introduction of verification criteria in Poland provided a strong foundation for designing exam tasks that can demonstrate whether students achieve the intended learning outcomes based in the vocational core curricula. These exams are created centrally by experts from the central examination board and are readily available online (see excerpt in Box 15). Given that individual exams are aligned with intended learning outcomes, teachers commonly use them for both summative and formative assessment at school. Similarly, as in the case of Malta, teachers are responsible for ensuring the alignment between the exam tasks, assessment methods and scores.

In Slovenia, assessment criteria and assessment methods are directly linked to the operational goals specified for each module, ensuring coherence between intended outcomes and assessment practices. The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training also conducts evaluations, monitors programmes, and assesses the implementation of learning outcomes and assessment practices.

#### **4.3.3. Some limitations observed**

In certain countries, some limitations in the quality assurance of alignment can be observed. This is the case, for example, in Bulgaria and Portugal and might be because curricula are still often rather input-based (Cedefop, 2025). In Bulgaria, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are outlined in the SESs for VET, which serve as the most comprehensive national reference documents. While national VET curricula include intended learning outcomes (but not assessment criteria) and NEPs define assessment criteria (but omit learning outcomes), both are required by legislation to build on SESs. However, intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria from SESs are not always consistently reflected in VET

curricula and NEPs, highlighting methodological inconsistencies<sup>(41)</sup>. In Portugal, learning outcomes and assessment criteria for trainees' learning are established at the national level and included in the curriculum for each qualification. However, there seems to be a gap in national provisions, as no detailed or specific documents define the quality assurance mechanisms needed to ensure alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and processes, and assessment results.

#### 4.4. Support and guidance at the national level

In terms of the level and type of national assessment-related support and guidance offered to VET providers, individual teachers and trainers, several countries are reported to have more centralised and structured approaches. While France, Malta, Slovenia and Finland this includes guidance material in addition to dedicated training and support, in Lithuania the focus is on the provision of support materials. The Netherlands ensures significant support primarily through specialised bodies, offering various training opportunities and resources to enhance assessment practices, though this support is less centralised. By way of contrast, Bulgaria, Ireland, Poland and Portugal exhibit gaps in offering training and resources at the national level. Some examples are provided in the paragraphs below.

Finland offers wide-ranging and comprehensive support for implementing the competence-based approach, including for assessment practices. At the national level, the support is offered by the Finnish National Agency for Education and includes written materials and guidelines, regional support groups (established and financed for the further development of assessment practices at the local level), financial resources for specific training, and support and consultations regarding assessment made available for professional teacher education schools. Additionally, national projects such as the 2017–2019 [Parasta osaamista](#) ('best skills and practices') project provided support materials, guidelines and a digital training course (still offered) to enhance assessment practices (see Parasta osaamista, n.d.; Vehviläinen, 2020). A dedicated national website was launched to support the implementation of work-based learning, including sections specifically dedicated to assessment and competence demonstration (OHJAAN, n.d.). Finally,

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<sup>(41)</sup> For example, there are differences in the formulation of learning outcomes. SESs define learning outcomes in terms of units of learning outcomes, specifying knowledge, skills and competences for each unit and, therefore, have higher level of granularity. By way of contrast, units of learning outcomes are not used in national VET curricula.

a formal qualification ‘specialist in competence-based qualifications’, with a focus on assessment practices, was offered until 2017.

In France, inspectors from the Ministry of National Education regularly organise meetings with teaching staff, either during their institutional visits or through ‘harmonisation meetings’ held prior to exams. Additionally, national and regional education authorities offer guidelines and the latest information online, in line with official documents. The assessment of learning outcomes is addressed through continuing professional development, specifically for teachers in *lycées professionnels*, though not for trainers in apprenticeship centres, as they are not employed by the Ministry of National Education. Similar to the French approach is the one in Malta regarding VET SEC subjects: all schools are supported by a team of education officers, one for each VET subject, within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation. They visit schools to talk to teachers directly to understand their challenges and support them with the assessment process. Education officers also provide training courses, and the MATSEC Examinations Board provides guidelines explaining how assessment criteria are to be used when setting tasks and examination questions in the case of school-based assessment designed by VET teachers and in the case of the controlled assessment designed by national examiners (MATSEC, 2022). The guidelines highlight that command words (e.g. ‘define’, ‘explain’, ‘outline’, ‘identify’) used in learning outcomes should be used consistently in assessment as much as possible so that the kind of task set is equivalent to that stated in the relevant assessment criterion (MATSEC, 2022).

Similarly, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training is particularly active in the field by providing various training and preparing materials for practitioners. An example of such material is the manual ‘Quality criteria for curriculum implementation: a handbook for facilitators’ (Grašič et al., 2008), which contains guidelines for designing learning outcomes, planning learning situations and assessing learning outcomes. Since 2008, training for mentors in enterprises (including the topic of assessing learning outcomes) has also been available.

Lithuania delivers substantial national support through detailed guidelines, methodological resources and structured assessment frameworks through the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (QVETDC). For example, the QVETDC has published several resources on teaching, learning and assessment in VET, including the publication *Learning Outcomes in Vocational Education and Training: Methodological recommendations for the formulation and assessment of learning outcomes*. QVETDC (2021) also published guidelines addressing assessment of achieved

learning outcomes (including how to decide on assessment criteria and how to develop appropriate assessment tasks). They also clearly establish that VET teachers and trainers working with modular VET programmes must be able to combine formative and summative assessment. Regarding external summative assessment of competences, materials are made available by QVETDC including, among other things, test specifications and guidelines for the theoretical part of the assessment of competences. Moreover, QVETDC provides methodological guidelines for the preparation of practical tasks. These explicitly state that the tasks are prepared based on competences, learning objectives and learning outcomes identified and defined in VET programmes and occupational standards. They further explain that criterion-based assessment is used.

In the Netherlands, support for VET providers and teachers is considerable but mainly provided through bodies other than the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, for instance, by the VET council through an information sharing platform: 'Kennispunt MBO [*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* (secondary vocational education)] – Onderwijs en Examinering' ('Knowledge point MBO – education and examination'). Here VET schools and educators can access information on (new) legislation and regulations and can exchange information and practical solutions related to examinations. The platform organises information sessions and workshops, such as on the topic of AI and examination in VET (Kennispunt MBO Onderwijs en Examinering, 2024). The Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven (Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market [SBB]) also offers resources, training and professional development opportunities, including online courses, workshops and seminars focused on effective assessment practices for in-company trainers. An example is the e-learning module for in-company trainers on 'assessing objectively and providing feedback' (SBB, n.d.).

The following examples from Ireland and Bulgaria refer to the limited support expressed in some of the case studies. In Ireland, while the programme descriptors and programme modules produced by ETBs to some extent serve as guidance for teachers to devise their programmes and assessment methods, there is a general lack of training offers for teachers. For example, an interviewee highlighted the need for a centralised, systematic approach to assessment and a repository of research and best practices. The only regular training available for VET providers, schools and individual teachers/trainers regarding assessment is an annual session for new assessors and a refresher for existing ones, organised by the quality office of the ETB. A key focus of this training is ensuring that assessment methods effectively cover learning outcomes, though opportunities for teachers to learn together and share experiences are limited. External authenticators also

receive training to maintain consistency in their approach, and there is an annual ETB briefing for them, with access to a digital portfolio of materials related to their role. While QQI offers information sessions, it does not provide training.

In Bulgaria, at the national level, there is limited support and guidance available for VET providers, teachers and in-company trainers concerning both formative and summative assessment. Recently, the Ministry of Education and Science published some VET-specific teaching guidelines and materials on its website. However, these are not widely known among teachers and students and are limited in scope, covering only a few VET subjects, which restricts their utility across the entire VET spectrum. Regarding work-based learning (apprenticeships), guidance on grading is provided in the individual diary <sup>(42)</sup> that in-company trainers have to keep for each student. The guidance is up to one page in length and explains what grades mean in terms of performance levels. The NEPs also provide a short guidance on grading for summative assessment procedures. Additionally, brief instruction is included on how to align assessment criteria (specifically those used in the theoretical exam) with Bloom's taxonomy of action verbs.

#### 4.5. Current discussions and reform plans

Ongoing discussions and plans for reform regarding assessment in IVET reflect the specific contexts and needs identified in each Member State. Malta has recently introduced changes in assessment processes and formats in VET secondary schools to more closely follow the approaches taken in general education. In Bulgaria and Slovenia, potential future assessment reforms are part of broader, system-level plans for improving quality assurance in VET schools. Discussions in Ireland focus on the degree of regulation in assessment and in Finland on ensuring the reliability of assessment practices. A key issue in France, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia is the alignment between graduates' (achieved) learning outcomes and employers' needs. Improving online assessments is a topic of ongoing discussion in the Netherlands and Slovenia. Moreover, current discussions in the Netherlands address the use of more individualised forms of assessment, and in Slovenia stakeholders are considering how to better integrate assessment into work-based learning. The following

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<sup>(42)</sup> The diary includes tasks completed by the VET student, assessment criteria (formative assessment), observations on tools and equipment used, problems encountered, etc.

paragraphs provide further detail on some countries where developmental plans or activities are currently being pursued.

In Malta, in secondary school VET, the assessment of VET subjects has recently been aligned with the practices for secondary general education subjects while retaining a modular structure across NQF levels 1, 2 and 3. Since the 2024/2025 school year, teachers have had flexibility in determining of the order of the three units over the three years. The assessment processes for students will also change to some extent. There will still be a school-based assessment task assigned to students each year and the average of these scores will then contribute to 30 % of the overall grade for the programme. Moreover, students are expected to undertake coursework each year as they build a portfolio across the three-year programme using templates set by the MATSEC Examinations Board. The portfolio tasks are set and marked by the teacher using a marking scheme provided in the syllabus. This component is allocated another 30 % of the final mark. Finally, the ‘controlled assessment’, conducted at the end of the programme, contributes 40 % to the final grade. The exam covers knowledge and comprehension criteria across the three years. The use of external verifiers has been removed.

ETBs in Ireland try to strike a balance regarding the degree of regulation. The standards underpinning the common awards system and individual programmes are due for review. It will be necessary to find a way to balance the preferences of teachers who seem to favour a high degree of guidance (‘being told what to do’) with those who see too much guidance as an intrusion into their domain of professional expertise. One interviewee commented: ‘Everyone talks about UDL [universal design for learning] now [which encourages more learner-centred approaches to assessment] and so we need to be really careful not to put a lid on assessment’.

The Slovenian 2023–2033 draft national programme for education (Republic of Slovenia, 2024) addresses assessment in vocational and professional education as part of broader reforms to the assessment of knowledge. Key objectives include strengthening the role of knowledge standards in ensuring quality teaching, improving online assessment and raising the quality of assessment in primary and secondary schools. Particular emphasis has been placed on aligning the knowledge and skills acquired with the needs of the economy and society, which means that assessment will not only be based on theoretical tests but will also include practical tasks and monitoring of the development of pupils’ competences. In addition, the programme anticipates strengthening systems for monitoring pupils’ progress, including both ongoing assessment and evaluations at the level of the whole education system. Reforms of national examinations are also planned,

which could have an impact on the way assessments are carried out in vocational and professional education. Also, there is a discussion on how to better integrate assessment into traineeship and practical training programmes, stressing the importance of involving employers and ensuring transparent processes for monitoring pupils' knowledge and competences.

Current reforms in the Netherlands aim to better integrate digital tools and online assessments, reflecting the growing importance of digital literacy and hybrid learning environments. Additionally, a push can be seen towards more personalised and adaptive assessment methods that can cater to individual learning paths and diverse student needs. An example for this comes from the learning network *'anders verantwoorden van het diplomabesluit'* ('justify the diploma decision differently') (Kennispunt MBO Onderwijs en Examinering, n.d.). Within this network of schools, new approaches are being tested to use different data points to validate that learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Similarly to France and Poland, discussions continue around ensuring that assessment practices remain aligned with the rapidly evolving demands of the labour market. Soft skills and transversal competences have also been receiving more emphasis in recent years (Broek, 2022).

#### 4.6. Conclusions

This chapter provided insights into how the use of learning outcomes has shaped assessment policies and regulations at the national level. Overall, the case study countries adopt a complementary approach to assessing learning outcomes in IVET, utilising both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is primarily used by VET providers (teachers/trainers) to monitor learners' progress, provide feedback on achievements and guide further learning. Summative assessment, on the other hand, serves two distinct purposes: (a) awarding a module/unit, typically conducted by VET providers (e.g. schools or companies); and (b) awarding a qualification, often administered by examination commissions or external assessors. Formative assessment is generally less regulated at the national level than summative assessment generally is, providing greater flexibility for VET providers in selecting assessment methods. Summative assessment is more regulated and aligned with national frameworks specifying intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The case study countries emphasise the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment results. This alignment is typically established during programme design or through national-level quality assurance mechanisms. This alignment is in several cases supported by assessment criteria or detailed learning

outcomes that act as a bridge between intended and achieved outcomes. However, the degree of alignment and coherence varies, and challenges such as methodological inconsistencies, differing interpretations and a lack of specialised training hamper the effective implementation of learning-outcomes-based assessment.

## Chapter 5.

# Practices and perspectives of VET providers / schools

### Key findings

- (a) The assessment of learning outcomes in VET is predominantly shaped by national regulations; most of the visited VET providers do not have specific policies or strategies for integrating learning outcomes into assessments.
- (b) Many VET providers do not have a structured approach to aligning learning outcomes, assessment processes and results. This is mainly because efforts to do so are concentrated at the national level and are part of the work practice of VET teachers and trainers.
- (c) Internal and external quality assurance mechanisms help ensure validity, reliability and fairness in assessment, especially for summative assessments.
- (d) Effective assessment relies on guidance, support and training for teachers, trainers and assessors, though the availability and structure of this support vary across VET providers.
- (e) Management at VET provider institutions generally find learning outcomes valuable due to their labour market relevance and their role in guiding assessment design.
- (f) Key areas for improvement include better alignment between learning outcomes and assessment, clearer assessment criteria, regular updates to assessment practices and enhanced assessment skills for educators.

This chapter explores how learning outcomes are used at the meso (VET provider/school) level in assessment practices, based on multiple sources. It is mainly based on information gathered via site visits at institutions (schools and partner companies) delivering IVET programmes in the 10 case study countries. In each of the countries, only a few VET providers have been visited. Hence, this information is more anecdotal than stating what is common practice in a country and can be read as indicative and explorative and not necessarily representing a representative national perspective. Each VET provider was asked to share relevant documents before the site visits, such as specific strategies, guidelines, evaluations, reports and tools related to assessment/assessment criteria<sup>(43)</sup>. National researchers reviewed and analysed these documents and, building on the information gathered, conducted semi-structured interviews with management representatives from each VET provider, for example with the principal, or with

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<sup>(43)</sup> Relevant documents of the VET provider gathered during the site visits on other themes of the overall study – on the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices in school-based settings (Cedefop, 2025) and on work- and practice-based IVET (Cedefop, forthcoming) were also considered.

staff representing a department or a unit coordinating or quality-assuring assessment activities. The interviews focused on strategies, plans, intentions, experiences, etc., related to the influence of learning outcomes on assessment at the VET provider level. Additionally, qualitative data were complemented by the results of a survey of school managers and curriculum coordinators (across the 10 case study countries).

## 5.1. Strategies, policies and practices at the VET provider/school level regarding the use of learning outcomes in assessment

The previous chapter demonstrated that intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria are typically determined at the national level. Consequently, VET providers usually do not have a particular role in defining these learning outcomes or the assessment criteria. The exceptions are Slovenia and Ireland, where teachers or groups of teachers develop assessment criteria (see Section 4.1.1).

Most VET providers / schools usually do not have specific policies or strategies explicitly addressing the use of learning outcomes in assessment. An exception to this is the MCAST in Malta (MCAST, 2020, 2022a, 2022b). Several of the institutions visited have procedures in place that relate to the use of learning outcomes in assessment, although this is sometimes more implicit, as the focus is on more general quality assurance aspects of assessment. These practices, illustrated in the following sections, refer to:

- (a) efforts to ensure alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment results;
- (b) practices for adherence to quality principles in assessment;
- (c) initiatives to foster cooperation;
- (d) learner-centred approaches.

### 5.1.1. Efforts to ensure alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment results

The alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment results is generally ensured by national-level regulations (see Section 4.3). Some of the VET providers visited have specific approaches in this regard; a few examples are briefly presented here.

One of the Bulgarian schools visited uses entry-level tests for specific subjects at the beginning of the school year. These tests serve to assess the intended learning outcomes students were expected to achieve in the previous year, identify

any gaps and determine areas for improvement in both teaching and assessment (formative and summative) processes.

Slovenian interviewees referred to work-based learning and the involvement of employers in the assessment process as an important measure for ensuring alignment, as employer feedback provides information on actually achieved learning outcomes and any necessary adjustments of the teaching and training process. In the Netherlands too, ongoing discussions between VET providers and workplace supervisors play a crucial role in refining assessment methods and maintaining alignment with industry standards. Regarding alignment in workplace settings, personal development plans are used to ensure coherence between assessment tasks and intended learning outcomes. Project-based learning approaches are also employed by the schools visited in Portugal and are seen as a means of enhancing alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and assessment results, serving as a tool for both promoting trainees' learning and assessing their progress simultaneously. When defining the projects, the pedagogical staff (including teachers and trainers) try to ensure the project's alignment with intended learning outcomes, identifying situations, methods and tools to perform the assessment, monitor learners' progress and provide guidance to learners to achieve the expected results.

As previously noted, the MCAST follows a clearly specific approach. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria for MCAST courses are written by VET lecturers at the institute level when a new programme is drawn up. On the approval of the concept for a new programme, MCAST lecturers are selected to write study unit specifications including learning outcomes, assessment criteria (which have to be mapped onto the learning outcomes) and assessment methods. Staff at the quality assurance department (centralised within MCAST) review the study unit specifications to check whether the learning outcomes are written in line with the assessment criteria, that they reflect the NQF level at which the study unit is set, and that the assessment criteria are measurable with the correct marks assigned for the different aspects of the assignment.

### **5.1.2. Practices ensuring adherence to quality principles in assessment**

Quality principles, such as validity, reliability, impartiality and fairness in assessment, are primarily addressed within national regulations, particularly for summative assessment. VET providers are expected to ensure that these requirements are met. In the countries, several practices have been identified that aim to ensure adherence to quality principles. Relevant practices – often closely linked to ensuring alignment – highlighted by representatives of the institutions visited are presented here below.

Finnish VET providers regard competence demonstration as a valid and reliable assessment method. Providers use common implementation plans for competence demonstrations, ensuring the consistency, fairness and quality of assessment. The implementation plans refer to general principles of assessment and are usually part of providers' quality-management systems. Harmonisation committees in France ensure reliable summative assessment (at the end of a cycle/year) across different schools (*lycées professionnels*). Before each exam session, the committees review student files to ensure that grading and rubric interpretations are aligned across institutions as, according to an interviewee, 'interpretation can vary from one institution to another, from one teaching team to another, despite the guidelines given by the Ministry of Education'. In the case of a *centre de formation d'apprentis* (CFA) <sup>(44)</sup> offering VET qualifications as part of an apprenticeship contract, France Compétences (the national governance body for vocational training and apprenticeship) is responsible for ensuring that they develop an assessment framework aligned with the Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles (National Directory of Professional Qualifications [RNCP]) <sup>(45)</sup> registration system and the professional qualification. Visited VET providers in the Netherlands also use internal quality assurance mechanisms (e.g. peer reviews and validation processes) to ensure reliability in assessments with a formative function. For summative assessment, providers consider the following criteria when selecting an external exam provider: the expertise of the exam provider in the professional field, the structure of exams / whether it fits the modular approach of VET programmes and validity. While all exam providers have valid exams (as supervised by the national quality assurance body), some of them are considered to be more rigid in the interpretation of the qualification files than others, which provide more room for adaptation and interpretation.

In Ireland, the quality of assessment is also externally assured by external authenticators who randomly check the work of teachers as assessors to maintain standards. At one of the Irish colleges visited, it was pointed out that the specific teachers whose work the external authenticators will assess is not disclosed. As a result, all teachers have to assume they could be evaluated. This serves as another method for upholding quality standards. Although learning outcomes are not always explicitly mentioned, it can be assumed – based on the approaches

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<sup>(44)</sup> *Centres de formation d'apprentis* are specialised training institutions in France that provide vocational education through an apprenticeship model. Typically, students spend about one week in the CFA and the next week in their workplace, gaining hands-on experience while pursuing their education.

<sup>(45)</sup> The RNCP is the national directory of professional qualifications.

discussed in the previous sections – that they do play a role in quality assurance mechanisms regarding assessment.

Bulgarian VET schools highlight the importance of combining various assessment methods, including individual and group assignments, to enhance the objectivity of formative assessment. In Bulgaria and Lithuania, theoretical exams and tests – an integral part of the final qualification assessment – are conducted anonymously (i.e. assessors are not able to identify the candidates), ensuring greater impartiality. Competence demonstrations in Finland are assessed jointly (involving workplace instructors/assessors, teachers and students' self-assessment) (see Box 12), which ensures a high level of impartiality, as noted by interviewees.

**Box 12. Assessment discussion – example from Finland**

In Finland, the assessment of students' performances in competence demonstrations is based on an assessment form that includes the competence requirements and assessment criteria for the respective module. Competence demonstrations are followed by an assessment discussion between the student, the workplace instructor and the VET teacher. In the assessment discussion observed for this case study, the parties involved reconstructed the competence demonstration bit by bit. The student began by explaining the tasks he had completed and how he approached them. The workplace instructor then shared her observations and provided additional comments on the student's performance. The VET teacher followed by asking clarifying questions to better understand the work completed and the student's performance. Once the VET teacher felt ready to determine the grade, the student first provided a self-assessment and assigned a grade to his own performance. The workplace instructor and the VET teacher then discussed the performance level and mutually agreed on the final grade. The VET teacher recorded the decision in writing, which was signed by all parties involved. The assessment discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Finnish case study.

The quality criteria used by MCAST, on the other hand, is laid out primarily at the provider level. MCAST has a centralised quality assurance department, responsible for developing key processes for the quality of assessment, alongside teaching and learning. It deals with quality principles such as reliability, validity, impartiality and fairness, including the possibility of an appeal procedure (see Box 13).

**Box 13. Ensuring the quality of assessment – example from Malta**

In the Malta case study, the quality of assessments was ensured through an internal verification process, which applies to all institutes at MCAST and ensures that assessment instruments are fit for purpose and present evidence that assessment

criteria have been reached, and that assessment decisions are fair, accurate and consistent with the assessment criteria.

The internal verifier is responsible for ensuring the reliability and validity of assessments, by verifying assignment briefs and samples of assessment decisions. Lecturers are usually nominated by the institute directors to act as internal verifiers for assessment by other lecturers (but not their own). Internal verifiers are experienced vocational lecturers and assessors, familiar with the subject area assessed, who understand the assessment methodology and have attended training on the assessment process.

In addition to the internal verification, MCAST also has a 'lead internal verification', carried out by the quality assurance department. The 'lead verification' goes over the whole process, from assessment to the publication of results.

Moreover, there is an appeals process for students who do not agree with the outcome of the assessment process. An example was described by an interviewee:

'I had an appeal about a presentation this morning ... the presentation itself has the same mark for all the group ... but the presentation skills, which form part of the teamwork too, the assessor would feel that he can mark differently, as one may have different presentation skills compared with the others ... so there your criteria have to be very clear to the students what you tend to assess the students on ... we guide the lecturers to include parameters for presentation skills, how you build your presentation and what you are looking once you are standing in front of me and you are delivering the presentation.'

*Source:* Authors, based on the Maltese case study.

### 5.1.3. Fostering cooperation

In several of the institutions visited, activities aimed at achieving and ensuring coherent assessment approaches within the VET provider were observed by promoting cooperation between management and teachers and trainers or between teachers and trainers themselves<sup>(46)</sup>. Some approaches have already been mentioned above, as such collaborations seem to be important for ensuring alignment between the intended learning outcomes, the assessment processes and the assessment results, in addition to ensuring compliance with the quality principles. Some further examples highlighted by the VET providers visited are presented here.

In the context of VET SEC subjects in Malta, for example, the head of department of the visited school collaborates closely with VET teachers to oversee the assessment process, ensuring their active participation in internal verification<sup>(47)</sup>. The management level is also actively involved in improving assessment practices in one of the French VET providers visited, where an

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<sup>(46)</sup> Cooperation and collaboration between VET providers or schools and companies and the use of learning outcomes in this context is discussed in Cedefop (forthcoming).

<sup>(47)</sup> School-based assessment is internally verified, often (but not always) by teachers as acting internal verifiers within the same school, teaching the same vocational subject (see Section 4.3).

internally developed rubric is used for ongoing assessment of competence blocks (modules) during training (CCF). This assessment tool (rubric) specifies in detail what is expected of learners in terms of competences. The use of this tool is intended to provide clarity for learners and support transparent grading and consistency among trainers. It also serves as an instrument to give the trainers feedback on how effectively they have conveyed the training content.

Because of the inconsistencies identified in national reference documents (see Section 4.3), one Bulgarian school formed teacher teams by VET subject to discuss and share experiences in developing uniform assessment criteria for intended learning outcomes. This effort can build on discussing the assessment criteria defined in VET standards for units of learning outcomes and compare them with teachers' practices. While these criteria are still works in progress, once developed and agreed, they could provide the basis for the preparation of provider-level guidelines (for formative and summative school-level assessment). The Portuguese schools visited also promote collaboration between trainers from different classes and courses, which further helps to develop a shared understanding of assessment criteria interpretation. A similar approach, practised by one of the secondary VET schools from Malta, is where group sessions are organised for teachers to discuss issues, mainly related to assessment, particularly the design of the assessment tasks in line with the assessment criteria. At one of the schools visited in Slovenia, there is an annual event for teachers to come together and share their practices.

In Ireland, at one college visited, an approach adopted in 2023–2024 for the mandatory communications module in all QQI level 5 awards involved using the same assignment and marking scheme throughout the institution, that is, across subject departments. This procedure was established to address issues surrounding variations in the content/volume of assignments and how strictly students were being graded. It was described as 'a form of internal quality assurance'. Furthermore, an important dimension of assessment is integration, where one activity may contribute to assessment of several learning outcomes, and this was encouraged at senior levels in both colleges visited, partly in order to streamline assessment processes and to reduce the assessment burden.

At both schools visited in the Netherlands, VET teachers design their own formative assessments and can make use of pre-existing databases of tests, assessments and assignments, developed by other teachers within their institution and also from other VET schools. The databases bring together assignments on specific parts (selected learning outcomes) from the qualification files.

#### **5.1.4. Learner-centred approaches**

Some of the VET providers visited use assessment approaches that particularly support learners' reflections on their progress in developing competences.

In Poland, for example, one of the schools visited uses modular teaching programmes and has introduced certificates for module completion. The overall aim is to achieve all learning outcomes defined in the core curriculum and prepare students to pass the qualification exams organised by the central examination board. What distinguishes this school is that students receive personalised certificates after passing a mandatory test required by the school, administered on the completion of learning tasks for each module. The certificate includes a list of skills the student has mastered. The detailed skills description matches the specific verification criteria defined in the vocational core curriculum.

The Portuguese schools visited employ project-based learning approaches. Their pedagogical teams design projects for students to develop throughout different phases of their training. Trainees are involved in determining their project-based learning activities as a school strategy to empower them to continuously proceed with self-assessment and be aware of their learning path and progress. Additionally, trainees may also contribute to defining the assessment criteria for the projects they develop throughout their course. The project conducted in the final year is presented to an examination committee (professional aptitude test) in their final year.

Larger companies in the Netherlands with a continuous flow of apprentices develop their own frameworks to check whether VET students' progress in their learning and whether they are ready to take up more complex tasks. At one of the companies visited (in the childcare sector), the learning outcomes are integrated in learners' personal development plans, providing additional structure to assure that VET learners' learning process in the company is fully aligned with the VET programme at school. This company (offering a work-based learning setting) uses the personal development plans to link assessment tasks with learning outcomes and curriculum objectives. The integration of learning outcomes into these personal development plans is aimed at ensuring clarity and consistency for learners and helping them understand the expectations and objectives of their assessments.

In both VET institutions visited in Finland, both learner-centredness and the use of different methods for formative assessment of learning are emphasised. Methods used include formalised assessment documents, portfolios, project tasks, written and oral feedback to students on their performance, regular personal development meetings between teachers and students as a method of providing

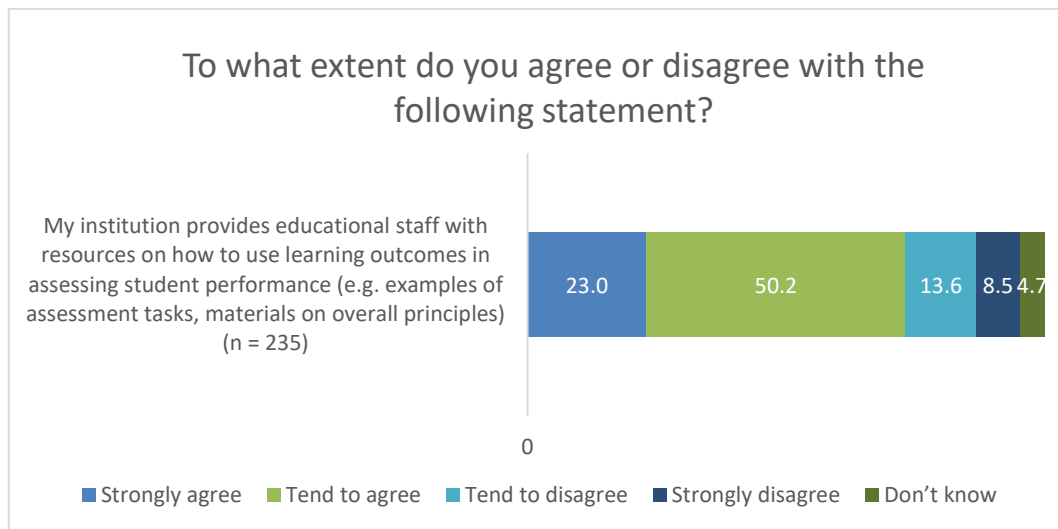
feedback on learning progress, and the use of digital platforms to monitor and provide feedback to students on their learning.

Formative assessment not only supports a learner-centred approach, but can also provide teachers and trainers with important feedback about their own approach. As one interviewee from the management level of a VET institution visited in France explained, teachers and trainers are encouraged to use assessments that are not necessarily graded (e.g. questionnaires, little exercises, oral interrogations), as ‘the formative assessment is not intended to leave a trace. And what we’re trying to convince them of is that formative assessment is more about the trainers being assessed than the learners.’

## 5.2. Guidance, support and training offered to teachers, trainers and assessors

Support at the provider level should ideally complement national-level support (Section 4.4) and, where possible, address any gaps identified therein. As illustrated in Figure 4, more than half of VET school principals and coordinators in all case study countries ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’ that their institutions provide staff with resources on how to use learning outcomes in assessing students (73.2 %).

Figure 4. **School leaders' views on staff resources related to learning outcomes (%)**



Source: Authors, based on survey data.

However, the qualitative data from the case studies shows a slightly different perspective and indicates a greater reliance on guidance and resources offered at the national level. Some VET providers do offer more structured guidance, support and training for teachers, trainers and assessors, while others mainly utilise guidance and support at the national level. The sections below provide examples for each approach in detail.

#### 5.2.1. VET providers mainly using national-level guidance and resources

As an example for VET providers mainly using national-level guidance, the school management representatives interviewed in Bulgaria stressed that schools do not develop materials to support teachers in using learning outcomes for assessment. This is the case because the preparation requires time that schools cannot afford to allocate. Additionally, national support remains limited and is often difficult to utilise. However, one school highlighted that it ensures its teachers have access to staff training provided by partner companies. Participation in this training allows teachers to refine assessment methods and content (e.g. integrate additional learning outcomes), particularly in formative assessments. Colleges/institutes visited in Ireland do not issue guidance themselves but rather teachers use ETB (national) guidance provided through the programme descriptors/modules. However, ETB guidance is limited to suggesting the types of assessment methods to use, as opposed to offering more detailed 'how to use' guidance.

### **5.2.2. VET providers complementing national resources with their own support services**

To ensure that teachers' and trainers' competences in assessment are up-to-date and adequate, Finnish VET providers organise on-site and online training, induction visits and regular meetings with workplace representatives. The guides, websites (e.g. Ohjaan.fi) and project materials offered at the national level are considered supportive of these efforts. Additionally, regular meetings with the representatives of local workplaces are organised, during which the renewal of qualification requirements or assessment of competences in real workplace situations are discussed. In relation to work-based learning, VET providers offer training and other support (e.g. online materials) for workplace instructors to ensure the quality of competence demonstration.

The Lithuanian schools pointed to various initiatives in place that facilitate the exchange of effective learning and assessment approaches, best methods and preparation of assessment tasks. These include, for instance, platforms for teacher methodological groups and peer-led seminars. As in Finland, the national-level support (guidance materials on assessment) complements schools' support efforts.

The French schools visited provide guidance and support for learning-outcomes based assessment mostly through collaboration with Ministry of National Education inspectors (harmonisation meetings) and companies (work-based learning). There are also internal arrangements to directly support teachers and trainers. The school management representatives interviewed emphasised that different groups of teachers and trainers have varying support needs. For example, younger teachers are more inclined to adopt learning-outcomes-based assessments as they are generally more familiar with this approach. Additionally, trainers who enter teaching directly from the workplace may face challenges in adapting to the use of assessment tools. Novice teachers are also supported through the MCAST system in Malta: when new VET lecturers join MCAST, they undergo induction training that includes familiarisation with MCAST's assessment procedures. This training covers key aspects such as designing assignment tasks aligned with learning outcomes and assessment criteria specified in the study unit descriptions. The MCAST personnel interviewed noted that new lecturers often rigidly adhere to the wording of the assessment criteria. However, as they gain experience, they begin contextualizing assignments to better align assessments with students' fields of study. After one or two years, these lecturers may be invited to take on the role of an internal verifier.

The VET schools visited in the Netherlands benefit from external support developed by the exam providers, including detailed guidelines on how to use

assessment criteria in teaching and learning. At one of the schools visited, a specific web portal is available (provided by the exam provider), where all checklists for validating learning progression, guidance materials and examination assignments are available for staff in the school and the companies. Furthermore, in the schools visited, teachers receive training on the topic of conducting assessments.

The Portuguese schools develop strategic documents to guide VET professionals along all phases of training, including assessment. These documents refer to a training and learning handbook (including documents for assessment) and assessment scripts and records (presenting the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in a more operational and practical way). Sometimes schools organise courses in cooperation with other key stakeholders on such topics as planning, monitoring and assessing trainees' learning.

In Slovenia, guidance and support for teachers and mentors on assessment is provided by a variety of institutions and individuals, in particular the schools themselves, professional institutions, and employers or mentors in companies. Schools often organise short training sessions, seminars and workshops for teachers and mentors. These trainings also cover the use of learning outcomes, the design of assessment criteria and methods, and the provision of quality feedback to students.

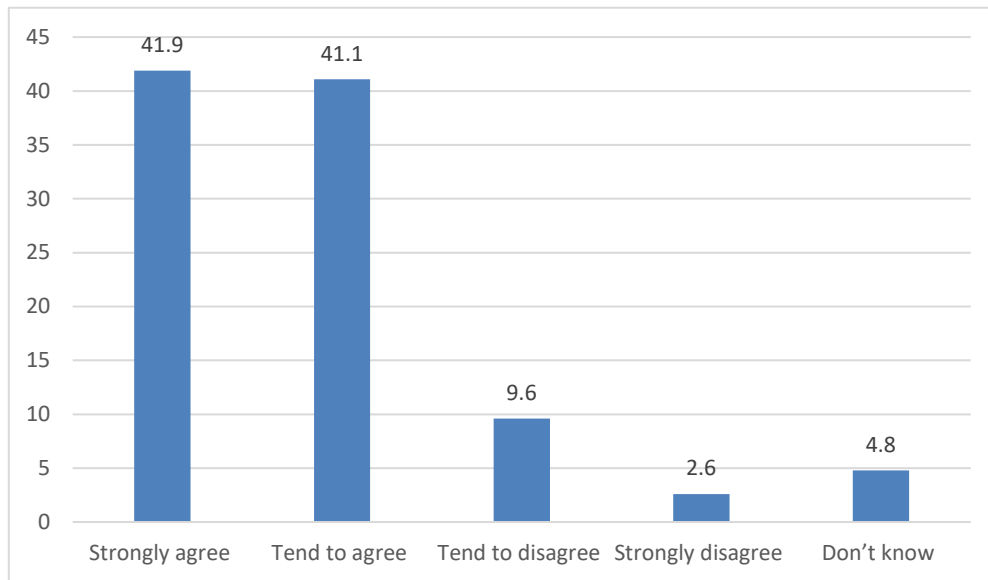
### 5.3. Reflections from management representatives of VET providers

Representatives from the management level of the VET providers surveyed in this study were asked to share their thoughts on the value and usability of learning outcomes for assessment and any needs for improvement in this context. Their reflections are presented in the following subsections.

#### 5.3.1. Perceived value and usability of learning outcomes for assessment

According to survey results, a majority of school principals and curriculum coordinators 'strongly agree' (41.9 %) or 'tend to agree' (41.1 %) that using learning outcomes facilitates the monitoring of student progress and the assessment of student performance. Only a small portion of respondents (12.2 %) 'tend to disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with this statement (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. **School leaders' views on using learning outcomes to facilitate the monitoring of student progress and the assessment of student performance (%)**



(\*) Number of respondents **n=87**  
Source: Authors, based on survey data.

Moreover, data from the countries indicate that the VET providers visited generally regard the value and usability of learning outcomes in assessment as high, partly due to their relevance for the labour market. For example, Finnish VET providers regarded the national vocational qualification requirements, along with the associated learning outcomes descriptions and assessment criteria, as well-suited for evaluating students' attainment of the necessary skills and competences. They also found competence demonstration highly relevant to working life. Similarly, the long-standing tradition of offering work-based learning for VET students was highlighted at all workplaces visited in Finland, noting that this led to well-established processes and procedures for assessment. For instance, employers in the social and health sectors have designated individuals responsible for overseeing the organisation of work-based learning and assessment. Similarly, at MCAST in Malta, learning outcomes are not only valued for guiding teaching and assessment but also recognised for their alignment with labour market needs. They are designed to equip students with knowledge, skills and competences relevant to the sector they intend to enter work. As the director of the department of quality assurance at MCAST explained: 'Usually the assessment practice reflects the learning outcomes and these reflect stakeholder feedback ... what we are promoting are learning and assessment practices that are relevant to the sector that the students are preparing to work in.'

The management staff interviewed at the French schools 'do not question' the usability of learning-outcomes-based assessment, recognising its value and understanding its underlying logic. Likewise, their Lithuanian counterparts view intended learning outcomes as closely aligned with assessment criteria. However, school principals recognised that assessment criteria are more essential for teachers than intended learning outcomes are when designing summative assessment tasks. They find the criteria more detailed and structured, as they encompass all topics outlined in national VET programmes to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. The Lithuanian VET schools emphasised that the extensive range of tools and materials used are comparable to those found in the labour market, including workshops and specialised classrooms that replicate real workplaces (e.g. a hairdressing salon). This infrastructure facilitates the effective execution of both formative and summative assessments.

In the VET providers visited in the Netherlands, it was generally agreed that learning outcomes are valuable, but there are challenges related to the way they are formulated (too broad, too specific) and how they are integrated into VET programmes and examinations (see Box 14).

**Box 14. Differences in the considered value and usability of learning outcomes – example from the Netherlands**

In the welfare sector, both formative and summative assessments closely follow the structure of core tasks and work processes outlined in the qualification files. These descriptions facilitate a logical progression of knowledge, skills and competences, leading to the ability to perform more complex tasks based on previously learned (and assessed) outcomes.

In contrast, another school and its partner company in the engineering sector adopt a more flexible approach to assessment, with greater emphasis on summative assessment. In this case, students are required to complete an engineering/metalworking project ('masterpiece'). The assessment focuses on core tasks and work processes defined in the respective qualification files. However, it is organised in a more procedural manner rather than progressing in task complexity. For example, the engineering qualification files typically include 'preparation of the work', 'conducting the work' and 'finishing the work'. As interviewees pointed out, it does not make sense to focus solely on the first stage (preparation) before moving to the second (conducting the work) and third (finishing). All stages need to be learned, trained and assessed together at the end.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Netherlands case study.

**5.3.2. Areas for improvement identified by management representatives of VET providers**

Regulations at the national level are usually considered important and are generally found to be helpful and valuable. This is, for example, pointed out by a French interviewee: 'If we do not have the same requirements everywhere [in the

school and the workplace setting], at some point, the student will be lost.’ School management representatives from Portugal emphasised that national-level regulations are relatively broad, which allows providers the flexibility to tailor these elements to the local or regional context, and to the needs and experiences of trainees. Both perspectives underscore the need to strike a balance between maintaining national requirements and allowing for provider-level adjustment when using learning outcomes for assessment.

Despite this generally high level of satisfaction with current approaches, in some cases the VET provider management representatives interviewed identified gaps and areas for improvement. Interviewees referred to the following aspects.

- (a) Strengthening the alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment. Representatives of French VET providers pointed to a challenge that arose due to the structure of the diploma frameworks. The diploma frameworks primarily describe knowledge, whereas assessments focus on performance. As one school principal explained: ‘[In the diploma frameworks] there are what we call associated knowledge ... the knowledge that the competences draw from, and which is not the focus of the assessment. Only the competences are assessed, and we struggle with that’.
- (b) Improving the clarity of intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Dutch VET providers noted that while (summative) exams are closely aligned with the qualification files, the assignments are often bureaucratically worded and difficult for learners to understand. Additionally, exam providers tend to interpret learning outcomes rigidly based on their wording rather than their underlying intent. As a result, exam assignments are meticulously designed to reflect the exact phrasing of the qualification files but do not always fully capture the intended learning objectives.
- (c) Regular update of assessment practices. Schools visited in Lithuania emphasised that internal documents, including those related to the practical assessment of competences, must be regularly revised to ensure that both educational content and assessment methods remain relevant and effectively prepare students for the workforce. The importance of continuous improvement of assessment practices was also highlighted by the principal of one of the Portuguese schools visited: ‘We have a tool, the interactive learning guide based on a modular structure, that the trainers develop every year. It’s not watertight material and it can and should be improved every year, every month, every week, if necessary, very much along the lines of developing and negotiating a project with the trainees’. The involvement of trainees – along with trainers and social partners – in the negotiation of project-based learning

- activities (part of formative and summative assessment) supports these stakeholders in updating assessment practices.
- (d) Considering the pros and cons of overall final assessment versus modular approaches to assessment. VET providers in the Netherlands observed a growing shift towards modular approaches and the issuance of certifications for smaller units. This trend challenges traditional assessment methods that emphasise final evaluations, particularly in technical and engineering fields. Certifying individual modules requires a more rigid assessment of specific parts of the qualification, whereas the core tasks and work processes outlined in the qualification files do not fully support this approach. As one school representative noted: 'It does not make sense to have a certificate solely for 'preparation of the work' (see Box 11).
  - (e) Emphasising assessment for learning versus assessment for certification. Despite a quality assurance system designed to ensure proper assessment based on learning outcomes and criteria, students in Malta often appear to focus on meeting assessment requirements in order to pass and obtain certification. There is a need to ensure that all VET lecturers can effectively motivate students to engage in learning. Another interviewee in Malta expressed a concern that recent reforms in VET SEC subjects had altered the nature and format of school-based (formative) assessment, viewing this as a step backwards. It is feared that the changes would reduce the level of discussion and reflection among teachers about the assessment process, which has been crucial to their professional development. With greater emphasis placed on 'controlled assessment' – culminating in a final exam at the end of three years, accounting for 70 % of the final grade – VET teachers have lost the autonomy they previously had in assessing students.
  - (f) Strengthening the assessment skills and competences of teachers, trainers and assessors. For example, Finnish VET providers viewed assessment (competence demonstration) as generally effective. However, variations in assessment quality were also reported by providers and linked to the occasionally insufficient assessment skills and competences of assessors. VET schools in Portugal highlighted the need for more structured training programmes (either at the national or provider level), which they believe would enhance transparency and reduce subjectivity in assessment. The training programmes can cover aspects such as planning and design of assessment tasks, using tools, sharing documents, and monitoring and transferring the assessment results of trainees. The French school management representative interviewed expressed a desire for more time to collaborate with teachers and trainers in harmonising assessment practices.

## 5.4. Conclusions

The information gathered at the VET provider level suggests that learning-outcomes-based assessment is largely shaped by national regulations (see Chapter 4). The majority of the VET providers visited do not have specific policies or strategies for integrating learning outcomes into assessment or a structured approach to alignment. However, there are internal and, in some cases, external quality assurance mechanisms that address the alignment of all elements of the learning outcomes chain. Guidance, support and training for teachers, trainers and assessors, in addition to cooperation between these stakeholders within a VET provider, are all seen as crucial to ensuring the quality of assessment. Overall, interviewees generally consider the value and usability of learning outcomes in assessment to be high. This is often because the specifications of competences that learners need to demonstrate are formulated with a strong degree of labour market relevance. Moreover, assessment criteria are seen as an informative reference point for teachers, learners and for the design of assessment tasks.

Areas for improvement identified by some VET providers include strengthening the alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment, improving the clarity of intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, regularly updating assessment practices, considering the pros and cons of overall final assessment versus modular approaches to assessment, emphasising assessment for learning versus assessment for certification, and strengthening the assessment skills and competences of teachers, trainers and assessors.

## Chapter 6.

# Practices and perspectives of VET teachers and trainers

### Key findings

- (a) Learning outcomes descriptions and assessment criteria inform the teaching and learning process, guiding teachers and trainers in planning and conducting formative and summative assessment.
- (b) Assessment criteria are essential for planning summative assessment, while intended learning outcomes may often help for planning the learning process and formative assessment.
- (c) VET teachers and trainers often discuss their interpretations of assessment criteria with one another, but the extent and form of collaboration depends on provider policies, quality assurance procedures, subject areas, individual educators and informal exchange opportunities.
- (d) Teachers and trainers inform learners about learning outcomes and assessment criteria but, while these criteria may be clear for educators, they are not always written in a learner-friendly way.
- (e) Assessment approaches for evaluating learning outcomes in most cases differ across educational setting and depend on the types of learning outcomes being assessed, whether theoretical or practical.
- (f) Both formative and summative assessment, whether explicitly or implicitly, seek to evaluate transversal skills and competences, although the extent to which they are assessed and the assessment methods cannot be generalised.

This chapter explores teachers and trainers' perspectives regarding the assessment of learning outcomes in the countries (the micro level). The main sources of information were interviews and/or focus groups with teachers and trainers at the visited VET providers, observations of a number of assessment situations (at the VET providers) and the results of the survey among VET teachers and trainers across the countries. The views and experiences described are of an exploratory nature and cannot be seen as representative for a country.

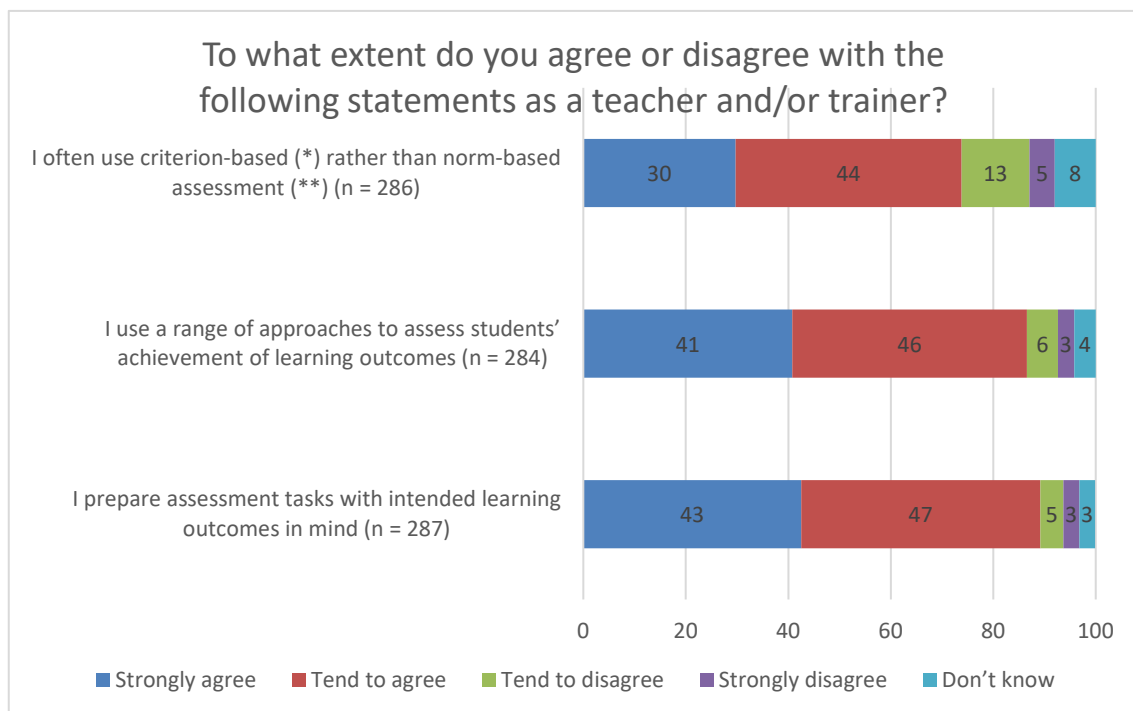
The following subsections describe how the teachers and trainers observed and interviewed apply learning outcomes in assessment and to what extent learners are informed and involved in the process. It also focuses on the extent to which there are differences in the assessment of learning outcomes acquired in different contexts and how transversal competences are assessed. Collaboration between teachers and trainers in relation to assessment is also highlighted, as are the resources and training provided to them in this context. Finally, this section examines the obstacles and areas of improvement identified by the interviewees.

## 6.1. VET teachers' and trainers' use of learning outcomes in assessment

This section examines how VET teachers and trainers incorporate learning outcomes descriptions into assessment planning and implementation, and their consideration of assessment criteria in teaching, learning and assessments (whereby the use of the assessment results can be either formative or summative).

The survey conducted among VET professionals aimed to understand their level of awareness of the learning-outcomes-based approach in addition to its perceived usefulness and practical application. Figure 6 illustrates that a significant majority of teachers and trainers responding to the survey 'strongly agree' (42.5 %) or 'tend to agree' (46.7 %) that they 'prepare assessment tasks with intended learning outcomes in mind'. They also often use criterion-referenced assessment, which is only slightly less emphasised.

Figure 6. Teachers' and trainers' practices and approaches to using learning outcomes (%)



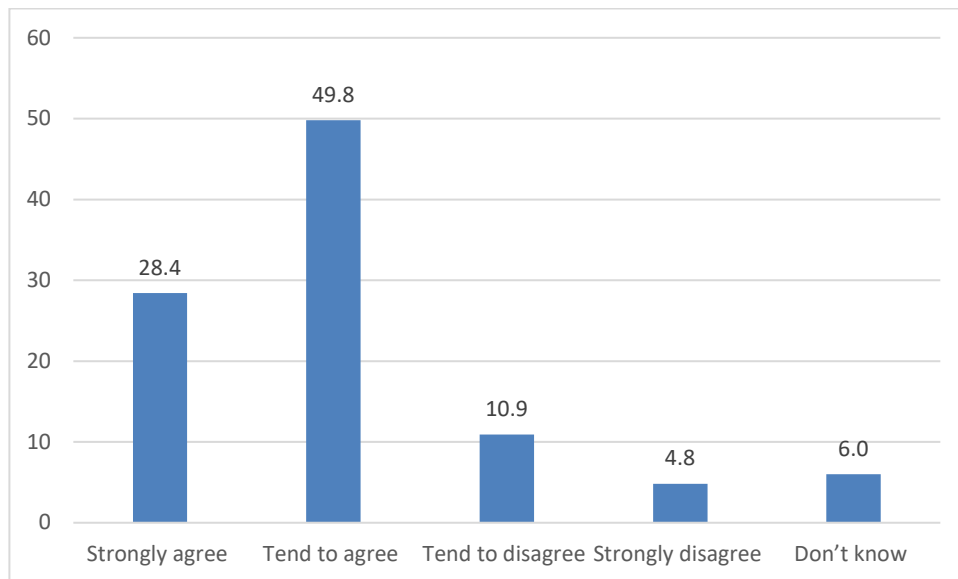
(\*) Criterion-based (or criterion-referenced) assessments measure the performance of students against a fixed set of predetermined criteria, without any reference to the achievement of others.

(\*\*) Norm-based (or norm-referenced) assessments measure student performance based on comparison with the performance of others; norm-referenced assessments show whether a person is performing at a level equal to, above or below average compared with others in a group.

Source: Authors, based on survey data.

Moreover, of all VET teachers and trainers surveyed, the majority either 'strongly agree' (28.4 %) or 'tend to agree' (49.8 %) that using learning outcomes facilitates the monitoring of student progress and the assessment of student performance (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. **Teachers' and trainers' views on using learning outcomes to facilitate the monitoring of student progress and the assessment of student performance (%)**



(\*) Number of respondents (teachers and trainers) n =331

Source: Authors, based on survey data.

These survey results align with insights from the case studies, as all interviewed teachers and trainers confirmed that they rely on learning outcomes descriptions and/or assessment criteria when preparing the teaching and learning process – including planning and conducting assessment for formative purposes – and conducting summative assessments. Although the use of learning outcomes is generally seen as beneficial, there are some concerns that they can also limit learning when there is too strong a focus on assessment criteria, as this could reduce the richness of learning (it could be, for example, that teachers disregard certain competences and talents of individuals that are not laid down in the assessment criteria, or that learners only concentrate on fulfilling the minimum requirements). To prevent this, there needs to be a degree of room for interpretation, customisation and flexibility in the use of assessment criteria. The sections below expand on these aspects through illustrative examples.

### **6.1.1. Use of assessment criteria**

VET teachers and trainers find assessment criteria provided at the national level generally clearly written and useful. Finnish VET teachers and workplace instructors use assessment criteria in formative assessment (i.e. to evaluate learners' progress) to determine whether students are ready for skills demonstrations. This ensures that learners have achieved the required skills and competences to a satisfactory level before moving on to skills demonstrations. Both the VET teachers and workplace instructors interviewed highlighted that assessment criteria related to competence demonstration are clear and have become more understandable over time. All parties involved in the assessment reported having a clear understanding of the assessment methods and assessment criteria used and the overall process undertaken. Additionally, teachers and workplace instructors found the assessment practices and criteria very useful in capturing students' skills and competences and determining their proficiency levels.

In post-compulsory IVET in Malta, VET teachers stated that the assessment criteria provide a clear pathway for operationalising learning outcomes and are well-structured, allowing teachers to design relevant and varied assessment tasks each year. However, they also pointed to the necessity of designing balanced assessment criteria that are neither too narrow and restrictive nor too broad. They highlighted how less experienced lecturers tend to use verbs based on Bloom's taxonomy, which can create problems with respect to the assessment tasks that can be assigned: 'if they are not that familiar with education ... sometimes they use words from the Bloom's taxonomy without seeing the impact, [for example,] they use the verb 'present' where we have a situation where it does not apply to what we have to assess but it restricts what we can give as an assessment ... and how the students are expected to do it.'

Overall, secondary-level VET teachers also hold a positive view of the assessment criteria included in the syllabi. They explained that they work with these criteria when they prepare the school-based assessment task on completion of a unit. They consider the intended learning outcomes from the VET SEC syllabus as too broad and generic, which can make them less useful for designing assignments. In contrast, teachers find the assessment criteria tangible and clear to understand, and these criteria provide sufficient guidance on which verbs to use to differentiate learning with respect to the NQF levels achieved by students. In the teachers' view, the assessment criteria were also useful for preparing the students for the controlled assessment (summative assessment) of a unit: 'the assessment criteria are clear and student-friendly ... the criteria give a lot of guidance, both to

us as teachers as well as to the students. ... The students know what is expected of them’.

Some of the interviewed Bulgarian teachers rely on the assessment criteria set in the NEPs. However, while these criteria are considered useful (‘precise’) for the assessment of theoretical subjects, the criteria for practical skills (also defined in the NEPs) are not detailed enough and need to be further refined to be effectively applied by teachers.

In Poland, when planning individual lessons, especially practical ones, teachers take the verification criteria from the core curriculum (see Box 15) into account. They consider the verification criteria to be clear, precise and very useful as guidelines for developing teaching programmes and planning educational activities.

**Box 15. Vocational qualification ‘preparation of dishes and beverages’ – example from Poland**

**Vocational qualification ‘preparation of dishes and beverages’**

Module (unit): ‘dish preparation’

**Learning outcome:** students know how to apply culinary recipes.

**Verification criteria**

- identify the components of a culinary recipe, including types and quantity of ingredient;
- calculate ingredient requirements based on recipes for dish preparation;
- weigh and measure ingredients according to recipes;
- weigh and measure portion sizes for dishes;
- estimate dish preparation costs (food costs).

*Source:* Authors, based on the Polish case study.

In Ireland and in Slovenia, teachers themselves are responsible for writing assessment criteria.

- (a) In Ireland, teachers take responsibility for drafting assessment briefs and marking schemes, tailoring them in ways that are clear and practical for their use. Teachers translate learning outcomes into more accessible terms, simplifying the language from national reference documents and breaking them down into smaller units to enhance students’ understanding. They also employ such techniques such as ‘scaffolding’, where they incorporate a mix of easier criteria into the assessment criteria to promote inclusivity and support student achievement.

- (b) In Slovenia, the teachers interviewed stressed that the intended learning outcomes specified in the knowledge catalogue are generally used, as illustrated by the following comment: 'I think we use all the descriptors of a learning outcome. They are prescribed. In our planning, in our preparation for lessons, in the choice of these teaching approaches and methods, and in the design of the criteria for assessment, I think we are all doing our work in a similar way here.' Moreover, the observed practices indicate that teachers also take the assessment criteria into account to a large extent. They draw directly on the assessment criteria when planning lessons, as they allow them to clearly define the knowledge, skills and competences that pupils need to achieve. The teachers interviewed also emphasised the use of assessment criteria for providing feedback to learners and helping them to address their deficits and progress in their learning process. Teachers also have the possibility to adapt the assessment criteria to the specific needs and characteristics of the students (e.g. by adjusting the difficulty and the way they assess them according to their abilities and background knowledge) and to identify and evaluate learning achievements that go beyond the expected learning outcomes. However, this often depends on the individual teachers and their willingness to recognise and encourage above-average achievement. Mentors in companies also use these learning outcomes, as they receive guidance from schools on what pupils are expected to achieve during their practical training. However, these mentors implement the assessment criteria less systematically, although this depends heavily on the individual mentors.

#### **6.1.2. Use of intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria in formative assessments**

Some teachers emphasised the important role that assessment criteria and their application in school-based assessments play in the preparation of students for external evaluations. In contrast, for formative assessment – which is usually less regulated and structured – the intended learning outcomes often appear to be sufficient for assessment planning. This seems to depend on how detailed they are, how they are formulated and whether the assessment criteria are explicitly defined in national-level reference documents.

Bulgarian teachers, for example, rely on intended learning outcomes from the national VET curricula to structure their teaching and formative assessment planning. However, due to the broad nature of the learning outcomes and the absence of assessment criteria in the curricula, teachers have to consult VET standards, which provide more detailed learning outcomes and corresponding

assessment criteria. This process, however, requires additional time for assessment preparation, as teachers have to align the assessment criteria from VET standards with the learning outcomes specified in national-level and school-level curricula. In Lithuania, teachers highlighted that for formative assessment they only consider the intended learning outcomes, as they do not need to strictly follow the assessment criteria outlined in national VET programmes. The learning outcomes descriptors are rooted in action verbs ('know', 'understand', 'do'), which guide teachers' choice of assessment methods. In comparison, for summative assessment (awarding a module), teachers rely more on the assessment criteria rather than on the learning outcomes descriptions. This is the case because descriptors are typically broadly formulated, prompting teachers to consider the more detailed assessment criteria (see Table 3). Problem-based and project-based approaches and formative assessments were also highlighted in Slovenia. For example, students solve concrete problems or carry out projects that are directly related to the learning outcomes. This approach helps teachers to check whether students are able to apply the acquired knowledge in real situations. Formative assessment allows for the timely identification of possible deviations from the intended learning outcomes and for appropriate adjustments to be made to teaching, ensuring greater coherence between the intended learning outcomes and the actual knowledge attained.

The complementary relationship between summative and formative assessment is emphasised by teachers in the two schools visited in Poland: summative assessments conducted at the end of the semester or the school year, in addition to ongoing monitoring of students' progress, are based on the results of tests similar to external qualification exams. To prepare the tests or to assess practical skills, VET teachers typically select tasks from the central examination board resources that match the content being taught. These tasks often consist of many 'micro-tasks', reducing the assessment to a simple 'can/cannot do' evaluation. However, it is impossible to judge from an examination sheet alone whether 'can' means that a student has difficulties and has just managed to fulfil a task, or whether the student is consistently performing well. To gain a deeper understanding of students' skills mastery, teachers often need to observe them during classes, for example while they perform assigned exercises and solve problems. This classroom-based formative assessment is less structured and depends heavily on the teacher's experience and pedagogical skills. Teachers are not required to apply verification criteria for classroom-based assessments (both formative and summative); however, the common use of examination tasks developed by central examination board experts helps align school-based assessments with these criteria.

In Portugal, VET trainers plan teaching and assessment activities (formative and summative) by considering the learning outcomes descriptions and assessment criteria (see Box 7) outlined in the national curricula and incorporated into school curricula. However, there were differences observed between the two schools visited: the first follows a learning-outcomes-based curriculum, where assessment criteria are explicitly mentioned and trainers commonly use them when planning and preparing the assessment tasks. At the second school visited, assessment criteria are not specified (in school curricula) and trainers have to define them based on intended learning outcomes. Although assessment criteria from national curricula do not specify performance levels, there is a common understanding among educators that trainees' autonomy should increase over time. However, this is not always reflected in the assessment conducted by trainers, as noted in the case study.

### **6.1.3. Influence of assessment criteria on the teaching and learning process and their alignment with intended learning outcomes**

The findings from the case studies indicate that the VET teachers and trainers interviewed recognise the need for close alignment between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment criteria in summative assessment. They use assessment criteria when designing assessments, while keeping the overall learning outcomes in mind. However, this focus should not restrict the teaching and learning process. In practice, teachers and trainers usually base their lesson planning on learning outcome descriptions from reference documents and not directly on assessment criteria. Nonetheless, assessment criteria can subtly influence lesson design, as some teachers use them to determine which topics to emphasise to ensure that these match what will be assessed upon completion of the learning process (e.g. module).

Although the teachers and trainers interviewed acknowledged that the assessment criteria are incorporated into the teaching process, there is some uncertainty about the extent to which these criteria not only guide but also steer the process. French teachers and trainers, for example, noted that assessment criteria inform their teaching process rather than steer it, as they do not focus only on meeting the minimum requirements but also encourage students to 'go beyond' what is written in the diploma framework – while always keeping the diploma levels in mind. For instance, teachers and trainers were aware that some competences belong to a higher level, but if they see their students motivated to 'explore' these competences, they will support them in their learning process. However, when assessments are administered, teachers align with what learners have studied in class (or in the workplace) to avoid putting additional stress on them. Additionally,

teachers reported that while aligning formative assessment with diploma frameworks in the classroom is 'quite easy', some noted challenges in using assessment rubrics during company visits for work-based learning. This difficulty stems from a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and the practical application of professional competences, as highlighted by one of the interviewees:

*'The biggest difficulty I find is related to assessment rubrics during workplace monitoring, because there is a significant disconnect between the theoretical aspect and the practical aspect of what we are able to assess in terms of students' competence. Depending on the company environment, we have completely different contexts, and students may, for example, not develop certain competences (intended learning outcomes). In that case, it will be necessary for us to cover the competences in class in order to compensate.'*

Lithuanian teachers highlighted that while they explicitly refer to assessment criteria when designing summative assessment tasks, they do not rely on them as a primary guide when planning their teaching process. Instead, they base their lesson planning on the topics outlined in VET programmes. However, assessment criteria still have an implicit influence on lesson delivery. For instance, one teacher indicated that she briefly reviews the assessment criteria to determine which topics to emphasise. Teachers also observed that assessment criteria can serve as a clear guide, fostering learner autonomy and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own progress. However, this depends on the learner: some students, motivated by achieving only a passing grade, focus solely on meeting the minimum requirements, while others use the criteria as a roadmap to understand expectations and develop the skills needed for higher achievement.

VET teachers from secondary VET in Malta highlighted that learning outcomes help them navigate a range of goals, from the overall learning to be achieved (as stated in the learning outcomes) to the specifics of what the students should learn (as stated in the assessment criteria). However, while assessment criteria primarily define what is to be assessed, they do not strictly limit the scope of teaching content. Similarly, VET lecturers in post-compulsory IVET indicated that the assessment criteria provide a clear definition of the learning outcomes in terms of what should be taught, promoting a standardisation of content and skills covered. Teachers consider the assessment criteria mainly as a means of specifying what exactly has to be learned, but they are not constrained by them. It also depends on the students' capability and motivation: 'if students are weak ... you need to adapt learning to the type of students that you have'. Teachers find the assessment criteria well-written and aligned with the learning outcomes,

making it easier for VET lecturers to apply them to assessment tasks. As noted by an interviewee, 'With the assessment criteria, I know exactly to which point I have to arrive, even the students. I tell them, this is, yes, assessed, but the rest, no'.

In the Netherlands, assessment criteria are not specified at the national level and intended learning outcomes descriptions in the qualification files are used for assessment purposes. Reflecting on this, Dutch teachers and trainers emphasised that the intended learning outcomes inform and also steer their teaching processes, sometimes leading to an overemphasis on outcomes that are measurable. This can have the effect that students may prioritise meeting the minimum requirements over engaging in deeper learning experiences. Overall, teachers reported that the assessment process is well-aligned with the intended learning outcomes defined in the VET programme or curriculum. They use these outcomes as a straightforward way to communicate the learning expectations of each module. In this context, learning outcomes provide clear guidance and support, empowering students to take ownership of their learning journey. The Dutch teachers and trainers consulted generally expressed satisfaction with the individual attention and focus given in assessments designed by exam providers. They emphasised that assessments are never treated as a simple tick-box exercise or too reliant on multiple-choice questions. Instead, the assignments are intended to give each learner the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in relation to the specified learning outcomes. Some teachers, however, indicated that sometimes they do not let students fail on more theoretical aspects if they show practical competence. Conversely, other teachers and instructors are more reluctant to relax the requirements, especially in childcare, where students have to look after babies, for example.

In FET in Ireland, where assessment criteria are specified by teachers, teachers emphasise that the learning approach is primarily focused on ensuring that learners achieve the intended learning outcomes. Consequently, the assessment process is tightly aligned with these learning outcomes and there is a seamless connection between the assessment and the criteria used by teachers. One teacher noted that because learning outcomes drive the whole process, teachers effectively 'work backwards' from these outcomes to design the curriculum and assessment criteria. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment are closely integrated. However, this does not imply that learning is restricted. The learner-centred ethos within FET also influences how assessment is conducted. While numerous learning outcomes exist to address employment needs, teachers strive to implement learner-centred pedagogies wherever possible. As highlighted in the case study, assessment criteria enable teachers to break down and translate

learning outcomes for learners, as some may find the language of learning outcomes obscure.

#### **6.1.4. Interpretation, adaptation and flexibility in the use of assessment criteria**

The extent to which teachers can interpret, adapt and apply assessment criteria depends on the purpose of the assessment (formative or summative), the teachers' involvement in defining the criteria and their competence in doing so. Generally, formative assessment offers more flexibility and adaptability than summative assessment (see Section 4.1). However, evidence suggests variations in approaches, particularly for summative assessment, as illustrated by the following examples.

Teachers in Finland and the Netherlands, for example, feel that they have limited flexibility in adapting the reference point to be used for assessment. In Finland, assessment criteria for competence demonstration are strictly limited to those outlined in vocational qualification requirements, along with VET providers' implementation plans for assessing competences. While students may demonstrate skills and competences beyond the defined objectives and proficiency levels, these are not formally recorded, as the assessment process remains focused on the specified learning outcomes and criteria. A similar approach was observed in the Netherlands, where the intended learning outcomes are used for assessment. While the VET schools and teachers have autonomy in developing the learning pathways leading up to the learning outcomes, as expressed in the qualification files, in practice, there is limited room for interpretation, adaptation and flexibility in using the exams and assessments developed by the exam providers. However, some exam providers also leave a certain flexibility for adjustments.

By comparison, teachers in Ireland and in Lithuania signalled that they have a higher degree of flexibility. In Ireland, where teachers develop assessment briefs, including assessment criteria, they considered themselves as having a high degree of flexibility to adapt and interpret intended learning outcomes. This is because the ETB programme documentation offers guidance only (it is not mandatory), and teachers are free to devise appropriate assessment criteria as they see fit, based on their professional judgement. One phenomenon commonly noted by teachers was the close adherence to guidance when teachers first start to teach a programme. This relaxes over time as their experience grows and also in response to how learners respond to certain methods – for example, teachers may change assessment methods if these are not suited to certain learners. Teachers emphasised that they strive to 'make assessment work better for

students' by using diverse methods that offer multiple ways for students to meet the assessment criteria, such as videos, diaries and other creative formats.

Lithuanian teachers pointed out that they can incorporate the newest relevant methodologies and industry practices of their professional field in teaching and assessment. For instance, the accounting teacher at one of the schools teaches learners how to use the latest accounting software and the newest regulations in place. These aspects are then incorporated into exam questions. Similarly, the hairdressing teacher includes the newest cutting techniques or fashion trends in their teaching plan and subsequently in assessment. While teachers adhere to the requirements for obtaining competences, they also encourage learners to explore broader and more contemporary aspects of their fields, ensuring that their education is relevant and up-to-date.

In terms of formative assessment, some patterns can be recognised depending on whether assessment criteria are explicitly defined and used. For example, in Bulgaria there are no explicit assessment criteria for formative assessment, and teachers have the flexibility to include labour-market-relevant aspects in both teaching and assessment. The teachers interviewed emphasised that they gain insights into new skills required by employers by working with partner companies. Even if these skills are not yet included in the curricula, teachers can integrate them into their teaching and formative assessment. Secondary school teachers in Malta stated that they sometimes find the assessment criteria restrictive. This is the case where the range of assessment options is very limited. However, the vocational teachers emphasised that they were careful to assess only what was included in the assessment criteria and did not attempt to assess learning beyond this. As one interviewee pointed out, 'When it comes to the assessment criteria, I know exactly where I have to get to, and the students know that too. I tell them that this will be assessed, but not the rest'. Nevertheless, teachers noted that they generally still have the flexibility to design creative tasks. They can choose different contexts and task formats that go beyond traditional written assessments, such as designing a leaflet, creating a brochure, producing a PowerPoint presentation, conducting an interview or taking part in a role play. This flexibility is particularly valuable for students with limited reading and writing skills. In Portugal, the flexibility and autonomy given to trainers arises from the need to tailor the activities, projects and assignments to trainees' learning gaps and preferences. This essentially promotes the autonomy of trainees and engages them in meaningful learning while adjusting the course to market needs and trends, as necessary.

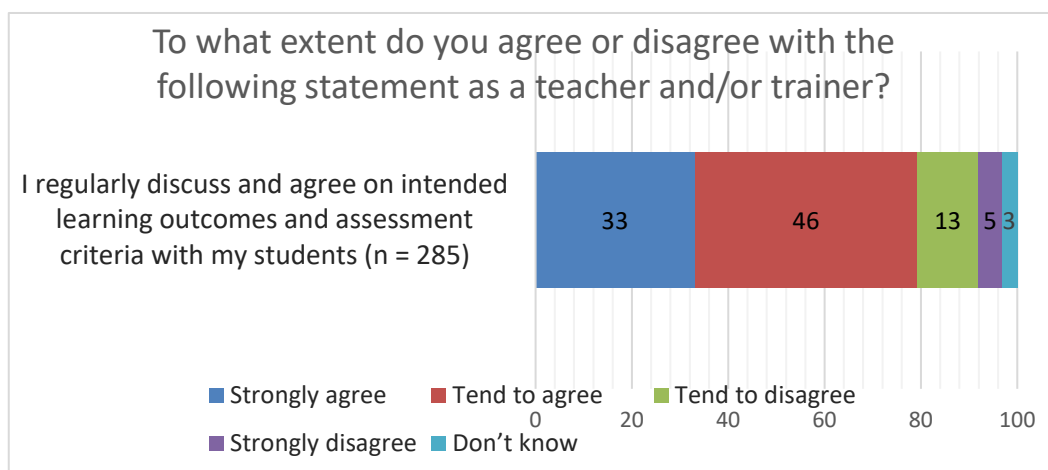
In some cases, teachers explicitly pointed out that assessment criteria should not be applied too rigidly or should be adapted to different circumstances or

learners. Teachers in France who draw on the assessment criteria for lesson planning by aligning the tasks with the learning outcomes to be assessed highlighted the need to find a balance between their aim to really ‘teach the profession’ and the need to prepare students to pass exams. Teachers in one of the visited schools emphasised the importance of adapting the assessment criteria: they apply performance-based assessments known as ‘profile assessments’ for both ongoing training assessments (formative) and periodic examinations (summative). These assessments use criteria for different performance levels, ranging from novice to more advanced. Furthermore, teachers tailor intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria from diploma frameworks to fit the VET provider’s context.

## 6.2. Information provided to learners

This section looks into whether and how learners are explicitly informed about the assessment criteria used in their evaluations. According to survey results, a majority of responding VET teachers and trainers either ‘strongly agree’ (33 %) or ‘tend to agree’ (46.3 %) that they regularly discuss and agree on intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria with their students (see Figure 8). Although this seems to be a high percentage, there is still room for improvement in terms of discussing the assessment criteria with the learners.

Figure 8. **Teachers’ and trainers’ practices and approaches to using learning outcomes (%)**



Source: Authors, based on survey data.

Insights from the countries offer a more nuanced picture – while all interviewed teachers and trainers confirmed that they explicitly communicate intended learning outcomes to learners, the same is not always true for assessment criteria. A common trend observed was that assessment criteria for formative assessment are generally given less attention in terms of informing learners than the information given for summative assessments. Of course, the extent to which assessment criteria are communicated depends on their inclusion in national VET curricula or other reference documents available to students. Finally, in some countries, learners were observed to be engaged in the assessment planning process (e.g. in Finland) or they were invited to suggest additional assessment criteria for a subject, project or activity (as practised in Portugal). Such practices were seen as enhancing students' understanding and awareness of assessment criteria.

In Bulgaria, teachers explained that they communicate to students the objectives of summative assessment and the assessment methods. At the start of the school year, students receive curricula for each VET subject, outlining the intended learning outcomes, but not the assessment criteria. Similarly, in Poland, teachers confirmed that they inform students at the beginning of the school year about the educational requirements they need to meet to achieve midterm or yearly grades, in compliance with legal obligations. Also in Slovenia, students are usually informed about assessments and assessment criteria at the beginning of the school year or at the start of a module, as this is specified in the regulations. The record in which the knowledge standards and descriptors are presented to learners is called a 'marking scheme', 'marking scale' or 'rubric'. Some teachers do this very systematically, others less frequently or less clearly. However, there are also cases where this is not done at all, as schools do not check whether students have been informed.

In contrast, Finnish teachers reported not only that students are informed at the beginning of the school year, but also that learning outcomes and assessment criteria are systematically embedded in the learning process. This information is integrated into their personal competence development plan, created in collaboration with the student and the VET provider. The plan is based on vocational qualification requirements, the provider's implementation strategies for assessment and the student's individual needs. The use of digital learning management tools helps them to keep up to date with their learning progress. Additionally, students plan their competence demonstration (i.e. the specific work assignments and tasks) with guidance from their workplace instructor and VET teacher, using the learning outcome descriptions and assessment criteria for the specific competence units. Thus, VET students are expected to learn

independently, take responsibility for their studies and learning progress and be able to adapt to different learning environments.

In France, the extent that teachers and trainers inform learners about assessment criteria for formative assessment is influenced by such factors as educators' experience with learning-outcomes-based approaches and the students' educational background. This is also a question of the availability of time. For example, one trainer noted that more time is needed to explain assessment criteria, especially when working with students whose first language is not French. In relation to formative assessment of work-based learning, teachers in one of the visited schools use the assessment rubrics to clarify workplace expectations, providing learners with explanations to achieving higher performance levels: 'I explain the rubric to them ... if you want to be at level 4 you collect information on customer satisfaction. If you do not collect information, you are at level zero.' For periodic (summative) examinations, assessment criteria are defined by the Ministry of National Education, and while teachers and trainers share the learning outcomes being assessed, they observed that 'it is always the grade that interests learners in the end'.

In Malta, VET SEC teachers emphasised the importance of the verbs used in learning outcomes providing the reference points for formative assignments, ensuring alignment with assessment criteria. For example, they clearly explain to students what is expected in terms of the response type and level of detail based on the verbs used in the assignment task. Teachers believed that the focus on verbs helps foster a shared understanding of the expected structure and depth of responses. As one of them noted, 'I hope that students understand them ... we frequently refer to the assessment criteria while explaining both the lesson and the assignment'.

The Irish case study highlighted that assessment criteria are deeply embedded in the learning process, ensuring complete transparency. Teachers are responsible for creating assessment briefs, including assessment criteria (an example is presented in Box 16) and methods in addition to marking schemes that break down the criteria in line with national/ETB guidance. These briefs are provided to learners. In one college, all these documents are accessible to students on the platform Microsoft Teams. This approach allows learners to identify key assessment areas and adjust their efforts accordingly.

Box 16. **Excerpt of an assessment brief – example from Ireland**

**Assessment criteria – you will be assessed under the following criteria:**

- relevant information collected and appropriately presented – 5 marks;
- understanding and knowledge of chosen topic(s) clearly demonstrated – 20 marks;
- comprehensive valuation/conclusion completed – 5 marks.

Learners are also required to make a set of declarations and to sign the brief, for example:

- I confirm that I understand [the college's] policy and procedure on assessment deadlines;
- I confirm that I understand [the college's] policy and procedure around assessment malpractice.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Irish case study.

A similar approach is reported by teachers in Malta at MCAST and its institutes, where assessment criteria are explicitly stated on the front sheet of assignment briefs. VET teachers also reinforce this by reading the assessment criteria aloud when assigning tasks, ensuring that students are fully informed regarding the expectations for their assessments.

In Lithuania, VET teachers introduce learners to assessment criteria at the beginning of each module as well as reiterating the criteria before the summative assessment takes place. They also inform students about the topics to be covered before the assessment and organise consultations where students have an opportunity to review their learning progress and identify any gaps in their learning. In the Netherlands, teachers clearly communicate the intended learning outcomes (used also for assessment) to the students, although this does not necessarily mean that learners will memorise them. Additionally, as observed in a classroom visit, learners were encouraged to ask clarifying questions about what is expected from them to be able to pass the final exam of the respective module.

In Portugal, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are communicated to learners at two key points: at the start of the school year and at the beginning of a new subject or project activity. At the beginning of the year, trainees receive a clear and simple overview of the learning outcomes for their course period. During classes, trainers introduce the assessment criteria when starting a new subject, activity or project. In one of the visited schools, trainees can review and provide feedback on the assessment criteria set by trainers, considering their relevance to the subject, activity or project. They can also suggest additional criteria, which, if deemed appropriate, are incorporated into the official assessment documents.

## 6.3. Learning context and types of learning outcomes

Utilising insights from interviews, this section presents the VET teachers' views and experiences regarding how the learning context and learning outcomes influence the assessment process and assessment methods.

### 6.3.1. Assessing learning outcomes in different learning contexts

Insights from the case studies highlight differences in the approaches used for assessing learning outcomes across various educational settings, including classrooms, practical learning environments at VET providers or schools (e.g. workshops, laboratories), online or hybrid learning settings, and work-based settings (e.g. companies). A key distinction lies in how assessment methods vary based on the nature of the learning outcomes being measured – that is, whether they pertain to theoretical or practical learning. Theoretical learning outcomes typically require students to 'explain', 'describe' or 'discuss' relevant concepts and are commonly assessed through (online) tests, written assignments and oral presentations. In contrast, assessing competences gained in practice-oriented learning focuses on students' ability to 'perform' or 'demonstrate' specific actions or apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios. The extent to which learning outcomes are achieved and assessed in real work environments may also depend on the occupational field, as was observed in the Dutch case study. In the welfare sector (e.g. childcare), for example, learning is primarily classroom-based and theoretically oriented (as one teacher explained: 'schools do not have a workshop with twenty babies'). In contrast, the engineering sector incorporates a more hands-on approach, with students training in workshops equipped with various tools, machines and materials. Regarding summative assessment, students in a metalwork VET programme may be required to design and produce a final project along with a corresponding report, while those in a daycare VET programme may be required to demonstrate their competences during a workplace examination, evaluated by an independent assessor.

Using illustrative examples, the sections below discuss the assessment of work-based learning in school and in work-based contexts, the coherence between assessments in different learning environments and experiences with the use of digital forms of assessment.

#### 6.3.1.1. *Assessment of practice-oriented learning in a school-based setting*

The assessment of learning outcomes achieved in practice-oriented learning can be implemented in specialised classrooms (laboratories) and workshops or in traditional classroom settings – regardless of setting, the focus of practice-oriented learning is on the students' demonstration of the ability to perform specific tasks.

In one of the Lithuanian schools visited, formative assessment in a hairdressing lesson focused on the hands-on execution of tasks using salon-specific tools and equipment. The learning environment closely resembled a real salon, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations. In Malta, VET teachers in secondary schools conducted lessons in school laboratories equipped with the necessary tools to facilitate both knowledge acquisition and its practical application. The practical assessment tasks (used for assessment with a formative function) were usually related to skills that the students would have learned during lessons. For example, students could be asked to measure the blood pressure of an older person with the machines they used during lessons. Teachers can assign different types of tasks, which according to them, give students more opportunities to demonstrate their learning. This is particularly the case for students who possess limited writing skills, as noted by one teacher. To accommodate such learners, the assessment methods were adapted: 'I had students that when I asked for written tasks, their work was poor, but when I asked them to talk about it, they were excellent. So when I have students like this, I am used to tailoring the assessment task accordingly'. In Poland, practical skills are regularly assessed (with a formative function) by completing tasks during practical lessons and through tests – that is, tasks completed independently within a specified time (similar to exams). In Portugal, assessment taking place in the VET school/centre (with a formative function) is done through practical activities, simulation or by creating practical learning environments. Additionally, VET trainers may prepare some written tests, with open or multiple-choice questions. These are usually done at the end of a subject or a learning period (every three or six months, depending on the school).

The Slovenian teachers interviewed pointed to clear differences between the assessment of practice-oriented learning in a school-based setting and in companies, partly linked to the available infrastructure and the capacity of the assessor. In school workshops and laboratories, work tasks are more structured, standardised and tailored to the curriculum and learning objectives. Pupils carry out predetermined tasks, which are mainly aimed at acquiring basic practical skills and consolidating theoretical knowledge. In companies, however, work tasks are more varied, less predictable and directly related to the real needs of the work process. In addition, school-based work environments (workshops, laboratories) often have limited infrastructure and equipment, due to the limited financial capacity of the school. In companies, on the other hand, the infrastructure is usually more modern, specialised and directly linked to current technological trends and labour market needs.

6.3.1.2. *Assessment of practice-oriented learning in a work-based setting*

Assessment of practice-oriented or workplace learning varies in terms of timing, formality and methods used, as the following examples presented by teachers and trainers show. In Finland, for example, the assessment of competences (through the summative assessment of modules) relies solely on competence demonstration conducted in the workplace (see Section 4.1.1). In contrast, in Poland, mandatory internships for technical school students with employers are not formally assessed. Instructors provide students with feedback on the tasks they perform, but their observations are not recorded. At the end of the internship, the supervisor only provides a descriptive assessment of the student's attitudes and behaviour, which – together with the achievements recorded in students' diaries – is considered when determining the final (summative) grades. Similarly, in Portugal, the assessment of workplace learning is done by observing trainees performing activities at the company. Trainees fill in a logbook specifying the tasks performed, their level of autonomy and performance, and an assessment rubric at the end of the training (self-assessment). Tutors also fill in an assessment rubric, similar to the one filled in by the trainee.

6.3.1.3. *Coherence between assessments performed in different learning environments*

An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews with teachers is the importance of the coherence of and alignment between the assessments carried out at the VET provider institution and those carried out in the work-based learning environment. This seems to be supported using learning outcomes. For example, French teachers emphasised that teaching and assessment in work-based settings should align with school-based practices. One teacher noted that the diverse environments in different companies create varied learning contexts, which can sometimes hinder students from achieving certain intended learning outcomes. In such cases, classroom instruction serves to fill these gaps. Another teacher pointed out that some students excel in the workplace but struggle in the classroom. This highlights the need to contextualise learning outcomes, but once a competence has been acquired in a particular setting, teachers need to help students decontextualise and reapply it in different scenarios. This works to ensure that students know when and how to use their competences effectively. A third teacher pointed out a significant gap between the skills students develop in the workplace and those taught in school, stressing the importance of bridging this divide. While teachers communicate to companies which learning outcomes students have acquired in class – expecting their reinforcement in the workplace – this process does not always unfold as planned. However, frequent collaboration

with the same companies and well-established relationships help to ensure alignment and clarity of expectations. Dutch teachers also acknowledged differences in how learning outcomes are achieved in school versus in companies. However, they noted that these differences do not significantly impact assessment, as regular discussions between teachers and workplace trainers – supported by guidelines and tracking forms – help monitor and align students' progress effectively.

#### 6.3.1.4. *Use of digital and hybrid forms of learning and assessment*

Most of the VET providers visited do not use digital or hybrid forms of learning and assessment to a great extent. Portuguese trainers, for example, highlighted the limitations of assessing learning outcomes achieved online. They believe that the online format does not align with the 'learning by doing' approach central to the Portuguese VET system. In their view, VET courses and skill-based training sessions need to take place face-to-face because they naturally require a combination of theory and practice, offering trainees hands-on activities and project-based learning. This practical aspect is also a key feature of project-based activities, which trainees find challenging to implement in online or even hybrid formats.

Only in a few cases did interviewees refer to digital forms of teaching, learning and assessment, although digital tools are frequently used (e.g. the digital learning management tool in Finland). In the Netherlands, for example, all assessment tasks and materials are available online and learners must submit their final products (reports) online for assessment (e.g. by uploading them via a dedicated portal). Teachers from Slovenia pointed out that online or hybrid learning environments have brought about some changes in the approach to assessment. Teachers have had to adapt their assessment methods, often using digital forms of assessment such as online tests, uploading products to online classrooms, making video presentations and/or using other online tools. The Lithuanian teachers interviewed actively use digital platforms for summative assessment of modules and express their overall satisfaction with their efficiency (see Box 17). They highlight such benefits as instant grading, immediate feedback and the ability to quickly evaluate each learner's performance.

#### Box 17. **Digital forms of assessment – example from Lithuania**

In the summative assessment of the module 'service for people with disabilities and limited mobility', both theoretical and practical evaluations were conducted in the classroom using the online platform Moodle. The theoretical component assessed students' knowledge through multiple-choice tests, while the practical component

presented seven different scenarios requiring open-ended responses. Students had to demonstrate how they would assist passengers with disabilities during airline boarding, particularly in cases where automated systems failed.

Similarly, in the summative assessment of the 'administrators programme' module, both theory- and practice-based evaluations were conducted through an online questionnaire. The theoretical section included multiple-choice questions covering key concepts from the module, while the practical component involved using a digital platform commonly utilised by administrators in workplace settings. Practical tasks included preparing an invitation for a corporate event and conducting market research for office supplies procurement.

*Source:* Authors, based on the Lithuanian case study.

### **6.3.2. Assessing transversal skills and competences**

The findings from the case studies show that both formative and summative assessments, whether explicit or implicit, are frequently used to assess transversal skills and competences. However, the extent to which this is done across systems and the methods used to assess complex learning outcomes, particularly transversal skills and competences, cannot be generalised. Interviews with teachers suggest that assessment methods tend to be adapted to the specific context and purpose, with common approaches including group work, observations, presentations, written work and oral examinations. Where assessment criteria are set for transversal skills and competences, they generally align with those for occupational competences and follow a similar linguistic structure – for example, using verbs and object – and guide grading through the specification of complexity and performance/mastery requirements. The teachers and trainers interviewed also pointed to various challenges in assessing transversal skills and competences. Their experiences are presented in the following sections.

#### **6.3.2.1. *Summative assessment of transversal competences***

In three countries, assessment criteria are not specified at the national level (see Section 4.2). In the Netherlands, where the intended learning outcomes described in the qualifications files are used as a reference point for assessment, there is a strong emphasis on integrating transversal competences into occupational knowledge and skills, demonstrating a holistic approach to vocational education. In Ireland, the inclusion of transversal skills and competences in the assessment briefs developed by teachers varies. They may be treated separately or integrated into occupational competences, depending on the course. For example, communication is a mandatory standalone module and is assessed independently, but communication-related elements are also embedded in some occupational modules and evaluated within their respective assessments. Some teachers noted

certain inefficiencies in addressing transversal competences, particularly because some skills – such as those related to health and safety – recur across multiple modules and often need to be taught repeatedly to meet the specific requirements of each module. In Slovenia, the learning objectives aimed at developing personal qualities, work habits and other general skills are not included among the knowledge standards or are not clearly defined, and are often less specific and less operational than occupational competences. The interviews indicate that transversal competences are often assessed indirectly, through observation of pupils in group work, project tasks, discussions, presentations and other activities that allow for the assessment of these competences. As an expert notes: ‘It has always been criticised that the system is too analytical, that it tends to be too interested only in vocational competences, that we test and evaluate only those competences that are linked to the occupation, and that we do not pay enough attention to general, transversal competences’. However, the development of these competences is considered the main objective of practical training in companies: earners gain work experience and develop competences that enable them to be directly employable and – as pointed out by an interviewee – work-based learning is primarily aimed at socialisation in a real work environment.’

In countries that set assessment criteria for summative assessment at the national level, transversal skills and competences – such as social competences and key competences for lifelong learning – are often explicitly stated. Differences can be seen in whether they are combined with occupational competences or listed/assessed separately. An example of the latter was observed in Bulgarian schools. NEPs define assessment criteria for transversal skills common to all qualifications, such as ‘health and safety at work’ and ‘work organisation’, which are assessed separately from occupational competences. Examples of assessment criteria for learning outcomes related to health and safety at work are: ‘to perform activities in compliance with necessary health and safety measures’ and ‘to prevent dangerous situations at work’. These criteria are not measured quantitatively; instead, if a trainee creates a hazardous situation during the exam, the exam is immediately terminated, and the lowest grade is assigned.

In other countries, assessments of transversal skills and competences are combined with occupational competences. In Finland, for example, social skills and key competences for lifelong learning are integrated into qualification requirements and assessment criteria (see Box 18). These competences are typically evaluated through competence demonstrations. It was reported that for workplace trainers, it is sometimes challenging to identify transversal competences as part of the competence demonstration. However, effective solutions have been

found using various assessment methods, including observations, presentations, written studies and oral examinations.

Box 18. **Assessment criteria for transversal competences – example from Finland**

**Qualification: vocational qualification in sports instruction**

Competence unit: working with climate responsibility.

Vocational competence requirement: examining the background of climate change.

The student 'understands climate change as a phenomenon and the impact of human actions on it [in addition to understanding] the need to find solutions; identifies special features of the Finnish operating environment with regard to climate change mitigation and adaptation; identifies the key factors contributing to climate change in their field; identifies opportunities to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation in their work task'.

**Assessment criteria**

To achieve the competence level 5 (excellent), the student has to meet the following assessment criteria, for example:

- 'apply the knowledge required in their set of tasks to problem-solving situations diversely and critically';
- 'assess their performance realistically and suggest justified solutions for developing their competence';
- 'understand the importance of their work as part of a larger process.'

Source: Authors, based on the Finnish case study and Finnish National Agency for Education (2021).

Similarly in Lithuania, key competences are typically integrated into the assessment of occupational competences. As national VET programmes do not define specific assessment criteria, teachers develop their own based on the nature of the qualification. For instance, effective communication with clients is essential for airport support staff, so teachers create specific assessment criteria to evaluate communication skills, such as the ability to interact professionally with customers.

Both approaches – integrated or separate assessment – can be identified, for example, in France, where diploma frameworks include transversal competence blocks common to all specialisations. Due to the varying structures of these frameworks, transversal competences are addressed in different ways. In some cases, they are standalone competence blocks, while in others, they are embedded within occupational competences under 'professional attitudes' and

contextualised accordingly (e.g. discretion, critical thinking, creativity or proactivity). The teachers interviewed prefer assessing learners using 'levels of mastery' (novice, resourceful, knowledgeable and expert) rather than 'performance levels' (sufficient, insufficient, satisfactory), believing that mastery levels provide a more meaningful assessment. Another challenge was mentioned by in-company trainers: they see the main difficulty in assessing transversal competences in the fact that students and their parents attach great importance to grading. As one trainer noted: 'It's not the competences that matter most to students, but their ranking among candidates. In such cases, even a difference between a 14 and a 14.5 (out of 20) can be significant – and parents place a lot of importance on these scores.'

Variations can also be observed in Portugal, where some transversal competences are embedded in the curriculum, though this varies by qualification. The assessment of transversal and occupation-specific competences is tailored to the trainee's job role, workplace learning component (if applicable) and the professional test project they prepare and present.

In Poland, transversal skills that apply across multiple occupations (e.g. related to adherence to safety rules) are included in the core vocational curriculum within the descriptions of learning outcomes required for each relevant qualification. Consequently, they are also included in tests, regular assessments based on practical exercises and qualification exams tasks.

Teachers in Malta reported that transversal skills are not part of the formal learning outcomes in vocational secondary education curricula, and VET teachers are not required to design targeted, specific assessments for them. However, practical tasks and written assignments (as part of formative assessments) give students the opportunity to develop transversal skills beyond the specified assessment criteria. While explicit assessment criteria for transversal competences do not exist and these competences are not directly evaluated, the way assessment tasks are structured – through the verbs used in grading rubrics – often requires students to demonstrate transversal skills. For instance, students often prepare and deliver presentations as part of their assessment. This requires them to demonstrate their communication skills, but they are judged on the content covered by the assessment criteria rather than the clarity and structure of their presentation. Similarly, in post-compulsory IVET, sector-specific study unit specifications do not usually reference transversal skills directly, leaving VET lecturers the flexibility to include them if they align with the subject's assessment criteria. Some teachers found the lack of official references to transversal skills in learning outcomes or assessment criteria challenging. To address this, they usually create diverse assessment methods, such as group work to evaluate

teamwork abilities or have students design and present a PowerPoint to assess their presentation skills.

#### 6.3.2.2. *Summative assessment of transversal competences in work-based learning*

Transversal competences are often acquired in work-based learning environments. In some cases, the teachers interviewed reported using specific assessment criteria in this context. In Bulgaria, assessment criteria for the summative assessment of modules are not defined at the national level. However, an exception exists for the assessment of work-based learning in a real working environment setting. Some companies utilise assessment indicators that distinguish between transversal and occupational competences, though their use remains optional. Most of these indicators (see Table 5) focus on transversal skills, accounting for 70 % of the total grade, while the remaining portion assesses occupation-specific skills. Some indicators are more detailed – such as those assessing teamwork (collaboration with colleagues, willingness to integrate into the team and fairness) – whereas others, such as communication skills, are more broadly defined. Competences are evaluated using a points system, with the final work-based learning grade calculated based on the overall number of points. The maximum grade (6 = excellent) means that the student has acquired all competences and can apply them independently in various training scenarios (Bulgaria. Minister of Education and Science, 2016).

Table 5. **Assessment indicators for work-based learning within companies (at end of the term) – example from Bulgaria**

Assessment indicators	Max. number of points	Points	Grade
Observes working hours, shows discipline at work	10		
Complies with internal organisational rules, instructions, and health and safety requirements	10		
Works to tight deadlines and is prompt	10		
Communication skills	10		
Teamwork (way of working with other colleagues; interest in joining the team; and fairness)	10		
Responsibility, self-control, and self-discipline	10		
Maintains order and cleanliness	10		
Occupation-related skills (commitment and interest in learning the profession; active participation in practical tasks; ability to correctly understand and apply what is learned; ability to learn from mistakes; and motivation to learn)	30		
<b>Total number of points:</b>			
<b>Maximum total number of points: 100</b>			

Source: Authors, based on the Bulgarian case study and the [GoDual project](#).

The VET schools visited in the Netherlands translate the transversal competences outlined in the qualification files' core tasks and work processes into practical, assessable criteria. This change allows in-company trainers to effectively evaluate whether learners have demonstrated the required competences. This process also involves providing detailed descriptions of expected learner behaviour. For instance, under 'collaborating and consulting', a more specific description includes 'promotes collaboration and team spirit within the group and adapts to the group when necessary' and 'consults with others in a timely and regular manner, providing sufficient information'. As part of the assessment, each aspect is assessed on a scale of 1 to 10, with a minimum score of 6 required to pass.

#### 6.3.2.3. *Formative assessment of transversal competences*

Interviews with teachers and trainers indicate that transversal skills and competences are embedded throughout teaching and learning as recurring themes and are often integrated into formative assessment. For example, Irish teachers emphasised their awareness of the increasing importance that employers place on transversal skills. Teachers, therefore, incorporate these skills implicitly into teaching, even when they are not explicitly outlined in programme documentation. For instance, on some courses, reflective practice is used – such as personal diaries in social studies or healthcare – that encourages learners to engage in self-reflection, often involving complex transversal skills. Additionally, teachers noted that cohesive teamwork is essential in fields like early learning and care, so they simulate workplace experiences in the classroom as much as possible. Also, Lithuanian teachers frequently embed transversal competences (e.g. social skills, teamwork) into formative assessment tasks. Learners often complete group assignments, reflecting on each member's contributions and engage in peer assessment. Teachers then evaluate the presentations and provide feedback. According to the teachers, this approach enhances engagement and makes learning more interactive. In Malta's vocational secondary education, while teachers are required to assess occupational knowledge and know-how, transversal competences are often assessed simultaneously. For instance, during a lesson observation, a teacher evaluated a student explaining to an adult why they needed to speak to a counsellor. The assessment went beyond spoken words, considering the student's approach and body language. In post-compulsory IVET, lecturers are encouraged to foster transversal skills through group work, presentations and assessments that require students to present their work. This allows for a combined assessment of both occupational and transversal skills. In Poland, the vocational core curriculum encourages teachers to create

opportunities for personal and social competence development across all classes. However, there are no formal guidelines on how to assess these competences. Teachers typically provide observations and feedback on students' attitudes and behaviours, particularly in practical lessons and extracurricular activities, such as professional competitions. The core curriculum includes verification criteria for personal and social competences, inspiring teachers on how to develop and assess these competences during lessons. For instance, for the learning outcome 'works collaboratively in a team', the verification criteria include 'takes responsibility for jointly completed tasks', 'adheres to assigned roles and responsibilities within the team', 'actively engages in team tasks' and 'adjusts behaviour based on collective team decisions'.

## 6.4. Collaboration, support and training

This section explores the extent to which educators collaborate with one another in order to align their interpretation of assessment criteria for greater consistency and reliability. This section also explores the extent to which resources, support and training are offered to educators.

### 6.4.1. Collaboration among teachers and trainers regarding the interpretation of assessment criteria

Insights from the case studies show that VET teachers and trainers collaborate to align their interpretation of assessment criteria. The level and form of collaboration, however, depends on several factors, such as VET provider policies, the existence of formal quality assurance procedures at the national or provider level, subject domains, individual educators or the availability of more informal mechanisms for exchange.

In Bulgaria, for example, there are no explicitly defined assessment criteria for formative assessment. Teachers reported that they engage in informal, ad hoc discussions about assessment practices and the interpretation of learning outcomes as needed. As previously mentioned (see Section 5.1), in one of the schools visited, teacher teams were established within VET subjects to develop uniform assessment criteria for summative assessment at the school. While worth noting, this initiative is still a work in progress. In comparison, Finnish VET providers commonly establish various development groups consisting of teachers and other staff members to address practical issues, such as workplace assessments. These include regional and national development groups, peer groups and working groups that focus on key topics like competence demonstrations and their assessment. Notably, VET teachers actively engage in

discussions with their peers on work-based learning assessment and strive to involve workplace instructors in these conversations. They work closely with companies to plan the tasks for learners and competence demonstrations. This is based on the national qualification requirements (including the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria) and the personal competence development plan developed for each learner. Close cooperation between teachers and workplace trainers is also important for another reason: workplace trainers reported that they sometimes receive young VET students who turn out not to be ready to work in real-life situations, partly due to a lack of professional skills and competences, partly due to a lack of 'right attitude'. In these cases, they will have to interrupt the on-the-job learning phase and send the student back to school. In the social work and healthcare sector in particular, workplace trainers said that, as they are responsible for the welfare of their clients, they have to treat trainees strictly according to their own work ethics and the working methods of their organisations. One workplace trainer said, 'We cannot afford to let the students experiment and play with our clients, and we have to make sure that the students are able to work with us as team members before we can let them work more independently. If a student is not ready, we liaise with the school and discuss what the student needs to practise at school before they can come back to us.'

In France, teachers at *lycées professionnels* collaborate with their peers to align assessment criteria and ensure consistency across their programmes. Less-experienced staff often seek guidance from more-experienced colleagues. Harmonisation meetings, organised with inspectors from the Ministry of National Education, are seen as valuable opportunities for peer engagement. Additionally, teachers conduct informal team discussions each year, working together on assessment rubrics and reviewing students' work – particularly from work-based learning – in preparation for the harmonisation meetings.

The teachers interviewed in Ireland reported that there could be many variations of how assessments for the same module in the same college/institute are done, along with variations within across institutions. One potential area of collaboration between teachers is around the sharing of assessment briefs. Some colleges encourage this, and teachers who are new to a programme might benefit from being able to borrow a brief from a colleague. However, some drawbacks were reported as well. Namely, one teacher's brief might not match the 'delivery style' of another teacher, one teacher might not know why the other teacher wrote a brief in a particular way (the rationale is not explicit) or teachers might want to combine learning outcomes in different ways. Some teachers carefully guard their assessment tools rather than share them because of the effort involved in developing them. There is collaboration among teachers related to the integration

of assessment – so that one assessment activity can contribute to multiple learning outcomes, in the same module, across modules or even across subject domains. In the institutions visited it was common for teachers to identify opportunities for students in different departments to work together on projects to meet the learning outcomes required in more than one award. As mentioned above (see Section 5.1), a communications module is a compulsory part of all QQI awards, and teachers often find ways in which an assignment might meet some of the learning outcomes in both the communications module and another module. Integration may increase the size of an assignment, but it enables more learning outcomes to be met in one go.

Teachers in Lithuania regularly exchange best practices through methodological groups that use platforms for discussing assessment methodologies and effective strategies for designing assessment tasks. Notably, teachers at one of the schools visited emphasised the value of having multiple educators collaborate on module preparation. This teamwork enables them to refine pedagogical strategies throughout the module, coordinate assessment methods and develop exam tasks. Such a collaborative approach, combined with ongoing knowledge sharing, helps ensure that learners are well-prepared for the final assessment of competences.

In Malta, within the context of VET SEC subjects and post-compulsory IVET, teachers noted that, when effectively implemented, the internal verification process (see Section 4.1) fosters meaningful discussion and reflection. As part of this process, VET SEC teachers share the assignments they design, enabling them to better understand the interpretation of assessment criteria and the alignment of the verbs used with the corresponding NQF level. This collaboration also helps them explore different contexts for creating relevant and meaningful assignments. Additionally, internal verification supports VET teachers in marking students' work by facilitating discussions and script sharing.

In the Netherlands, while the process of translating the qualification files into exams is relatively rigid, teachers and trainers have opportunities to discuss the descriptions of learning outcomes through the SBB and to contribute to discussions on exam design through the exam providers. This is largely because educators play a role in developing both the qualification files and the exams. Similarly, in Bulgaria, VET teachers are involved in creating NEPs, allowing them to engage in discussions on assessment criteria for the final summative assessment.

Trainers in Portugal work in multidisciplinary teams, which enables them to share and discuss different perspectives on their understanding and use of assessment criteria. For instance, trainers teaching the same class often work together to define and assess tasks or projects, regularly discussing their

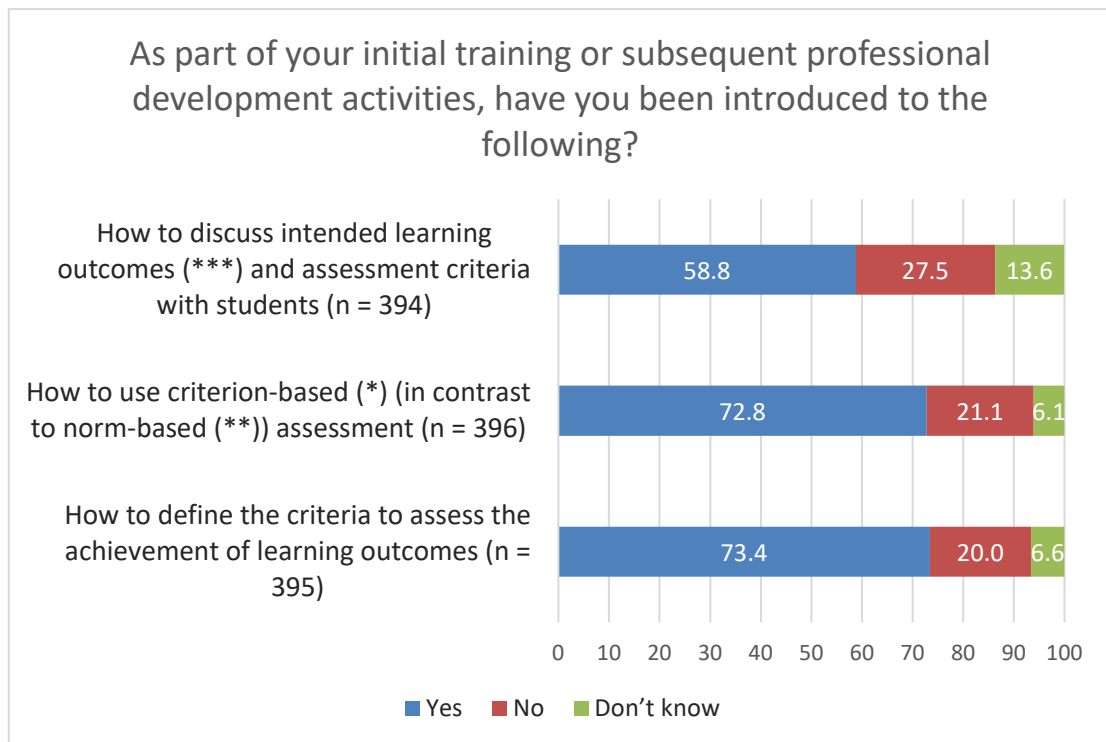
interpretations and conclusions about assessments at the end of a project, semester or activity.

The Polish teachers interviewed recognised that they rarely discuss their interpretation of assessment criteria. When doubts emerge, they consult exam assessors who are registered in examination boards' examiners database. Also in Slovenia, teachers reported that they do not have frequent opportunities for in-depth discussions about learning outcomes and their use in assessment, as there is limited systematic exchange of professional experience in this area. However, this varies across schools and teachers and is linked to the developed culture of collaboration and sharing of experiences within a school and the encouragement of the school management.

#### **6.4.2. Resources, support and training**

As part of the survey developed for this study, teachers and trainers were asked about the different forms of support they received for conducting assessments and using assessment criteria. A significant majority of responding VET teachers and trainers (72.8 %) reported being introduced to the idea of discussing intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria with students, either during their initial training or through professional development activities (see Figure 9). Similarly, 73.4 % indicated they had been taught how to define criteria for assessing learning outcomes. However, around 20 % of respondents reported not being introduced to either of these practices. A smaller percentage, though still majority group (58.8 %), stated they had been trained in using criterion-based assessment.

Figure 9. **Teachers' and trainers' views on the integration of learning outcomes and assessment criteria into their own training and development (%)**



- (\*) Criterion-based (or criterion-referenced) assessments measure the performance of students against a fixed set of predetermined criteria, without any reference to the achievement of others.
- (\*\*) Norm-based (or norm-referenced) assessments measure student performance based on comparison with the performance of others; norm-referenced assessments show whether a person is performing at a level equal to, above or below average compared with others in a group.
- (\*\*\*) Intended learning outcomes are statements describing what learners should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process; they refer to intentions and desired targets of learning.

Source: Authors, based on survey data.

Several of the VET teachers and trainers interviewed expressed satisfaction with the support they receive for conducting assessments. In Malta, for example, the adequacy of the support is ensured through the internal verification process (see Section 4.3). However, certain areas (e.g. training of in-company trainers or the availability of tailored learning materials) still offer room for improvement. This is illustrated by several examples. The Finnish VET system has a long-established tradition of a competence-based approach and using competence demonstrations for assessment, with intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria becoming increasingly clear and accessible, including for those without formal pedagogical education and training. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed the ongoing need for support and guidance in the training workplace instructors on the effective use of established assessment practices and tools. In the Netherlands,

although the support provided is generally considered sufficient, it was pointed out that in-company trainers show limited interest in information or briefing sessions, organised by the exam providers, the VET schools, the VET council and the SBB. This is largely because training and assessment are often secondary responsibilities alongside their primary job within the company. Bulgarian VET teachers highlighted the absence of relevant literature, tailored to students' age, class level and knowledge level, and absence of the technical language required to aid students' self-preparation. As a result, teachers have to summarise and adapt existing materials to make them accessible and understandable for students – a task that demands significant time and effort. French in-company trainers expressed a desire for more targeted training on assessment, as they continue to face challenges in using assessment rubrics for ongoing training evaluations (formative assessment) and translating their assessments into grades. In Ireland, the teachers interviewed predominantly felt that there is insufficient support, guidance, resources and training for conducting assessment and using assessment criteria. One interviewee noted the contrast between the lack of support and training provided for the central QQI awards and the very good training provided by the more secondary Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) <sup>(48)</sup>. According to the interviewee, one of the most valuable parts of the BTEC training was the opportunity to learn together with other teachers and to share experiences. The Slovenian teachers stated that the training they receive mainly provides them with theoretical knowledge. They would rather have practice-oriented training that enables them to apply the knowledge they have acquired directly in their daily work. Moreover, they pointed out that the support they receive often depends on the individual school, the school management or the individual projects in which they are involved (e.g. some projects have developed manuals for curriculum planning, assessment of knowledge). The complexity of working with learning outcomes and the need for continuous cooperation and training is illustrated by the following statement from a Portuguese trainer:

*'The planning and assessment of the learning outcomes require a lot of training from the trainers. We need to work a lot in a team, we need to define and redefine, to adjust to the multiple circumstances and targets all the time; we need to be willing to learn more and do differently all the way. This requires time, energy and a lot of teamwork. The support from the management is critical, but commitment and ownership from the other trainers is also important. ... Seeing the impact of all of this on our trainees gives sense and meaning to our dedication and efforts.'*

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<sup>(48)</sup> The BTEC is an awarding body based in the United Kingdom, providing work-related qualifications that are available globally.

## 6.5. Areas for improvement identified by VET teachers and trainers

This section explores the factors that hinder the effective use of learning outcomes in assessment and outlines some areas for improvement identified by the VET teachers and trainers interviewed. These considerations are presented below.

On the one hand, the results of the case studies show that teachers' and trainers' understanding of the learning-outcomes-based approach and/or the competence-based approach needs to be further deepened. This relates to the understanding and use of these concepts, in addition to teachers' and trainers' perceptions of their role as learning facilitators. On the other hand, the case studies also demonstrate a need for sufficient support for learners to increase their readiness for planning their studies and for assessment. This is illustrated below with examples.

- (a) Teachers and trainers. In France, evidence suggests that teachers' adaptation to the shift towards learning outcomes is partly shaped by their teaching experience. Teachers who completed their initial training before 2019 – without exposure to competence-based approaches – often face challenges in fully understanding and applying formative and summative assessment methods. On the other hand, teachers familiar with competence-based approaches noted that they sometimes need to clarify the pedagogical aspects of teaching, learning and assessment with companies, as the terminology used in national-level documents is not always easily accessible. This gap is particularly evident among trainers who lack familiarity with this language and who frequently seek support from the VET provider's pedagogical staff. However, time constraints can make accessing this support difficult. In this context, trainers expressed a strong need for a deeper understanding of competence-based assessment and how diploma frameworks can aid in designing classroom-based assessment. The Portuguese case study also indicates that not all trainers embrace the learning-outcomes-based approach or are willing to plan learning and assessment accordingly. However, as highlighted by a trainer, effective implementation requires trainers who prioritise the trainees' learning process and see themselves as facilitators of learning, rather than experts merely transmitting their own knowledge. One of the most frequently mentioned challenges cited by Slovenian teachers is the lack of clear and systematic guidelines for assessing learning outcomes. They also pointed to a lack of capacity for assessing learning outcomes in less traditional learning environments. In particular, online and hybrid learning environments bring

- additional challenges for assessment, as they require the use of new digital tools and methods that teachers are often not yet sufficiently familiar with.
- (b) Learners. Guidance and advice from teachers to support learners is essential and needs to be ensured. At the Finnish VET providers visited, students often create competence demonstration plans with the support of workplace instructors and VET teachers. However, both instructors and teachers expressed concerns that younger students sometimes lack the necessary understanding (e.g. what is expected from them in terms of learning outcomes) to properly draft these plans. In Poland, verification criteria from the core curriculum can help students in planning their learning, as they specify the intended learning outcomes in detail. However, due to the number and specificity of the criteria, it may be challenging for students to independently select and logically organise their studies. Furthermore, French trainers also questioned whether learners truly grasp the concept of competence-based assessment. As one trainer noted, 'When they get a [grade] 10 or a 20, they immediately understand what that means. It's much clearer for them than the concept of competence-based assessment, which uses performance levels like "novice" or "expert". That approach seems more geared towards teachers, trainers, directors and inspectors.'

Another area for improvement identified refers to formulating and updating assessment criteria. Teachers in Slovenia, for example, observed that the assessment criteria (that are developed by the teachers themselves) are not always written in a way that is learner-friendly and accessible. The sometimes excessively technical language is difficult for pupils to understand, which can affect their understanding of the expectations and consequently their motivation and independence in learning. Moreover, teachers often define just the minimum standards that pupils need to achieve in order to obtain a positive grade, while more detailed descriptions and assessment criteria for all grades (e.g. excellent, proficient, good, sufficient, insufficient) are only occasionally produced, in the context of individual projects or specific assignments. In Lithuania, VET teachers acknowledged that evaluating certain learning outcomes through summative assessment often demands more detailed and comprehensive assessment criteria than those provided in national VET programmes. To address this, teachers suggested incorporating additional criteria when designing assessment tasks, to ensure a more thorough assessment of learning outcomes. Teachers also observed that while intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria are generally aligned, there are cases where national programme criteria are outdated and no longer reflect current labour market trends. Similarly, Portuguese trainers

pointed out that learning outcomes and assessment criteria for certain qualifications do not always keep pace with evolving industry needs, resulting in misalignment with company expectations over time. In the Netherlands, an ongoing debate focuses on the perceived rigidity of learning outcomes as interpreted by some exam providers. Teachers and trainers stressed the importance of continuously improving on and adapting learning outcomes to better align with the evolving needs of students and the labour market.

Language barriers related to a Member State's official languages can also negatively affect whether students understand the learning outcomes used in assessment and, thus, the effectiveness of current assessment practices. For example, in recent years, the MCAST in Malta has experienced a rising number of foreign students with limited English literacy skills, many of whom struggle to fully comprehend the assessment criteria and their application. Tackling this issue would require a review and simplification of the existing assessment criteria, making them clearer and more accessible to students.

The depth and number of assessments were also presented by some teachers as challenging and as something that would be desirable to change. In Irish FET, awards are structured into modules, with each module being individually assessed, which creates a limited time frame for teaching and assessing learning outcomes. This creates an intense and highly focused learning environment. As highlighted by one teacher: 'We are teaching learners as if there were an exam every day'. Another interviewee emphasised that the absence of formal examinations, combined with the focus on continuous assessment and evidence-gathering, has significantly increased the overall assessment workload. Similarly, Maltese secondary VET teachers noted that the need to assign numerous assessment tasks in order to address all assessment criteria can lead to student fatigue. As one teacher explained: 'In one assignment, you may have five different types of criteria and this takes time, as you give [the students] a series of tasks, with the students becoming burnt out; this mainly being an issue towards the end of the year.'

Better clarity on how to prepare learners for the final exams was called for by Lithuanian teachers. Exam questions in the external summative assessment in Lithuania are developed through commissioned projects led by experts from academia. However, VET teachers reported that they were not aware what materials these experts use when formulating questions and suspected that they often rely on their own occupational knowledge, rather than the handbooks available to both teachers and learners. As a result, teachers expressed concern about the lack of clarity regarding which handbooks to use when preparing students and uncertainty about the types of questions that will appear on the

national exam. Additionally, after the competence assessment, students receive only their grade without any feedback on specific mistakes made. This absence of feedback makes it difficult for teachers to identify which topics need more attention in lessons and provides no guidance on the complexity of tasks, making it challenging to determine the level of preparation needed for future assessments.

In Finland, the comprehensive and complex vocational qualification requirements in certain sectors present challenges for finding suitable workplaces for VET students. This is because many workplaces specialise in only a specific area of the industry, making it difficult to provide students with the broad learning and assessment opportunities needed to cover all the different competence units of the qualification.

Slovenian teachers referred to differences in school facilities (e.g. laboratories, workshops, modern equipment) that have an impact on assessment and emphasised the need to have appropriate material conditions in place to allow the use of a variety of assessment methods, especially for the assessment of practical competences. Teachers and trainers also found greater alignment and cooperation between schools and companies in assessing work-based learning to be important.

## 6.6. Conclusions

The survey results and case studies show that teachers and trainers consistently use learning outcomes and assessment criteria for planning teaching, formative assessment and summative assessment. While these learning outcomes are generally beneficial, there are concerns that they can limit learning. In particular, the emphasis on learning outcomes that are observable and easily measurable can lead teachers to limit their teaching, for example by avoiding teaching more complex competences that cannot be easily assessed. However, this can also limit the development of a diverse skill set. Allowing room for interpretation, adaptation and flexibility in assessment criteria can help to avoid this. In many countries VET educators retain considerable autonomy in selecting assessment methods and designing assessment tasks, with greater flexibility given for formative assessments than given for summative assessments. This flexibility enables educators to tailor their teaching approaches to meet the specific demands of both formal assessments and broader learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are consistently communicated to students, but assessment criteria are shared more clearly for summative assessments than formative assessments. In some cases, students are actively involved in the assessment planning process, enhancing their understanding. Practices vary and

include integrating assessment criteria into personal development plans, tailoring communication based on student needs, using rubrics for clarity, emphasising the use of verbs in describing assessment tasks to align with assessment criteria and ensuring transparency by embedding criteria in learning processes. Some teachers and trainers also allow students to review and suggest additional criteria, promoting engagement and understanding.

Approaches for assessing learning outcomes differ across educational contexts, including classrooms, practical environments, online settings and workplaces. The choice of assessment methods largely depends on whether the learning outcomes are theoretical or practical. Theoretical outcomes, which involve explaining or discussing concepts, are typically assessed through tests, written assignments or presentations. In contrast, practical competences are evaluated by having students perform or demonstrate actions or apply knowledge in real-world scenarios. The authenticity of the assessment environment can vary depending on the occupational field, influencing how effectively learning outcomes are measured.

Transversal skills and competences are not always explicitly included in descriptions of intended learning outcomes or assessment criteria; still, they are often addressed in teaching and learning and through assessment methods. They can be assessed separately or in an integrated way with occupational competences. However, there is a need for greater consistency and clarity among educators to ensure a shared understanding of how to effectively assess complex transversal competences.

Teachers and trainers collaborate in various ways to improve assessment practices, although the extent and nature of collaboration varies. In some cases, educators engage in informal discussions to interpret learning outcomes or work in teams to develop uniform assessment criteria. Collaborative groups, such as development teams or methodological groups, are used to refine assessment tasks, ensure consistency and share best practices. Some educators work closely with industry partners to align assessments with real-world competences. Additionally, internal verification processes and multidisciplinary teamwork facilitates discussions on assessment criteria, and their interpretation and alignment with learning outcomes. However, collaboration can be limited by factors such as differences in teaching styles or reluctance to share assessment tools.

VET teachers and trainers generally appreciate the support they receive for conducting assessments, but gaps remain in certain areas. More tailored training and resources are needed, particularly for in-company trainers and workplace instructors. Some educators feel that training opportunities are inconsistent, highlighting the value of collaborative learning experiences.

## Chapter 7.

# Practices and perspectives of learners in VET

### Key findings

- (a) Most learners are aware of assessment criteria, but not all students/trainees understand how assessment criteria are related to learning outcomes.
- (b) In all countries, teachers play a key role in explaining assessments, contextualising criteria and making assessment criteria language more accessible to students.
- (c) Students' motivations and attitudes towards learning shape their perception of assessment. More-motivated students see assessments as more than just an exam requirement; they view assessment as a tool for tracking progress, identifying learning gaps and developing skills.
- (d) Assessment practices influence learning across all countries. Continuous assessment and regular feedback support structured learning and greater student engagement.
- (e) The learners interviewed stressed the need for assessments that better prepare them for employment. Some called for more practical, job-oriented evaluation methods. Work-based learning is highly valued, whereas online assessments were often seen as less effective.
- (f) Some of the learners interviewed suggested clearer assessment criteria and more structured feedback from workplace instructors.

This chapter explores learners' perspectives on assessment practices in their respective countries (the micro level). It gathers students' views on assessment criteria, the perceived impact of assessment criteria on learning experiences and the perceived alignment between assessment criteria and learning outcomes in curricula.

The insights presented in this chapter are based on evidence gathered during site visits to VET providers. The number of learners consulted varied across countries, and the limited scope of observations prevents a fully representative analysis of the broader student population in any of the countries studied. With this caveat in mind, the findings nevertheless offer valuable qualitative insights into learners' experiences with assessment practices, highlighting common challenges and areas for improvement across different contexts.

### 7.1. [Assessment criteria](#)

This section examines to what degree learners are aware of the assessment criteria, how they perceive the language used in the assessment criteria and the

extent to which these factors influence learning. It also examines how learners perceive the alignment between the assessment and the learning context, the assessment with the intended learning outcomes and the assessment of transversal skills.

#### **7.1.1. Learners' awareness of assessment criteria**

Across all the countries analysed in this report, learners indicated that they were aware of how they will be assessed and cognizant of the assessment criteria that will be used during the evaluation. Most of the learners interviewed confirmed that teachers and trainers convey this information by introducing the reference point for assessment (usually the assessment criteria) at the beginning of a course, alongside the learning programme and the overall assessment process. Member-State-specific examples highlight key differences in how the information is communicated and how students engage with it. The timing and frequency of these explanations, as well as the involvement of students in shaping the learning process, affect students' understanding and grasp of the criteria. In the Netherlands, for example, some learners noted that insufficient reiteration of explanations throughout the semester can negatively affect the comprehension of assessment criteria and their application. In Bulgaria, the interviewed students reported a need for earlier communication of assessment information, as they felt that teachers provide this guidance too late. In France, students highlighted that their awareness of assessment criteria depends on the subject, as some teachers provide more explicit and detailed explanations than others. This was also reported by learners from Slovenia, where although some schools and teachers systematically inform students about the assessment plans (e.g. documents are available on the schools' websites explaining how the national regulations feed into the school regulations and into the assessment plans for the programme and possibly the individual modules), others do not. Finland takes a different approach through involving students in defining their personalised learning plans and assessment modalities. This progressive involvement helps Finnish learners to develop a deeper understanding of assessment criteria over time.

#### **7.1.2. Learners' perception of the language used in assessment criteria and their role**

Learners have different views of the language used to formulate the assessment criteria in the countries analysed. The students interviewed in France and the Netherlands find it complex and not user-friendly. In Finland, some of the learners interviewed reported that assessment criteria are not easily understandable, noting that to fully understand the phrasing, further interpretation and discussion is required. By contrast, students in Ireland, Lithuania and Portugal express a more

positive view of the clarity and accessibility of assessment criteria. However, it is important to note that, in these countries, assessment criteria are often adapted to suit students' needs. For example, in Portugal, assessment criteria are not presented exactly as they appear in the national catalogue of qualifications, and VET schools and training centres rephrase them to align with specific learning activities and contexts, making them more accessible to students. In Ireland, learners noted that teachers present the criteria in a learner-friendly way and provide opportunities for clarification both in class and online. They also reported that there is enough flexibility in the way assessment criteria are drawn up by teachers for learners to take responsibility for their learning and respond to assessment criteria in a way that is relevant to them. For example, teachers make resources available online from which learners can select in completing assessments corresponding to assessment briefs.

In Lithuania, students highlighted that assessment criteria are formulated in a way that closely aligns with lesson content, making them easier to comprehend. Hence, as pointed out by the learners interviewed, these criteria serve as valuable guidelines for exam preparation, helping students understand which topics to focus on and identify any gaps in their learning that need more revision and attention.

Finally, in Malta, students' perceptions of the language used in assessment criteria vary depending on the respondents' education level. The students in post-compulsory education who were interviewed reported fewer difficulties with comprehension, whereas those in secondary school find the terminology unfamiliar and difficult to understand. Students do not always follow what teachers mean when they speak about the assessment, and they need further explanation to understand, as one interviewee pointed out: 'But sometimes the teacher speaks a lot at one go and I have a lot of things in my head to understand and sometimes I do not follow everything, but then I ask her again and she explains and I somehow eventually understand.'

In most of the countries (Bulgaria, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Finland), the interviewed students judge assessment criteria positively, particularly for the role that assessment criteria play in guiding exam preparation. In Ireland, learners appreciated how assessment criteria provide clear goals and structure to their learning. The assessment criteria help them understand what is expected and how to achieve specific learning objectives. As one learner commented, 'half the work is done for you'. In Portugal, the learners interviewed believe that assessment criteria help them to better understand what the trainers expect regarding their performance in the assessment activities, fostering student accountability for their progress. Students reported gaining greater autonomy, self-awareness and critical thinking skills with the support and feedback from the pedagogical teams. In the

Netherlands, the perceptions of assessment criteria are mixed. While some students find them beneficial for structuring their learning and guiding study efforts, others describe them as overly complex and detached from practical application. This contrast suggests that the effectiveness of assessment criteria not only depends on their support of the learning process and exam preparation, but also on their ability to reflect the practical use of knowledge and skills beyond the classroom.

### **7.1.3. Perceived influence of assessment criteria on learning**

Across all the countries analysed, learners associate assessment criteria with exam preparation, with all students interviewed confirming that assessment impacts their learning process. For example, in Lithuania, students considered assessment criteria helpful in clarifying key learning priorities and highlighting areas requiring further revision. In France, the learners interviewed placed great importance on knowing what will be assessed and how and noted that the awareness of assessment criteria fosters a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning. In Malta, a secondary VET student explained that learners actively consider teachers' expectations when completing homework and refer to assessment criteria to understand better what is required during assessment.

The impact of assessment on learning largely depends on how learners perceive the role of assessment. Such perceptions vary across countries studied. In some contexts (France, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovenia), assessment is primarily seen as a formal obligation. This is prevalent in education systems that emphasise final grades. For example, as observed in Slovenia, students often see assessment as the main goal of education, which can lead to an instrumental understanding of learning. They are actually 'learning for grades', and when they are informed at the beginning of the year about the learning objectives or content and what is expected of them, it is not about what a student needs to know to get a better grade 4 or 5, but rather what is required to pass. In contrast, in other countries (Ireland, Finland and Portugal), assessment is valued beyond exams, and serves as a means to track progress, identify learning gaps and support learners' overall development. For example, in Finland and in Portugal, the learners interviewed deemed continuous assessment and feedback crucial for fostering awareness of their education paths, structuring their learning and building skills for future employment. Finally, in Bulgaria, Lithuania and the Netherlands, the interviewed students reported mixed perceptions, depending on their engagement and motivation. In Bulgaria, students acknowledged the importance of assessment for examinations and tracking their learning progress, but only engaged with teachers' feedback when they were motivated. A similar pattern

emerges from the Netherlands, where students who struggle academically often view assessment as an obstacle, while those who enjoy learning see it as a developmental tool. This perspective was also noted in Lithuania, where engaged students used assessment to guide their learning, but where disengaged students focused solely on meeting the minimum requirements needed to obtain the certification.

Despite the different roles given to or weight put on assessment, none of the students interviewed expressed that there was too much focus placed on assessment criteria during the teaching process. In contrast, students in Ireland were content with a high degree of focus on assessment and assessment criteria during the teaching and training process, as assessment briefs provided clear links between instructional materials, pedagogical approaches and assessment.

Students' confidence in external assessment depends on how well these assessments align with classroom learning and real-world skill application<sup>(49)</sup>. In Lithuania, students reported no significant discrepancy between classroom learning and summative external evaluations, suggesting that the teaching process adequately prepares them for the exam. However, students also pointed out that the evaluation of such an alignment is inherently difficult, as the final exams take place at the end of the vocational training programme. Similarly, in the Netherlands, students did not identify major inconsistencies, but some suggest that greater focus on hands-on training would better prepare them for real-world applications of their skills. In Portugal, students believed that classroom teaching and learning methods and practical projects sufficiently prepare them for external assessments and equip them with essential skills for professional settings. This is illustrated by the following comment from one of the learners interviewed: 'All trainees know and are aware that they are assessed all the time, everywhere and by everyone (trainers, tutors, colleagues and external stakeholders). We know that the assessment is important to get a grade and conclude the training and that it is important for our work and life.' In Poland, the learners interviewed consistently agreed that teachers effectively prepare them for passing vocational exams by assigning tasks, gradually increasing their difficulty, providing clear instructions and assessing the results. In France, the students interviewed confirmed that they understand assessment criteria and felt confident in their competences in view of exams. However, they expressed discomfort with summative assessments, particularly final exams, which they perceived as stressful. As one student explained, while they possess the necessary skills, the pressure of being evaluated on a specific day and time creates additional challenges.

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<sup>(49)</sup> Students in Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta and Finland did not provide views on this.

Aside from external assessments, some learners interviewed in the Netherlands highlighted the importance of being prepared for the labour market. These students demanded job-relevant assessments that align more closely with career aspirations. This concern is less pronounced in VET institutions where learning is predominantly work-based, as students gain direct experience in real work settings.

#### **7.1.4. Perceived alignment between assessment and learning contexts**

Students who provided insights on work-based learning found the assessment methods to be appropriate (Finland, France, Ireland and Portugal). More specifically, in Finland, students appreciate workplace learning and its assessment as a valuable way to understand their profession, emphasising that practical experience clarifies job expectations and qualification requirements. In Portugal, students also acknowledged workplace learning and assessment as crucial for comprehending future job roles. They found that these experiences reinforce school-acquired competences while fostering new technical and transversal skills. Feedback from tutors and colleagues was regarded as essential for deepening job function understanding and improving performance through continuous learning. Work-based learning is conducted at least once per academic year in the two schools visited. Finally, students in France pointed out that work-based learning assessment quality varies significantly depending on individual tutors, with some being stricter than others. This inconsistency affects the perceived fairness and reliability of workplace assessments.

Only a handful of students provided feedback on online assessments, as these practices were not widely used in the VET providers visited. In Portugal, trainees viewed hybrid and online formats as less engaging, ineffective and ill-suited for technical training. Some learners described the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in national lockdowns (when these assessment methods were widely used), as a time of poor learning progress and low motivation. One trainee reported having to return to in-person classes to strengthen competences they felt had not been properly consolidated during the lockdown. This reflects students' general preference for learning experiences that more closely align with the demands of their future professional roles.

#### **7.1.5. Perceived alignment between assessment and intended learning outcomes**

In most cases, students did not provide insights into how assessment criteria align with the intended learning outcomes detailed in curricula. This is probably because most of the learners interviewed do not fully understand the learning outcomes as distinct elements of their educational process, even though – as mentioned in

Section 6.2 – they are usually informed about the intended learning outcomes by their teachers. In Malta, for example, the learners interviewed struggle to differentiate between assessment criteria and learning outcomes, and they are more familiar with the former. Furthermore, some post-compulsory students reported a lack of understanding of how the overall VET system functions, calling for clearer information. In Bulgaria, students mentioned that teachers present curricula and qualitative indicators used in assessments, and they also implicitly communicate intended learning outcomes during formative assessments. Students displayed different degrees of awareness, depending on their overall level of engagement in their studies. Nonetheless, most learners report an understanding of grading descriptors and broader assessment principles. Students in Slovenia indicated that it is not always clear to them how learning outcomes are linked to assessment, since they do not understand exactly what is expected of them, how they will be assessed and how this relates to learning outcomes. In contrast, the learners interviewed in Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal are generally aware of learning outcomes, though the depth of their understanding varied.

Among the countries where insights were provided, students in Ireland and Finland reported a strong alignment between assessment and learning outcomes. In Ireland, the assessment brief outlines learning outcomes and assessment criteria, helping students establish a clearer connection between the two elements. In Finland, students actively shape their study plans, and this ensures high levels of awareness of the coherence between learning activities and assessment. In the Netherlands, opinions are more divided. Some students found that assessment criteria reflect the intended learning outcomes well, while others highlighted a disconnection, particularly in subjects like mathematics<sup>(50)</sup>. In France, perceived alignment depends on the educational pathway of the students interviewed. The students enrolled in a CFA saw a clear link between training and assessment criteria. However, those students enrolled in the *brevet de technicien supérieur* (advanced technician certificate [BTS])<sup>(51)</sup> in the *lycée professionnel* did not

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<sup>(50)</sup> The reason for this is that the Dutch vocational education system includes generic qualification requirements rather than specific learning outcomes in mathematics. These broad requirements often state that students should possess 'basic mathematics' skills without specifying what those skills entail.

<sup>(51)</sup> The BTS is a French vocational diploma awarded after a two-year programme of specialised education. It is designed for students who have completed their secondary education (*baccalauréat*) and wish to acquire practical skills for specific careers. The BTS is recognised as a level 5 qualification in the French education system, equivalent to an advanced technician certificate.

recognise a strong alignment between assessment criteria and the competences outlined in diploma frameworks.

#### **7.1.6. Assessment of transversal skills and competences**

When asked about the assessment of transversal skills, students highlighted the difficulty of evaluating these skills (in Ireland, Lithuania, Poland and Finland). In Ireland, students noted that transversal skills are challenging to assess because they develop implicitly rather than through direct learning. In Poland, students acknowledged the importance of transversal skills but felt that formal assessments were unnecessary, and felt instead that the assessment of these skills should rely on teachers' informal recognition. In Lithuania, the lack of predefined assessment criteria created uncertainty about the extent to which these skills were effectively evaluated. The Maltese students interviewed were unfamiliar with the concept of transversal skills. Students in Bulgaria were aware of learning outcomes related to transversal skills but were unaware of specific assessment criteria used by teachers and company mentors. This is because transversal and occupation-specific skills are generally assessed together in an integrated manner.

### **7.2. Areas for improvement identified by learners**

Few learners shared suggestions for improving the assessment process. One reason for this could be that learners do not necessarily consider alternatives; as one interviewee from Ireland remarked, 'you play the hand [of cards] you are dealt'. In Finland, learners identified two key challenges regarding assessment practices used during work-based learning. First, students emphasised the need for more structured and consistent feedback from the workplace, particularly concerning their progress, performance and areas requiring improvement to meet learning outcomes. Second, concerns were raised about student–instructor relationships in the workplace, and students mentioned that tensions may compromise the impartiality of assessment since instructors are assigned without a structured matching process. In Portugal, the Netherlands and Slovenia, learners called for clearer and more accessible terminology to be used in assessment criteria. In France, learners suggested increasing group assessments, prioritising formative assessments over summative assessments and involving students more in designing assessment criteria. A positive example came from students whose trainer sought their preferred assessment methods at the start of the year and integrated their feedback into the assessment design. As one of the interviewees commented, 'it's about how we approach [assessment]. It's true that if we're sitting in our chair in front of a sheet, we'll rather endure it, whereas if we participate in

the design, we don't endure it, we experience it. And it's true that it's different.' Learners in Portugal and in Malta (in post-compulsory education) raised concerns about the frequency of assessments, stating that continuous evaluation leaves little time for preparation. Despite recognising these challenges, students were sceptical about potential reforms. Slovenian learners would welcome less emphasis placed on grades and theoretical content and more placed on labour-market-relevant competences, as the latter has more potential benefits for acquiring a future job and students are motivated by the goal of mastering the tasks that need to be performed in the workplace. Students would also favour more practical assessments that go beyond written tests and oral exams.

Students in other countries did not provide suggestions for improvements. National-level analysis indicates that in Ireland, this may reflect overall satisfaction, whereas in Lithuania, this may stem from unfamiliarity with how learning outcomes align with assessment criteria. In Poland, students viewed assessment as a fixed aspect of their education and showed little interest in change, doubting the feasibility of meaningful reforms.

### 7.3. Conclusions

The analysis of learners' perspectives is based on insights gathered from a selected number of school observations. Keeping this in mind, several key conclusions may be drawn regarding learners' perceptions of assessment criteria and assessment practices.

Learners are generally aware of assessment criteria, but often find their connection to the intended learning outcomes unclear. Teachers play a key role in bridging this gap by explaining assessment processes and curricula. The timing, frequency and clarity of these explanations have a significant impact on students' comprehension. Teachers also often help make assessment criteria more accessible, especially when language barriers exist. However, students' engagement with assessment criteria largely depends on their attitudes towards learning. To this end, learning approaches that strongly involve students in the educational process foster a deeper understanding of the role of assessment.

It is clear from the evidence that in many cases assessment remains closely linked to fulfilling requirements and grading, and it is clear that assessment criteria have a direct impact on students' learning. The degree to which students engage with these criteria depends on multiple factors, the most important of which is – again – students' attitude and motivation. In education systems where assessment is continuous, students are more likely to use assessment criteria as a tool for self-improvement than merely as a requirement for passing exams.

Overall, the learners interviewed highlighted the need for assessment approaches that better align with future employment opportunities. They placed high value on practical learning and assessment and showed great appreciation for work-based learning for its role in reinforcing real-world skills. However, some students highlighted that the quality of the process of teaching, learning and assessment in this context strongly depends on the trainer or assessor. Online assessments were generally regarded as less effective. These findings illustrate the importance of transparent, practice-oriented assessment methods that support progression during the learning process and help boost students' employability.

## Chapter 8.

# Lessons learned

This chapter presents overall conclusions, related to the key research questions and based on the data collected, and outlines several policy recommendations for the further improvement of the use of learning outcomes in assessment.

### 8.1. Responding to the key research questions

#### 8.1.1. Role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment

Learning outcomes are integrated into national assessment regulations in all of the countries studied. In most countries, assessment criteria (mainly described in terms of achieved learning outcomes) are defined at the national level, along with the intended learning outcomes. In these cases, the assessment criteria are to be used as reference points for summative assessment – either for awarding a module (or unit) or for awarding a qualification. In three countries, no separate assessment criteria are provided at the national level: in Ireland, teachers are responsible for developing assessment criteria in assessment briefs; in Slovenia, assessment criteria are developed by teachers or teacher collectives; and in the Netherlands, the intended learning outcomes specified in the qualification files are to be used for assessment purposes.

As learning-outcomes-based summative assessment in VET is predominantly shaped by national regulations, most of the visited VET providers do not have specific policies or strategies for integrating learning outcomes into assessments. Nor do VET providers have specific strategies for formative assessment, which is less regulated at the national level. Thus, significant autonomy is granted to teachers and trainers in designing and implementing assessments in many countries, allowing for customisation but potentially also leading to inconsistencies in the approaches used. Overall, learning outcomes in VET assessments are valued by representatives of VET providers, teachers and trainers. Learning outcomes provide clarity and a certain degree of consistency and still allow some flexibility, thereby supporting effective learning and skills development. In particular, educators believe that assessment criteria formulated as learning outcomes provide detailed and clear goals, facilitating the design of assessments, the evaluation of the performance of learners and the grading process.

In formative assessments, learning outcomes help identify areas for student improvement and provide a basis for constructive feedback and for adjustment of

teaching and learning strategies. In some cases, teachers and trainers rather use the more broadly formulated intended learning outcomes in assessments with formative functions but focus on more detailed assessment criteria when preparing students for summative exams.

Overall, the findings from the case studies confirm that the formative function of assessment is valued but could be further strengthened, as could learner self-assessment and peer assessment. Learning outcomes help maintain consistency between teaching objectives and assessment tasks. They also help to plan the logical development of knowledge, skills and competences, including in work-based learning environments. If intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria are aligned with labour market requirements, they can effectively guide teaching, learning and assessment to prepare learners for the workplace, ensuring that learners acquire skills and competences relevant to their future professions. Whether learners appreciate the formative function of assessment as a tool for supporting them in their competence development process seems to strongly depend on students' motivations and attitudes towards learning, but also on the overall culture in place and the extent to which learner-centred pedagogies are used – in the VET system, at the VET provider and in the teaching and learning process.

Table 6 presents key elements of the approaches taken in the case study countries.

Table 6. **Role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessment**

Member State	Key points
Bulgaria	SEEs for VET and NEPs include assessment criteria for summative assessment; no explicit assessment criteria are specified for formative assessment; intended learning outcomes are used for preparing teaching, learning and assessment processes.
Ireland	Learning outcomes and assessment criteria (developed by teachers) play an important role in the teaching, learning and assessment process.
France	Learning outcomes are used for summative assessments; general acceptance of and awareness about the usefulness of the learning-outcomes-based assessment was observed but so too was a need to improve teachers' competences for conducting formative assessments; learners are increasingly aware of the learning-outcomes-based approach.
Lithuania	Learning outcomes and assessment criteria play an important role in the teaching, learning and assessment process.
Malta	Learning outcomes (and assessment criteria) play an important role in both formative and summative assessment; students are more aware of assessment criteria than the intended learning outcomes.
Netherlands	Learning outcomes are effectively used in both formative and summative assessment, and they are used in the communication about learners' progress; there are some concerns that the focus on the written word and less on the 'spirit' of that word is too strong – for

	example, it is unclear to students, what it means to be a 'novice' in an occupation.
Poland	Both formative and summative assessments are integral parts of the teaching and learning process, which is centred on the gradual expansion and deepening of students' competences.
Portugal	Learning outcomes play a key role in the identification of methods, strategies and instruments used for formative assessment and are the basis for summative assessments; learning outcomes are translated into 'clear language' to be understandable for all stakeholders (e.g. trainers, trainees, external stakeholders).
Slovenia	Learning outcomes and assessment criteria play a key role in summative assessment of modules/subjects and in final assessments.
Finland	Learning outcomes play an important role in the competence-based VET approach, comprising the 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment of competences'; intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria are considered to be highly relevant to the world of work.

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

### 8.1.2. Role of assessment criteria in the teaching and learning process

Criteria used for assessment are also important for the teaching and learning process. This study explored the extent to which the teaching and learning process is informed and/or steered by assessment criteria.

The influence of assessment criteria on teaching and learning is strongly dependent on how assessment criteria are written and used. Let us first look at how assessment criteria are formulated: the common use of action verbs and specific objectives for the formulation of assessment criteria, as seen at the national level in the case study countries, is intended to provide clarity and ensure that the expected actions are observable and measurable. This should reduce ambiguity and increase the objectivity of the assessment process. In some cases, broader formulations are used (e.g. statements consisting of a noun and a modifier) that do not refer to an observable action. These statements leave room for interpretation and offer flexibility but can lead to inconsistent assessments.

The evidence from the 10 countries shows that specific assessment criteria are not always used for assessment with a formative function. In other cases, however, the same criteria are used for both functions of assessment – formative and summative – only the result is used differently. Overall, the teachers, trainers and learners interviewed in the case study countries tended to emphasise the informative nature of assessment criteria for the teaching and learning process.

Teachers and trainers in all case study countries recognise the importance of aligning assessment criteria with intended learning outcomes, particularly for summative assessments. They design assessments with the criteria in mind but generally prioritise the intended learning outcomes (i.e. the descriptions in the curriculum or qualification reference documents) when planning lessons so as not to overly constrain the teaching process with the more detailed assessment

criteria. The assessment criteria influence lesson design indirectly, in that they help teachers decide which topics to emphasise in line with the assessments. Overall, teachers usually do not feel constrained by assessment criteria and adapt them to the students' abilities and level of motivation.

From the teachers' and trainers' perspective, assessment criteria serve to support consistency across educators teaching the same unit. They also help to break down learning outcomes and translate them into terms that are more accessible to learners, improving understanding and alignment with educational objectives. In this way, they help to clarify expectations and promote learner autonomy and responsibility.

However, teachers and trainers also recognise that the criteria are used with different aims in mind: some learners focus only on meeting the minimum requirements, while others use them to strive for higher achievement. In particular, a strong focus on measurable outcomes sometimes leads to an overemphasis on minimum requirements, which can hinder deeper learning experiences.

Learners in all the countries surveyed associate the assessment criteria with exam preparation, as the criteria help them to better understand teachers' expectations of their performance in assessment activities and, therefore, help them prioritise what they should be learning. However, there are differences in whether assessment criteria are seen mainly as a tool for examinations (this is often the case in systems that strongly emphasise grades) or whether assessment criteria are also valued as a way to track learning progress, identifying gaps and provide clear links between instruction and assessment – ultimately fostering students' responsibility for learning. There is no evidence from the case studies that students feel that assessment criteria dominate the teaching and learning process. However, some concerns were raised that, in some cases, there is too strong a focus on just meeting minimum requirements and obtaining a passing grade.

While learners in most of the case study countries view assessment criteria positively for structuring learning and guiding exam preparation, and thus – at least to some extent – support taking responsibility for their learning process, their perception of the language used in assessment criteria varies. In some countries, students generally find the assessment criteria clear and understandable, partly because the criteria are closely aligned to the lesson content or to the work-based learning context, which makes them easier to understand, or because they are adapted to learners' needs (e.g. they are either reworded to fit specific learning activities and contexts, which improves accessibility, or they are presented by teachers, which provides an opportunity for clarification). In other cases, learners indicated problems in understanding the criteria, stating that they were unfamiliar

with the terminology and that the language was complex and not user-friendly. Interpretation and discussions with teachers, trainers and peers are needed to fully understand the criteria. Sometimes the criteria were even described as being detached from practice. Interestingly, this criticism was also voiced by students from Finland and the Netherlands, where the learning-outcomes-based approaches have a long tradition and are considered to be fully embedded. This could be because learners in the VET provider institutions visited in these countries are used to discussing and reflecting on the intended learning outcomes or assessment criteria and therefore have the confidence to make critical comments.

In summary, the use of assessment criteria, formulated as detailed learning outcomes, is generally favoured. In some cases, it can also be stated that assessment criteria are the central point of orientation for teachers and learners. However, it is important to note that criteria must be meaningful and understandable to all those who use them. Overall – and this can also be deduced from the case study findings – attention must be paid to the inclusivity or learner-centredness of the assessment and the criteria used, as is also emphasised in the literature considered (see, for example, Tai et al., 2021).

Table 7 provides a brief summary of the key points observed in the case study countries.

Table 7. **Role of assessment criteria in the teaching and learning process**

Member State	Key points
Bulgaria	No explicit assessment criteria specified for formative assessment; intended learning outcomes used.
Ireland	Assessment criteria (developed by teachers as part of assessment briefs) drive teaching and learning, and teachers have scope to make sure that assessment methods fit with their preferred teaching styles; to some extent, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are found to be narrowing the focus of teaching and learning.
France	Assessment criteria are specified for the minimum required performance levels – but learners are encouraged to ‘go beyond’ what is required.
Lithuania	Assessment criteria are strictly regulated at the national level, but VET teachers have significant autonomy in selecting assessment methods and tasks.
Malta	Assessment criteria play a very important role in the teaching and learning process – they are used to guide what has to be learned for the assessment and in some cases are more likely to steer than guide the teaching and learning process.
Netherlands	No separate assessment criteria are provided at the national level – instead, intended learning outcomes in the qualification files serve as assessment criteria; the qualification files have a steering and structuring role in VET delivery (as organised by the VET schools and companies) and assessment (as organised by the VET schools, but secondary to exam providers).
Poland	Exam tasks developed by the central examination board are based on verification criteria (supplementing and clarifying the descriptions of

	learning outcomes); teachers frequently use these exams to prepare students for the assessment but employ a variety of assessment methods to monitor students' progress, such as short written tests, multiple-choice tests, oral presentations and projects (including group projects).
Portugal	Assessment criteria are used as a starting point for planning the teaching and learning process (including activities, exercises and projects to assess trainees' learning along their learning path).
Slovenia	Assessment criteria (developed by teachers) are used for planning the teaching process; sometimes there is too strong a focus on grades and minimum requirements.
Finland	Assessment criteria (specified for different performance levels) are believed to guide the teaching, learning and assessment process.

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

### 8.1.3. Alignment of intended learning outcomes with assessment processes and results

One of the key research question focuses on the relationship between curriculum statements/intentions (intended learning outcomes), assessment processes and assessment results (achieved learning outcomes), and whether they are aligned and complement each other.

Countries emphasise the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes (including criteria, context, methods and tools) and results (achieved outcomes), typically establishing alignment at the national level during programme or qualifications design and with specific quality assurance mechanisms. Several of the case study countries report a strong correspondence between the different elements of the learning outcomes chain in the national regulations. In some cases, this refers more to a correspondence between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment criteria. Assessment criteria often refer directly to specific intended learning outcomes and are described with statements that use the same linguistic structure but are more detailed than the intended learning outcomes. In this way, the assessment criteria are designed to serve as a bridge between the intended learning outcomes and the achieved learning outcomes. In summative assessment, learning outcomes are often also used for grading, although only in a few cases is this grading supported by the specification of assessment criteria for different levels of achievement. This can be considered one of the most significant challenges to ensuring the consistency and reliability of summative assessments.

Alignment between the intended learning outcomes, the assessment processes and the learning outcomes achieved in relation to summative assessment is also ensured through specifications of assessment procedures. Such specifications can include referring to the methods to be used – for example, written and practical assignment – or the context of assessment. An example of an approach used to maintain coherence between assessment tasks and learning

outcomes, particularly in the workplace, is the requirement to develop a plan for assessment based on demonstration of competences for a unit of a qualification in Finland. This plan is drawn up in cooperation with the teacher, the learner and the representative of working life (i.e. employer), taking into account the learning outcomes and assessment criteria set at the national level and the individual working environment in which the demonstration is to be carried out. Alignment can further be ensured by specific quality assurance mechanisms that, in some cases, include an external component (e.g. inspection, external validation of assignments or external examiners).

While formative assessment is generally encouraged in national-level policies or frameworks, it is not usually specified in detail how it should be carried out or how the elements of the learning outcomes chain should be aligned (this is the responsibility of teachers and trainers). Although VET providers do not generally have specific policies or strategies that explicitly address the use of learning outcomes in assessment, practices can be observed addressing related aspects, such as ensuring the quality of assessment in addition to maintaining the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and results. Such approaches focus, for instance, on the assessment criteria for units of study developed at the provider level to ensure that they are measurable and reflect the level of qualification required. Conversely, they may focus instead on the use of some form of diagnostic testing to assess prior learning and identify gaps in order to improve teaching and assessment practice, designing assessment tasks (e.g. projects) around learning outcomes, using appropriate assessment methods to monitor progress and working with workplace trainers to ensure that assessment methods are in line with industry standards. Efforts towards consistency between teachers and trainers within a VET provider are also used to ensure the quality of assessments and thus harmonise the interpretation and application of assessment criteria. This is done, for example, using joint implementation plans, harmonisation committees or the provision of common tools (e.g. assessment rubrics) to ensure consistent interpretation and marking across institutions. Peer reviews, validation processes and, in some cases, external quality assurance mechanisms are used to increase the reliability of formative and summative assessments.

Teachers and trainers also emphasise the importance of aligning intended learning outcomes with assessment criteria to enhance both teaching and assessment processes. This alignment serves as a foundation for planning lessons, conducting formative assessments and executing summative evaluations. Educators often start with the more general formulated learning outcomes in their teaching process and for formative assessment and then refer to the more detailed assessment criteria to design assignments for assessments or preparing students

for summative assessments. Challenges arise when learning outcomes are too broad or when explicit assessment criteria are lacking, necessitating additional efforts from teachers to bridge these gaps.

It is not always clear to learners how the assessment criteria, the assessment process and the results are linked to the overall competences to be achieved. In most countries, learners struggle to differentiate between intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, despite being informed about them by teachers. In some cases, they are more familiar with assessment criteria and grading descriptors than with learning outcomes.

Learners are more aware of the alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment processes and results when this information is contained in individually developed written documents that are co-developed by or shared with the learners. In some cases, learners' perceptions of the alignment between these elements can vary within a Member State, depending on the learning pathway or the subjects concerned.

Overall, the multiple efforts to establish coherence between the intended learning outcomes and assessment processes in IVET identified in previous studies (Cedefop, 2022b; Scarpato & Hogarth, 2023) can also be largely confirmed in this study. Ensuring alignment requires interventions at several levels, the involvement of different institutions, implementation with different instruments and quality assurance arrangements and, finally, interpretation by different individuals (including assessors and learners). However, as also shown in previous studies, these interventions seem to be taken up more at the national and provider levels and are not always implemented at the micro level.

Table 8 presents key points of the approaches identified in the case study countries.

Table 8. **Ensuring alignment**

Member State	Key points
Bulgaria	No national quality assurance arrangements exist ensuring the alignment between intended learning outcomes (defined in SESs and national curricula), assessment criteria (defined in SESs and NEPs) and assessment processes and assessment results.
Ireland	Strong alignment is observed, with some weaknesses (variations in assessment practices and grading between teachers and colleges).
France	Reliability and alignment is ensured by the 'harmonisation approach' applied in <i>lycées professionnels</i> and by France Compétences in CFAs.
Lithuania	Alignment is ensured, as both intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria are rooted in occupational standards and defined competences; some misalignment observed between assessment criteria defined in the VET programme and the questions asked in external summative assessment.
Malta	Alignment is ensured by internal and external quality assurance measures.

Member State	Key points
Netherlands	Alignment is ensured, as the elements described in the qualifications files form the basis for developing exams and assessment assignments.
Poland	Alignment is ensured, as verification criteria are included in core curricula and for developing vocational exam tasks; each task must be explicitly linked to specific verification criteria and, consequently, to particular learning outcomes; however, the result is a pass or no pass decision without evaluating the degree of mastery of specific skills.
Portugal	Alignment is ensured in national regulations and guidelines and in the internal documentation schools provide for the trainers and other quality assurance measures.
Slovenia	Measures for ensuring alignment are in place, but challenges are observed (e.g. regarding a clear definition of learning outcomes that are precise, measurable and relevant to both educational objectives and labour market needs; conflicting interpretations by teachers, assessors and learners; and limited institutional capacity, insufficient training and overall inadequacy of resources).
Finland	Alignment of all elements described in the qualification requirements is ensured and developed in cooperation between VET teachers and in-company trainers; assessment criteria are specified for different levels of achievement and inform the results of assessment.

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

#### 8.1.4. Influence of the learning context on assessment

Learning outcomes generally allow for flexibility in assessment approaches, adapting to different vocational contexts and learning environments. This study explored to what extent the context in which learning outcomes are acquired influence assessment. Particular attention was paid to any differences between learning outcomes obtained at the provider level (in classroom settings) and in work-based learning (in companies).

In general, the forms and methods of assessment in VET in the case study countries vary depending on the use of the assessment results in particular, that is, whether they are formative or summative, whereby in the latter case it can again make a difference whether it is the award of a unit/module or the award of an entire qualification (final examination). Insights from the case studies suggest that the occupational field, the type of learning outcomes specified and the purpose and context of assessment have a stronger influence on assessment, the methods and instruments used than the context in which learning outcomes have been acquired. It can also be observed that in many cases learning outcomes are assessed in the context in which they have been acquired. However, this is not always anticipated or possible.

The statements in the reference points used for assessment (assessment criteria or intended learning outcomes) are in many cases formulated with an action verb, an objective and often further descriptors (modifiers). These descriptions usually inform the assessment methods to be applied but leave room for flexibility. Final examinations usually involve a more complex practical task that calls for

students to demonstrate the required competences, regardless of where they have been acquired. In addition, assignments that are used to check the progress of competence development during the learning process often contain tasks that assess the application of what has been learned and not just the reproduction of, for example, memorised facts. However, it may well be that the application of what has been learned is demonstrated in a written assignment or in a simulated form. At VET provider institutions, practical skills are often acquired and assessed within specialised environments such as laboratories and workshops. Such assessments can be designed to closely mirror real-world scenarios, enabling students to showcase their practical abilities effectively. Overall, the focus in assessing VET learners' competences is on performance, that is, on assessing how well individuals can apply what they have learned in (close to) real-life scenarios.

In some countries, the formulation of the intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and the assessment process are closely linked to the world of work (this is particularly highlighted by Finnish interviewees, but is to some extent visible in other assessment criteria presented as well). If this includes comprehensive forms of assessment (for awarding a unit/module or a full qualification) involving the completion of complex and real-life work tasks, which are also carried out in a company, this makes it easier to assess the competences required in the workplace. However, this poses the challenge of finding a consistent form of assessment due to the different and sometimes unpredictable company contexts in which learners are assessed. Learning outcomes or assessment criteria that provide clear guidelines on the one hand and sufficient room for flexibility on the other are necessary to ensure consistent assessment.

Findings from the case studies point to the importance of aligning assessments conducted in educational institutions and those in workplace settings. Assessments conducted during work-based learning frequently involve direct observation and feedback from in-company trainers, but differ in terms of structuredness and formality. Regular communication and collaboration between teachers and trainers from the VET provider and from the workplace are essential to bridge gaps and ensure that students can transfer competences across different contexts effectively.

Learners generally highlighted a preference for learning experiences that closely align with real-world job demands. They often value workplace learning and workplace assessment in order to better understand job expectations and qualification requirements. Practical experience reinforces school-acquired competences and helps students to develop new technical and transversal skills. Feedback from in-company trainers and colleagues is seen as crucial for improving performance and deepening job function understanding. However, it was also

pointed out that the quality of work-based learning assessments varies depending on individual tutors, leading to a lack of fairness and low reliability.

The aim of the study was also to investigate the influence of online and hybrid teaching and learning processes on assessment practice. However, the case studies revealed little evidence of practical approaches relating to online or hybrid teaching and learning processes or digital forms of assessment in the institutions studied here. Such approaches were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic when learning moved online, but these practices were discontinued afterward. Only in a few cases did the teachers interviewed refer to the use of digital tools for teaching, learning and assessment. Due to the general lack of such approaches at the VET provider institutions visited, learners also did not share many thoughts related to online learning and assessment. However, such approaches are being taken up in some reform plans at the national level, reflecting the growing importance of digital competences and hybrid learning environments.

Table 9 presents key points of the approaches in the case study countries.

Table 9. **Influence of the learning context on assessment**

Member State	Key points
Bulgaria	Formative assessment processes differ depending on the learning environment, and this is most notably expressed in the assessment methods used and differentiated by who is conducting the assessment. For instance, in school-based VET, the assessors are always teachers, as compared with apprenticeship programmes where work-based learning is assessed by company mentors. Assessment methods vary depending on whether they aim to assess the learning outcomes of a theory class (e.g. a combination of a test and group assignment in the first assessment situation) or practical skills (e.g. demonstration in a school lab in the second assessment situation).
Ireland	Different methods are used in the assessment of learning outcomes obtained in the classroom, in practical learning environments at the VET provider/school (e.g. workshops, laboratories), through online or hybrid teaching and through workplace learning (e.g. in companies).
France	The assessment situations for practical tests are largely constructed by teachers; in contrast, tests related to professional situations are dependent on the company – teachers, especially tutors, have no influence over this and have to 'reconstruct' the professional situations that the learners face through the learners' reports, as the assessment of the internship is also considered in the final grade.
Lithuania	Assessments vary based on the learning environments in which they are conducted: summative assessments conducted in workshops, companies or specialised classrooms primarily focus on evaluating practical skills; assessments conducted in classroom settings typically utilise digital platforms, allowing learners to receive instant feedback on their mistakes and performance; formative assessments in either setting do not differ significantly.
Malta	Teaching and assessment methods are adapted based on the type of competences to be achieved and the context of assessment (including workshops, laboratories); a minimum of two different modes have to be included in the assessment, which can involve either practical tasks or

Member State	Key points
	other methods (e.g. presentations, written assignments) to assess the competences as indicated in the learning outcomes.
Netherlands	Different approaches to assessment are in place depending on whether learning outcomes are acquired in the classroom, in practical environments or in workplace settings; both formative and summative assessments are tailored to the specific context and purpose.
Poland	During internships, assessment is limited to informal, oral feedback provided by the instructors overseeing the practical training; at the end of the internship, a brief written opinion is issued by the employer, focusing on the students' behaviour and attitudes.
Portugal	The context of learning and assessment has an influence on the activities, exercises and projects to be carried out by trainees.
Slovenia	Context (school or workplace) is an important determinant of what is assessed, since in the work environment the assessment focuses mainly on the practical competences and skills that pupils acquire in real-life situations.
Finland	Independently of how and where the learning has taken place, assessment of competences is conducted as competence demonstration in real working-life situations.

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

#### 8.1.5. Assessing transversal skills and competences

Finally, the study examined the way in which complex learning outcomes, particularly transversal skills and competences, are addressed and assessed.

The case studies show that the assessment of transversal skills and competences varies widely – for both formative and summative purposes – and is often tailored to specific educational contexts and objectives.

In some educational systems, assessment criteria for transversal competences are not explicitly specified at the national level (this is the case in Ireland, the Netherlands and Slovenia, where no separate assessment criteria are provided at the national level, but also in other countries, such as Lithuania or Malta), leading to variability in how these competences are evaluated. In some cases, they are implicitly addressed, for example through conducting assignments in groups or giving oral presentations; in others they are not assessed at all. In some instances, assessment criteria for transversal skills align with those for occupational competences, sharing similar linguistic structures and specifying levels of complexity and performance expectations.

In certain VET systems, transversal competences are assessed separately from occupational skills (e.g. in the Bulgarian schools visited). Conversely, other systems integrate the assessment of transversal skills into occupational skills evaluations, adopting a holistic approach to competences in VET. For instance, social skills and key competences for lifelong learning might be embedded into qualification requirements and assessed through various methods, including observations and presentations (e.g. in schools visited in Lithuania, the Netherlands and Finland). In such cases, achieving higher competence levels

necessitates the application of knowledge to problem-solving in diverse and critical ways. In some other cases, a hybrid approach is adopted, assessing transversal skills and competences both in standalone units and as integrated components of occupational competences.

In work-based learning environments, the assessment of transversal competences is often emphasised. Certain companies utilise specific indicators focusing on aspects such as discipline, teamwork, communication skills and responsibility. These indicators may constitute a significant portion of the overall assessment, reflecting the importance of transversal competences in practical settings. However, the application of such assessment tools varies, and their use remains optional in some contexts. It might be challenging for in-company trainers to identify and assess these competences.

Formative assessments also play a crucial role in evaluating transversal competences. Teachers and trainers often embed these skills into teaching practices, even when not explicitly outlined in curricula. Educators employ methods like reflective practice, group assignments and peer assessments to encourage self-reflection and interactive learning, thereby enhancing engagement and the development of transversal skills. However, the lack of formal guidelines and explicit assessment criteria can lead to inconsistencies in how these competences are assessed.

The learners interviewed were not always familiar with the concept of transversal competences but, in some cases, they were able to reflect on them and their assessment in the context of focus group discussions or interviews. Some learners consider transversal skills as difficult to assess, as they develop implicitly. Thus, students prefer informal teacher recognition of transversal competences over formal assessments. Also, the absence of predefined criteria can cause uncertainty about the assessment of these competences, in particular when transversal and occupation-specific skills and competences are assessed together.

Overall, while educators employ various methods to assess transversal skills and competences, challenges persist due to their embedded nature and the variability in or absence of assessment criteria. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among policymakers, educators and industry stakeholders to develop clear guidelines and effective assessment tools that accurately capture the complexity of transversal competences.

Table 10 presents key points of the approaches in the case study countries.

Table 10. **Assessment of transversal skills and competences**

Member State	Key points
Bulgaria	Transversal skills and competences are assessed in an integrated way; there is one exception related to work-based learning at companies; namely, if company mentors use the individual diary described in this report, the assessment of work-based learning includes assessment indicators differentiating between transversal competences and occupation-related skills.
Ireland	Transversal skills and competences are not always made explicit in assessment briefs but are implicitly addressed; it depends on the course whether they are assessed separately or integrated into assessment of occupational skills and competences.
France	Transversal skills and competences are not always clearly identified in diploma frameworks; in some cases, they are assessed as standalone competences within a competence block.
Lithuania	VET programmes do not provide specific assessment criteria for transversal skills and competences – they only outline intended learning outcomes; teachers often develop their own assessment criteria for key transversal competences.
Malta	Transversal skills and competences are not always explicitly addressed in intended learning outcomes and are not required to be assessed; however, teachers usually promote them by using pedagogical approaches such as groupwork and practical work as well as by assigning different modes of assessment tasks (e.g. PowerPoint presentations, debates, groupwork).
Netherlands	Transversal skills and competences are often assessed in an integrated way; discussions among educators – needed to ensure a shared understanding of how to effectively assess these outcomes – are ongoing, and improvements are being made.
Poland	Transversal skills and competences that are common across many professions are included in the vocational education core curricula and are addressed in exam tasks; competences that primarily involve knowledge and practical skills (e.g. adherence to safety principles and regulations) are assessed in schools and with exam tasks; social competences, which are closely tied to attitudes, such as readiness to work as part of a team, effective interpersonal communication and willingness to take responsibility, require observing students' behaviour in various contexts, often in extracurricular activities like competitions, workshops, excursions and artistic events.
Portugal	Whether transversal competences are embedded in the curriculum varies depending on the qualification; complex and, in particular, transversal skills and competences that cannot be easily observed are assessed using a combination of methods.
Slovenia	Transversal competences are sometimes assessed indirectly; there is a lack of attention to general, transversal competences, which are also more generalised and often not assessed.
Finland	Transversal skills and competences are assessed in an integrated way.

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

## 8.2. Policy recommendations

This report – guided by the overarching research questions of this study – demonstrates that learning-outcomes-oriented approaches have a clear influence on assessment practices. This can be seen in particular through the use of

assessment criteria, which are largely formulated in terms of learning outcomes (with action verbs and objects) and serve as reference points for comparing intended learning outcomes with the performance of a learner in both formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments, for example, utilise learning outcomes to enable ongoing feedback and adjustments to teaching and training. This approach fosters a learner-centred environment by identifying gaps in understanding and achievements and supporting tailored interventions. Overall, in some cases there is clear evidence of greater learner-centredness brought about through these approaches; however, there is still room for improvement, particularly in this context.

The success factors for the use of learning outcomes in assessment cannot be considered completely in isolation from the use of learning outcomes in VET in general, particularly for teaching or training and learning at the VET provider level (Cedefop, 2025) or in work-based learning environments (Cedefop, forthcoming). The extent to which and how learning outcomes are dealt with in the initial and continuing training of teachers and trainers (Cedefop, 2024a) also plays a role. When it comes to training trainers, the tradition of using learning outcomes in VET must also be taken into account. In some countries, this approach has already been common practice for many years and this naturally also has an influence on assessment practice and the use of learning outcomes. This should be considered in relation to the policy recommendations for improving the use of learning outcomes in assessments developed based on the results of the data collected. These recommendations, which are expanded on below, relate to four aspects, ranging from learning expectations to confirmation of the achievement of learning objectives (i.e. the learning outcomes chain):

- (a) improving the clarity and relevance of assessment criteria;
- (a) strengthening assessment methods and practices;
- (b) enhancing learner-centredness;
- (c) strengthening the assessment competences of and support for VET teachers and trainers.

### **8.2.1. Improving the clarity and relevance of assessment criteria**

Intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria – including for transversal competences – should be formulated in clear, understandable language for learners, teachers, trainers and assessors. Overly technical or bureaucratic language can create confusion, making it harder for learners to grasp expectations and for teachers and trainers to assess competences effectively. Simplifying technical terminology or giving examples can help learners who have difficulties with complex formulations, for example.

As shown in Section 4.2, in most cases the assessment criteria employ action verbs paired with clear objects to ensure measurability and observability. This approach reduces ambiguity, provides assessors with concrete indicators for evaluating performance and, thus, supports alignment. Distinguishing multiple levels of achievement within the assessment criteria (as found in the examples from Malta, Finland and, to some extent, Slovenia) can further increase clarity. The use of Bloom's taxonomy, as cited in Lithuania or Malta for example, provides a structured framework for assessing different levels of mastery. This approach also helps learners to understand the progression of competence development.

In general, preference is given to assessment criteria that correspond closely to working life and real assessment environments (including instruments and materials) or are at least comparable to those used in the labour market (see Cedefop, 2025). Finland's integration of work-based competence requirements into assessment criteria for vocational qualifications is an example of this focus, as the assessments are directly linked to practical tasks in real or simulated work environments. This approach requires collaboration with labour market stakeholders and continuous updates to assessment practices to better align with real workplace demands.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria provided at the national level support VET providers, teachers and trainers to apply them consistently. Explicitly linking assessment criteria to intended learning outcomes enhances transparency and can support coherence. At the same time, some degree of flexibility in choosing assessment methods, and in designing assessments (e.g. tailoring them to learners' specific needs) and operationalising and interpreting assessment criteria, is crucial. While specificity is important, using the criteria too rigidly can limit adaptability to different learning contexts or unexpected outcomes. Therefore, overly prescriptive assessment criteria and overly rigid interpretations that restrict understanding and flexibility of the application of assessment criteria should be avoided. Balancing nationally set requirements with local or individual requirements is of particular importance in the assessment of work-based learning in a company.

As labour market demands evolve, assessment criteria must be regularly updated to remain relevant. This refers not only to occupational competences but also to transversal competences. Outdated assessment frameworks can fail to reflect the skills required in professional environments, leading to a disconnect between education and employment expectations. Teachers and trainers also need greater flexibility to incorporate new learning outcomes and criteria that reflect workplace realities.

### **8.2.2. Strengthening assessment methods and practices**

As discussed in Section 4.1, countries use different approaches to summative assessment: while the shift towards modular assessment provides more flexibility, it risks fragmenting assessments and focusing on artificially separated competences that do not reflect competence needs in the workplace. The integration of assessments across multiple learning outcomes streamlines the process and reduces assessment burdens. However, comprehensive assessments that demonstrate and confirm the achievement of competences in a broader range of learning outcomes (theoretical knowledge and practical skills) can have the disadvantage that they are very complex and that the acquisition of certain important skills may not be captured or their non-acquisition may be overlooked. Careful consideration is needed as to which form of assessment is necessary and possible for which purpose and how the disadvantages can be offset in each case to ensure the development of comprehensive competences.

An overload of assessments should be avoided, as this can lead to fatigue and decreased engagement of students. Streamlining assessment processes, but using different assessment methods, can ensure quality without overwhelming learners. The diversification of assessment methods (e.g. using practical exams, written tests, portfolio reviews, observations) also helps to ensure that different types of learning outcomes are assessed effectively. Various forms of group-based assessments are, for example, used for the assessment of transversal skills and competences (e.g. in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Portugal). Moreover, the inclusion of real tasks helps learners to recognise the connection between their training and their future professional life.

Work-based learning plays a key role in VET, but assessment practices vary widely across VET systems or providers. However, work-based assessments that reflect real-life tasks are important, as they motivate students and ensure relevance to industry needs. More structured feedback mechanisms, making use of intended learning outcomes or assessment criteria, and clearer assessment guidelines – including tools or checklists – for workplace instructors can help the assessment of broader competences, improve consistency and fairness in assessments and motivate learners.

Assessment criteria, assessment methods and assessment practices need to be continuously refined to remain aligned with industry changes and pedagogical advancements. Ongoing reviews – for example by collecting feedback from learners, teachers, trainers and labour market stakeholders – and updates ensure that assessments remain relevant and effective. With the rise of online and hybrid learning environments, assessment strategies must reflect how to incorporate digital tools effectively. These could include, for example, learning management

systems for tracking learning progress and automating assessment, virtual reality simulations for immersive skills demonstrations or AI-supported adaptive assessments for personalised learning experiences.

### **8.2.3. Enhancing learner-centredness**

Insights from the case studies highlight how clear communication and consistent alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria are important for enhancing learner understanding of expectations and overall learner engagement. In order to use assessment to support students in their learning process, students should continuously engage with intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and not only be informed about these tools at the beginning of a school year or unit. It is important to increase awareness about assessment criteria and demonstrate to students how they are aligned with intended learning outcomes, the assessment process and the assessment results (as it is the case, for example, with the assessment briefs developed by teachers in Ireland). Learning outcomes should be used continuously as reference points to monitor achievements and identify learning gaps. While this should be made transparent, the focus should not only be on the minimum requirements necessary for passing an exam (and the respective grades).

Learner-centred approaches should be used during the learning process, such as personalised learning and assessment plans (e.g. the ones used in Finland or in the Netherlands), self-assessment and peer assessment and various forms of feedback (including structured reflection tools), to support reflective learning and encourage more meaningful assessments. Students themselves could be involved in co-constructing assessment criteria. For example, involving learners in discussions about what constitutes high-quality work or performances, based on examples and learning outcomes, can make the criteria more accessible and meaningful. Learners could also be involved in developing assessment methods, including opportunities for group-based assessments to foster deeper engagement and ownership.

Formative assessment supports and guides learners' progress and can also help to guide learners to understand learning outcomes beyond assessment criteria, fostering motivation and self-directed learning. This approach ensures that intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria are actively used as a foundation for competence development. Structured and consistent feedback during work-based learning, particularly concerning learners' progress, performance and areas requiring improvement to meet learning outcomes, can support the competence development process in the workplace.

The frequency of continuous graded assessments should be optimised to allow adequate preparation time and to ensure that the assessment process supports rather than hinders learning.

#### **8.2.4. Strengthening the assessment competences of and support for VET teachers and trainers**

The assessment competences of teachers, trainers and assessors are of crucial importance. Not all teachers and trainers feel adequately prepared to assess students based on learning outcomes. In particular, teachers who were trained before the introduction of learning outcomes orientation may find it difficult to adapt to learning-outcomes-based approaches and to competence-based assessment. These educators also need to be introduced to learner-centred approaches and the use of innovative assessment methods, including digital technologies, and supported in the assessment of more complex learning outcomes, such as transversal skills and competences. More structured training in assessment methodology can improve the competences and confidence of assessors in addition to their efficiency and the fairness of their assessments.

Additionally, support material, resources, guidelines, peer collaboration, workshops and other continuing professional development initiatives – as discussed in Sections 4.4, 5.1.3 and 6.4 – can help improve the use of learning outcomes in assessments. Harmonisation efforts (e.g. the use of shared instruments or databases of test assignments) can also increase efficiency in assessments. VET providers can benefit from increased cooperation among teachers, trainers and workplace instructors to standardise assessment practices and ensure consistency. Creating opportunities for professional dialogue can enhance the overall quality of assessments.

Regular and systematic feedback on learners' progress, performance and areas for improvement during work-based learning is considered important to better support learners in achieving learning outcomes and developing workplace competences. This requires VET teachers to support in-company trainers – especially as there is usually only limited pedagogical training for in-company trainers (see Cedefop, forthcoming) – and foster close cooperation between teachers and trainers. Moreover, a structured matching process for the assignment of workplace trainers (in-company trainers) to learners based on learning outcomes to be acquired could foster a positive relationship between learners and trainers and ensure impartial assessment.

## Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
Bac Pro	<i>baccalauréat professionnel</i> (professional baccalaureate)
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
BTS	<i>brevet de technicien supérieur</i> (advanced technician certificate)
CAP	<i>certificat d'aptitude professionnelle</i> (professional aptitude certificate)
CCF	<i>contrôle en cours de formation</i> (assessment during training)
CFA	<i>centre de formation d'apprentis</i>
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ETB	education and training board
FET	further education and training
IVET	initial vocational education and training
MATSEC	matriculation and secondary education certificate
MBO	<i>middelbaar beroepsonderwijs</i> (secondary vocational education)
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
NEP	national examination programme
NQF	national qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QVETDC	Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre
RNCP	Repertoire national des certifications professionnelles (National Directory of Professional Qualifications)
SBB	Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven (Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market)
SEC	secondary education certificate
SES	state educational standard
VET	vocational education and training

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# Annex 1. Structure of the case study template and research areas addressed

## 1. Introduction

- (a) Focus of the case study.
- (b) Data collection approach and main sources used, including national-level interviewees and sources and VET providers/school visited.
- (c) Overview.

## 2. Assessment in IVET in [Member State]

### 2.1. Overview

This section should provide relevant information on national policies and arrangements in assessment in IVET in the Member State for contextualising the case study.

Please provide a short introduction on how assessment in IVET is organised in the Member State. Please reflect on:

- (a) national policies and regulations on assessment in IVET;
- (b) how assessment is organised and administered in IVET systems – refer to (formative and summative) assessment conducted at the VET provider/school level and assessments of work-based learning in companies, and to different types of learning outcomes, if appropriate (occupation-specific learning outcomes, transversal skills and competences, general education subjects);
- (c) whether any forms of assessment in IVET are conducted externally and in a standardised way and, if so, for which parts of a qualification or which types of learning outcomes;
- (d) the key processes included, and the stakeholders involved and their tasks and responsibilities;
- (e) what principles are promoted and what role considerations such as validity, reliability, impartiality and fairness, costs and scalability play;
- (f) what autonomy VET providers / schools and individual teachers/trainers in their role as assessors have regarding assessment;
- (g) the support and guidance/training made available at the national level for VET providers / schools and individual teachers/trainers regarding assessment;
- (h) ongoing discussions and reform plans related to assessment in IVET.

NB: Cedefop ReferNet publications and other Cedefop reports, along with national documents and national-level interviews, can be used to provide this overview.

## 2.2. Assessment criteria

This section should present information on assessment criteria specified at the national level. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) whether assessment criteria are specified at the national level (if not, how they are specified and by whom), in which documents assessment criteria are provided (e.g. curricula, assessment specifications) and whether there are any differences between learning outcomes in curricula and assessment criteria;
- (b) to what extent and how alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assessment processes and assessment results is ensured at the national level (e.g. are there any specific quality assurance arrangements);
- (c) which assessment criteria are used, and who has developed them and how are they designed (e.g. what is the granularity of learning outcomes used in assessment criteria? How detailed and specific or broad and 'open-ended' are the assessment criteria formulated for expressing what is required from learners? How do they deal with knowledge, skills and attitudes/behaviours (are they separately identified or integrated)?).

NB: National documents and national-level interviews can be used to provide this information. If possible, please use examples of assessment criteria to illustrate the approach.

## 3. The perspectives and practices of VET providers / schools

### 3.1. Assessment practice in focus

This section should briefly introduce the form(s) of assessment that the case study focuses on, that is, the one(s) relevant to the VET providers / schools visited.

NB: This is relevant in case different approaches to or forms of assessment in IVET are in place in a Member State (and described in Chapter 2), such as in different VET subsystems.

### 3.2. Approaches to assessment at the VET provider/school level

This section should provide more detailed information regarding the specific assessment approaches of the VET providers / schools visited. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) the strategies and policies provided and the practices or principles related to assessment promoted at the VET provider/school level;

- (b) the role of VET providers / schools in defining the assessment criteria and designing assessments (e.g. in case of external assessments, are VET providers consulted in designing the tasks/questions);
- (c) whether formative and summative assessment specifications that refer to learning outcomes are provided at the VET provider/school level;
- (d) whether and how assessments differ in different learning environments (including classroom, workplace, digital and hybrid settings) and for different types of learning outcomes (occupational, transversal);
- (e) what efforts are taken to ensure the alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment processes (context, tasks, methods and tools) and assessment results (achieved learning outcomes) (e.g. is this addressed in quality assurance arrangements, is it a topic in the preparation of assessment tasks, is it reviewed when reflecting on assessment results);
- (f) what role considerations such as validity, reliability, impartiality and fairness and costs related to the assessment approaches used play;
- (g) how the value and usability of learning outcomes for formative and for summative assessment purposes is perceived at the VET provider/school level.

NB: Information in this section should be based on VET-provider/school-level documents and interviews.

### 3.3. Guidance and support offered to teachers/trainers/assessors

This section should provide information on the resources, guidance, support and training offered to teachers/trainers/assessors by the VET provider/school. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) provision of guidance or support related to assessment by VET providers / schools (e.g. on how to use assessment criteria in teaching and learning processes and to communicate them to learners, the role of formative assessment, how to assess learning outcomes obtained in different learning contexts and how to assess transversal skills);
- (b) offer of training and support to teachers/trainers in their role as assessors (e.g. to discuss their interpretation of assessment criteria and come to a shared understanding in order to have more consistent and reliable results);
- (c) whether educators find that trade-offs have to be made in relation to assessment, for example that constraints have to be placed on the validity of the assessment due to limited resources (e.g. use of written or multiple-choice assessment for a larger group of learners rather than individualised competence demonstrations in the workplace);
- (d) identified needs for improvements and reform plans regarding assessment.

NB: Information in this section should be based on VET-provider/school-level documents and interviews.

#### **4. Teachers'/trainers' perspectives**

##### **4.1. Use of learning outcomes in assessment by teachers/trainers**

This section should provide information about the teachers'/trainers' assessment practices and the use of learning outcomes in this context. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) whether and how teachers/trainers use learning outcomes descriptions for planning assessments (which ones, included in which reference documents?) and what role learning outcomes play in the selection of assessment tasks and methods;
- (b) to what extent and how teachers/trainers consider assessment criteria (which ones; are they described as threshold levels, specifying minimum requirements to be met by the learner, or do they articulate different levels of performance?) for preparing the teaching and learning processes (e.g. for planning their instruction, for reflecting on learners' progress, for conducting formative assessments and identifying the gap between the intended learning outcome and the learner's actual performance, for individualisation of instruction, for preparing learners for summative external assessment) and for conducting summative assessment and grading;
- (c) to what extent teachers/trainers discuss their interpretation of assessment criteria with their peers and come to a shared understanding in order to have more consistent and reliable results;
- (d) whether and how educators explicitly inform learners about the assessment criteria.

NB: Interviews with teachers/trainers/assessors, the authors' own observations and documents from the case studies (e.g. assessment criteria, tasks) can be used to provide this information.

##### **4.2. Learning context and types of learning outcomes**

This section should provide information regarding the extent and how the learning context and the type of learning outcomes influence the assessment practices of teachers/trainers. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) to what extent and how the context in which learning outcomes are acquired influence assessment (e.g. in terms of content of assessment, the tools and context of assessment or who is assessing);
- (b) any differences in the assessment approaches of learning outcomes obtained in the classroom, practical learning environments at the VET provider/school

- (e.g. workshops, laboratories), online or hybrid teaching and learning processes workplace learning (e.g. in companies);
- (c) to what extent and how complex learning outcomes and, in particular, transversal skills and competences, are assessed (e.g. which methods are used, in which context and by whom are they assessed, for which purpose are they assessed, whether the assessment is formative or summative);
  - (d) how occupational knowledge and skills and transversal competences are handled in these assessments (e.g. are transversal competences treated separately or integrated into occupational ones?);
  - (e) how are the assessment criteria for transversal skills and competences formulated (what is their linguistic structure, e.g. use of verbs) and do they inform grading (by expressing the levels of complexity and performance/mastery at which learning outcomes can be achieved).

NB: Interviews with teachers/trainers/assessors, the authors' own observations and documents from the case studies (e.g. assessment criteria, tasks) can be used to provide this information.

#### 4.3. Reflections and perceptions

This section should provide information about the teachers'/trainers' perceptions on the use of learning outcomes in assessment. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) to what extent teachers/trainers find that the assessment criteria to be useful (are they valuable for formative and summative assessment?) and clear for them and also written in a learner-friendly and accessible way (and what could possibly be improved);
- (b) to what extent and how teachers/trainers think the assessment criteria (including those specified at the national level) influence their teaching/training activities (from informing to steering their teaching/training process, and whether they focus too much on what is measurable) and the learning process of their students (e.g. do assessment criteria guide students and support them in taking responsibility for the learning process or do they restrict learning because students only concentrate on the minimum requirements);
- (c) whether teachers/trainers think that the assessment process and the criteria they use fit to the intended learning outcomes specified in the VET programme/curriculum (e.g. are the intended learning outcomes and the assessment criteria aligned in terms of granularity and specificity, labour market relevancy);

- (d) how much room the teachers/trainers have for interpretation, adaptation and flexibility in using the assessment criteria and for identifying learning achievements that go beyond intended learning outcomes;
- (e) whether teachers/trainers face any challenges in assessing learning outcomes achieved in different learning contexts (in particular in hybrid or online teaching and learning processes and workplace learning) and in assessing complex learning outcomes (that cannot be directly measured) and, in particular, transversal skills and competences;
- (f) whether teachers/trainers find that trade-offs have to be made in relation to assessment, for example that constraints have to be placed on the validity of the assessment due to limited resources (e.g. use of written or multiple-choice assessment for a larger group of learners rather than individualised competence demonstrations in the workplace);
- (g) whether teacher/trainers feel they receive sufficient support, guidance, resources and training for conducting assessment and using assessment criteria;
- (h) success factors and weaknesses of educators' current assessment practices;
- (i) whether teachers/trainers identify any specific factors that hinder or facilitate the use of learning outcomes in assessment.

NB: Interviews with teachers/trainers/assessors can be used to provide this information.

### **5. Learners' perspective**

This section should provide information about the learners' perceptions on the use of learning outcomes in assessment. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) whether learners consider assessment only as a necessity for certification and grading or whether they (also) see it as information on progress made and for identification of gaps (i.e. as supporting their learning process);
- (b) whether learners are aware of assessment criteria (and when and by whom are they informed about them);
- (c) to what extent learners find the language of assessment criteria as clear and concise (are they written in a learner-friendly and accessible way so that students understand of what is expected from them?);
- (d) to what extent and why (not) learners find the assessment criteria useful;
- (e) whether learners believe there is too much or too little focus on assessments and assessment criteria during the teaching and training process (e.g. do they understand how the teaching and training process, including the materials and pedagogies used, is related to the assessment criteria?);

- (f) to what extent learners think that assessment criteria influence their learning process (e.g. do they mainly focus of their learning on what will be assessed as specified by assessment criteria; do assessment criteria help students to take responsibility for their own learning);
- (g) to what extent learners think that the teaching and learning process helps them to sufficiently prepare for taking external assessments (if relevant in the national context);
- (h) whether learners believe that the assessment criteria and the assessment process fit to the learning outcomes stated in the curriculum;
- (i) whether learners believe the assessment criteria and the assessment process used for assessing learning outcomes obtained in (1) hybrid and online teaching and learning processes and (2) workplace learning are appropriate;
- (j) whether learners believe the assessment criteria and the assessment process used for assessing transversal skills and competences (e.g. communication, teamwork) are appropriate;
- (k) learners' perceptions on what should be changed and improved in relation to assessments and assessment criteria.

NB: Interviews with learners and the authors' own observations can be used to provide this information.

## **6. Conclusions**

This chapter should present conclusions based on the data collected. Please refer to the following aspects:

- (a) alignment between curriculum statements/intentions (intended learning outcomes), assessment processes and assessment results (achieved learning outcomes);
- (b) the use of assessment criteria in the teaching and learning process (do they have an informing or steering role);
- (c) the role of learning outcomes in formative and summative assessments;
- (d) the influence of the learning context on assessment;
- (e) assessing complex learning outcomes (transversal skills and competences);
- (f) any relevant additional reflections, observations and considerations related to the use of learning outcomes in assessment in the Member State (e.g. strengths and weaknesses, plans or needs for improvements and further developments).

NB: Please base these conclusions on the data collected and your own observations and interpretations.

## Annex 2. Overview of data collection

This publication mainly builds on data collected through scoping interviews (conducted at the beginning of the study), a survey of VET practitioners and site visits to VET providers (with a focus on schools) <sup>(52)</sup>. Numbers by Member State are specified in Table 11.

**Table 11. Data collection – overview**

Member State	Number of scoping interviews	Number of survey responses	Number of site visits (VET providers / schools)	Number of (individual or group) interviews with ...		
				Representatives of VET providers (management level)	Teachers or trainers	Learners
Bulgaria	5	33	2	3	3	23
Ireland	7	21	2	4	12	14
France	5	15	2	4	5	9
Lithuania	6	98	2	4	8	4
Malta	6	71	2	1	4	4
Netherlands	6	116	2	5	10	4
Poland	7	31	2	3	4	31
Portugal	8	190	2	2	5	6
Slovenia	5	29	2	5	10	40
Finland	9	246	2	4	17	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>143</b>

<sup>(52)</sup> The publication also uses relevant information gathered during the site visits on other themes of the study: the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices in school-based settings (Cedefop, 2025) and work-based and practice-based IVET (Cedefop, forthcoming).

# The influence of learning outcomes on assessment

This publication examines how the shift towards learning outcomes influences both formative and summative forms of assessment in initial vocational education and training through analysing data from case studies across 10 EU countries: Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland.

The research reveals that learning outcomes are a core element of national assessment regulations in all the countries studied, but whether or not assessment criteria are specified at the national level and used for formative assessment purposes varies. The use of learning outcomes in assessment is generally appreciated by teachers, trainers and learners.

The study also shows that there is sometimes a need to improve the clarity and relevance of assessment criteria, to strengthen assessment methods and practices, to enhance learner-centredness and overall learner engagement and to strengthen the assessment skills of teachers and trainers.



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