

**ERASMUS-EDU-2021-PEX-COVE****Project number: 101056023****AgriNext project**

# **Proposal for flexibilization of vocational education and training (VET)**

## **Spain**

## Partners



BC Naklo - Naklo Biotechnical Centre



OnP - On Projects Advising, SL



COAG Jaén - Coordinadora de Organizaciones Agrarias



IES Galileo - Consejería de educación - Junta de Andalucía



CPI - Centre for Vocational Education



ARCTUR - Computer Engineering, d.o.o.



SLOGA - Agricultural and Forestry Cooperative Society sloa Kranj, z.o.o.



TUS - Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest



VUKA - University College near Karlovac



SKINK - Skink, d.o.o.

## Summary

Currently, in Spain a regulatory change is taking place with the implementation of a new law for the organisation of Vocational Education and Training, so the analyses and conclusions that were drawn in the round table have their point of origin in the old legislation of vocational training in Spain, the new law establishes many flexibility measures in the Vocational Training model, although it establishes certain rigidity in terms of curricular flexibility and freedom of development in vocational training centres.

The Round Table was held very assertively and seeking improvements in the flexibility process, the meeting began at 12:00 p.m. on 04/16/2024 and ended at 3:00 p.m. that same day.

The round table began with the intervention of Marta Navarro Burgos, who explained the current framework and work paradigm in the network of Excellence of Vocational Training centres. She explained that one of the functions of the Centres of Excellence is to propose curricular improvements.

Finally, the proposals are described below as a consequence of the ideas that were exposed by the members of the Round Table.

## Abbreviations

C-VET	Continuing Vocational and Technical Education and Training
I-VET	Initial Vocational and Vocational Education and Training
INCUAL	Vocational qualification institute
VET	Vocational education and training
WBL	Work based learning

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# 1. Introduction

*"In the world of the future, the illiterate will be those who do not learn how to learn."*

*Alvin Toffler*

**AgriNext**, or the **Agricultural and Rural Excellence Incubator and Competence Exchange Platform**, is a CoVE Erasmus+ project. The aim of the project is to create a flexible learning environment that responds to the demand for skills in the labour market in the field of multifunctional agriculture.

The agricultural sector is facing a number of changes that require adjustments. Successful adaptation requires cross-sectoral cooperation between all key stakeholders.

The AgriNext project will facilitate an international exchange of knowledge and competencies for achieving rural excellence through innovative pedagogical approaches, lifelong learning, continuous professional learning of teachers/trainers/mentors and business incubator activities. The exchange of good practices at the international level will enable individuals to gain good, innovative ideas for personal and professional development.

**The objectives of AgriNext are:**

- Developing a career guidance model (GSM) that adapts quickly to the changing needs of the labour market;
- **Integrating systemic change at a national level to make the school system more flexible and responsive;**
- Empowering teachers to respond quickly to labour market demand;
- **Establishing a cooperation system for continuous exchange between employers, teachers, and trainers;**
- Creating physical and virtual environments for interaction, demonstration, development and individualisation;
- Promoting rural development and vitality, presenting the potential of multifunctional agriculture;
- Increasing digital competencies among students and teachers.

The international AgriNext project aims to establish a collaborative system of continuous exchange between employers, teachers, mentors, students and other stakeholders by creating a networking platform that enables interactive collaboration and by setting up business incubators in each partner country to create a safe environment to support innovation and project development in agriculture.

## 1.1. The Proposal For Flexibilization Of Vocational And Professional Education And Training in Spain

With the proposal to flexibilize VET in Spain, we want to present to all those involved in the education system, especially political decision-makers, legislators and their providers, the different levels, areas and options for a rapid response of the school system to the demands for knowledge, skills and competences reflected by changes in the labour market.

The document Proposal for the Flexibilisation of VET in Spain is a summary of the documents mentioned in the introduction and of the comments made at the Round Table about improvements in VET&MA, which, in the model of vocational and professional education and training, presents ten areas where, in different ways and with the involvement of different providers, the education system can respond quickly and continuously to the needs for knowledge, skills and competences on the labour market, with a focus on multifunctional agriculture.

## 2. Flexibilising vocational and technical education and training

*The path to a transformative and sustainable learning ecosystem.*

Adaptive VET systems in the areas of multifunctional agriculture are a pathway to a transformative and sustainable learning ecosystem. They can be transformed in terms of promoting different learning pathways that follow the interests of learners (school pupils, students, formal and non-formal adult learners, and people with disabilities) and sustainable in terms of facilitating lifelong learning for all those who co-create the VET system.

A flexible education system allows individuals to move between education, training, employment or self-employment in the MA field. This means that trainees can tailor their educational pathway to their interests and abilities, both during their training and later on when they have already entered their careers.

The model has been developed based on the results of an analysis of conditions and examples of flexicurity (level of legislation and implementation) in the four project partner countries and consists of 10 elements that are interlinked and complementary:

1. flexibility in educational programming and school autonomy;
2. flexibility in the enrolment process;
3. allowing horizontal and vertical passage;
4. providing a range of options for implementing programmes;
5. splitting the programme into modules, allowing for choice, customisation and portability;
6. integrating and developing key competencies;
7. an individualised approach to planning and delivering education;
8. involving the social partners and responding to labour market needs;
9. preventing early school leaving;
10. Recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and qualifications framework.

The flexibility model is designed as a sunflower, with the central part of the inflorescence consisting of a large number of individual flowers that merge. The metaphor of connectedness can also be applied to the creation of an ecosystem in which professionals, schools, teachers, learners, social partners and others reduce barriers and increase opportunity towards permeable education and training systems. Only together can we create a flexible VET system that responds to the current challenges in agriculture and related industries. This is the pathway to transformative and sustainable education and training that enables lifelong learning and the development of the competencies of all those involved.



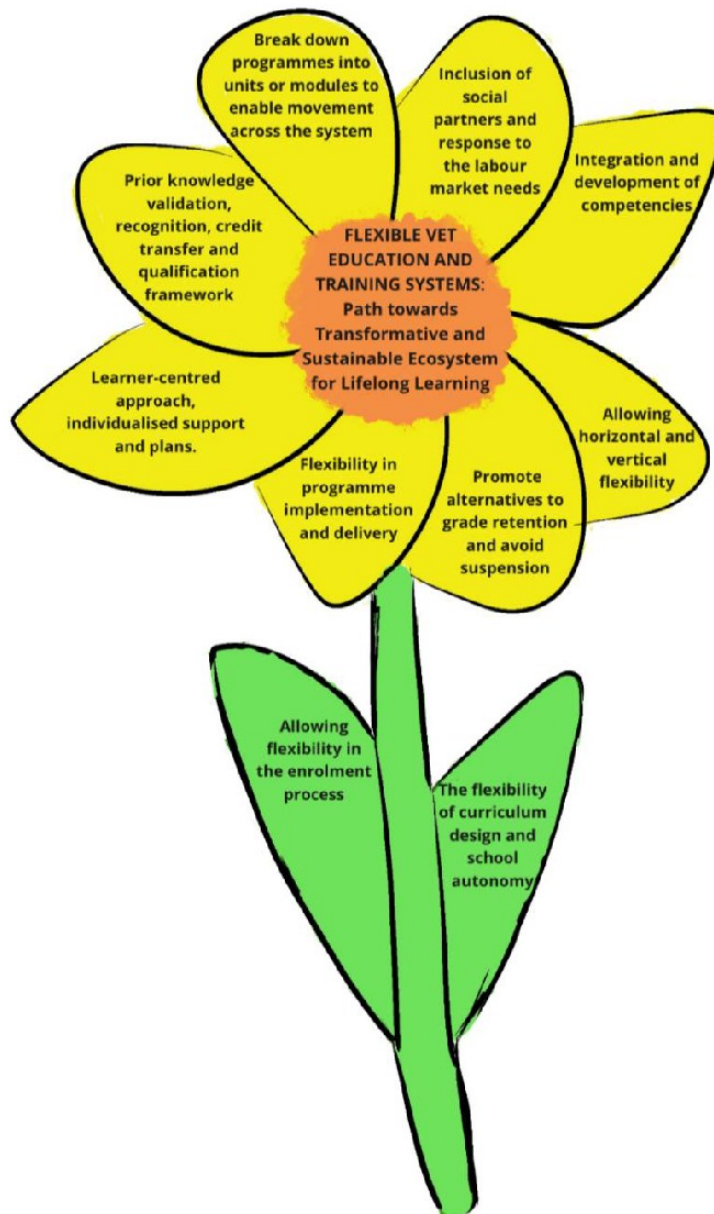


Figure 1: Model of Flexibilisation of VET - Sunflower.

## 2.1. Flexibility in curriculum design and school autonomy

Flexibility in the design of educational programs and curricula/skills catalogues in the field of MA and the autonomy of schools form a stable basis for responsiveness and adaptability at many levels of the educational process. The curriculum design policy is carried out in dialogue with teaching experts, experts from the world of work, the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Professional Qualifications, employers, professional and trade associations and other social partners, and has allowed the development of the curriculum, together with the regional authorities with jurisdiction in the matter, through the development of training modules together with a percentage for the design of the second and third level of curricular specification, based on hours of free configuration. The curriculum is relatively closed to date and does not allow schools to respond quickly to the needs of workers and students, who cannot choose between a variety of content defined at the national or regional level and that of the school environment. In this way, they can create their combination of skills to meet the needs of the labour market or their agricultural activity.

Since the application of the new Vocational Training law in Spain, there is a great paradigm shift, and Vocational Training is schematized at different levels in relation to competency standards, and all curricular development will be linked to the catalogue of competency standards, ranging from incomplete competency standards of basic, medium and advanced levels to specialisation courses with the same levels. In the case of practical content, the degree of content of those learning results that are developed in companies is left to the centers to choose, ranging from 25% to 50%

The consultation made the following proposals:

- According to the new VET law, the administration must incorporate complementary professional modules in grades B and C not included in the VET modular Catalog (up to 25%), in grades D and E up to 10%
- The centres of excellence propose curricular modifications annually according to the needs of the companies.
- The creation of a sectoral table is proposed to collaborate on modification proposals.
- The inclusion of Multifunctional Agriculture in Agricultural Vocational Training is also requested, in such a way that professional skills are developed that are integrated into training, adapting them to market needs according to geographical location.

## 2.2. Flexibility in the enrolment process

Rigid entry requirements and application deadlines can hinder participation in VET. Flexibility in the enrolment process is therefore another important element that builds a solid foundation for a flexible VET system.

To enable flexible enrolment, it is necessary to train teaching staff in the use of individualised working methods, from the preparation of an individual work plan for each student, through their implementation and follow-up. Thus, students do not have to wait a whole school year to enrol in the desired programmes or move from one programme to another or from one level to another under certain agreed conditions.

This allows pupils, especially those who, for various reasons, did not enrol on time or later changed their minds because they were too busy, to start their education at any time during the school year.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- Art 22.1 Royal Decree of new VET law. -
  - Flexible offer scheduling
  - Allow incorporation of unexpected needs
- Art 22.2. -
  - Open nature Grades B, C, D and E in person
  - All degrees permanently open online, with limited calendars and budget
  - New places if there is credit and working people.
- It is proposed to encourage and improve the modular offer, in such a way that it adapts to the needs of the market and the training needs of the active agricultural population. It would not be surprising if the change led to a continuity of the current VET system, at least in its initial aspect.

## 2.3. Flexibility in the implementation and delivery of the training programme

The VET education system allows programmes to be delivered in different settings: at school and in the employer's workplace, as practical training with work, or in a dual mode of education with different employer responsibilities. It is essential that schools when delivering a programme in their setting, do not narrow the legal options available to them, but make the most of them and link up with the local, national and international environment.

Multifunctional agriculture education takes place within an official school calendar, which determines the start and end of school, school holidays and other days off, but which does not coincide with the growing season, care and processing of plants and animals.

Skills catalogues or curricula define the learning outcomes to be achieved in the course of education, and management, teachers, trainers and others involved in education can choose different pedagogical approaches, teaching methods and content, adapting them to the needs of learners and employers.

Learning with the help of modern technology enables different methods such as distance and blended learning with different implementation models, the use of simulations, and artificial intelligence, which allows learners to adapt their time, space and pace of learning.

Inter-enterprise training centres have specially equipped classrooms and other suitable facilities that allow trainees to actively engage in practical training, and participate in business incubators and various projects (e.g. Erasmus+).

The consultation made the following proposals:

- Adaptation of the Multifunctional Agriculture offers to the productive area and its characteristics, in such a way that productive sustainability is encouraged by improving the ways and styles of life in rural areas

## 2.4. Student-centred approach; individual support and plans

Participants learn most when they are motivated and take an active approach to learning, critical thinking, research and practical training in as realistic a working environment as possible. This requires flexibility in the perception of learning and the definition of the roles of teacher/trainer and participant/learner. A learner-centred approach requires a change in the role of the teacher. Teachers create a supportive learning environment for learners and play more of a mentor, motivator, and counsellor role. This role requires teachers to have additional didactical skills to enable an individualised approach so that participants/learners can fully acquire knowledge and develop their skills, abilities, potentials and personal qualities. To this end, they can make use of learning estates as excellent examples of open-air classrooms that allow real-world problem solving, integration of theory and practice, and peer support in a safe and stimulating learning environment.

Formal education programmes in VET offer various possibilities for partial individualisation, such as optional modules in an open curriculum or a range of non-formal courses, employer choice in practical training and a range of compulsory electives.

Individualisation is also present in the organisation of additional professional support for pupils with special needs, teacher support, peer support, volunteer support and more.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- Promote simultaneity between young people and workers and training activities
- Flexible itineraries for people without grade D (EQF-level 4 mainly)
- Implement the Universal Design for Learning in a mandatory and effective manner and in an adaptive manner for the active agricultural population with few resources to be able to face a training process, lack of time, travel, few economic resources, etc.

## 2.5. Division of programmes into units or modules

VET programmes are modular, allowing trainees to benefit from a better link between theory and practice, and greater choice and transitions between programmes. This modularisation of programmes allows VET to adapt more quickly to changes in the MA labour market by providing relevant skills for employment. Modular structures can be organised as compulsory, optional, specialist or core modules.

Modular structures in VET are based on the credit system, which is based on learning outcomes and allows for progression and the recognition and validation of non-formal learning.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- Encourage modular offerings, differentiated or not, in vocational training centres. (Grade A and B)
- Improving the offer at the local level in rural areas of B-grade vocational training, linked to Multifunctional Agriculture.

## 2.6. Inclusion and competence development

Vocational and technical education and training (VET) provides students with vocational and key competencies that combine the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the different sectors of multifunctional agriculture. This enhances their employability, supports their personal development and emotional intelligence, and promotes interdisciplinarity, critical thinking and active citizenship.

In developing and accessing competencies, we need to consider the following:

- Competences are individual and collective (collaborative learning and expertise).
- Competences are acquired through formal, non-formal and informal education (experiential learning). Many participants enter the agricultural sector with valuable experience and background knowledge that must be taken into account.
- Competence means knowing and mastering your job. Social interaction also becomes more pronounced (team learning).
- Competencies are about flexibility, tolerance of uncertainty, responsibility and a positive attitude to change.
- Competences require continuous evaluation, assessment and development. Evaluation is both self-assessment and external assessment.
- Competences are context-dependent, so competence assessment is linked to prevailing values and the work environment.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- A certain disconnection is observed between the school training environment and the training needs in Vocational Training for Employment (C-VET), and even more so in what rural development is concerned, it is therefore necessary to make the Vocational Training centres more flexible with **structural changes in their general functioning, creating training and adaptive niches for rural development and Multifunctional Agriculture.**

## 2.7. Validation, recognition, credit transfer and the qualifications framework

Genuine flexibility must allow learners to transfer and build on all kinds of prior learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal or informal settings, whether they have learned at school, in the workplace or in their leisure time. Recognition of prior learning means the evaluation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or from non-formal or informal learning, which were acquired before the request for evaluation was made. It is typical in multifunctional agriculture education to be entered by participants who, even at a young age, have already acquired many vocational and key competences, as well as ingrained beliefs that need to be tested and taken into account in order to be successful learners.

A single system for recognising prior learning (with the possibility of transfer to formal education) and the development of self-assessment tools could play an important role in making education more flexible and individualised. For trainees, "this broader view" of what is considered relevant knowledge is very important and motivating.

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) play an important role in this by classifying qualifications according to a set of levels based on learning outcomes. The NQF levels reflect what the holder of a certificate or diploma should know, understand and be able to do. By linking or 'referencing' NQFs to the EQF, learners and employers can compare the levels of qualifications awarded at home and in other countries.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- A more decentralised model is needed, the centres that carry out the accreditation of professional skills are few and force participants to travel long distances, an increase in the centres authorised for the accreditation of professional skills is proposed. Although a more practical meaning must be given to the process since according to some components of the round table, the current model seeks formal recognition rather than linkage to the productive system and the improvement of professional skills linked to rural development, Multifunctional Agriculture and employability or entrepreneurship.
- The creation of career counsellors in educational centres is proposed since the current counsellors are from an academic point of view without knowledge or experience in professional guidance, and even less in Multifunctional Agriculture.



## 2.8. Involving the social partners and responding to labour market needs

Involving the social partners in VET systems helps to improve labour market outcomes and address employers' needs for knowledge, skills and competences. Cooperation with the social partners is planned strategically and in the long term. The social partners play an important role in policy and decision-making by participating in the design of specific programmes, the development of vocational standards, curriculum design, apprenticeships, work-based learning, assessment, etc. In the area of MA, the needs of employers are even more difficult to keep track of because most of the agrarian farms/enterprises in Spain are small and find it difficult to find the time to work with schools, even if they are aware of the importance.

Their active participation in the VET system can:

- Effectively mediates between work and education.
- It helps to identify new professional standards and qualification requirements in companies.
- Ensure that vocational and professional qualifications are recognised within the country and, increasingly, beyond its borders.
- It helps to design new educational programmes and promote learning processes in schools, dual systems, etc.
- By mentoring students in practical training through work or mentoring on projects, diplomas, they can contribute to the development of well-trained future employees and enable the development of some competences that cannot be acquired in agricultural schools.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- Creation of sectoral tables, to survey business needs and implement training programs adapted to the labour market and a more vertical rural development, not only focusing on the agricultural productivist point of view but rather on diversifying the offer from the rural world.

## 2.9. Allowing horizontal and vertical flexibility and passability

There should be no restrictions in determining the progression of initial vocational and technical education and training (FPI) and employment education (FPE). The transition between different educational sectors (formal, non-formal, informal) and institutions must be systematically enabled and facilitated. Through lifelong learning, we develop professional and key competencies that allow us to advance in our respective agricultural sectors, remain competitive, creatively solve professional and private problems, and be socially inclusive. Training participants should be able to move at their own discretion between different levels: VET and FPE programmes, and A-E grades, as well as secondary education including adult education. The National System of Professional Qualifications provides for the recognition of knowledge acquired non-formally and informally for a wide range of national professional qualifications in the field of multifunctional agriculture found in practice and governed by the Institute of Professional Qualifications.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- A type of partial training with core content is proposed, in such a way that standard professional competence and a more specific training itinerary are acquired depending on the student's interest.

## 2.10. Preventing early school leaving

Options to prevent repetition include individual learning support, small group learning, tutoring or counselling, cooperative learning, peer support, increased practical training with an employer, parental involvement, positive teacher-student relationships, participation in extracurricular activities, support from the class community, etc.

Repeating a year should only be used in exceptional circumstances because of its proven negative effects on learning. If, due to specific circumstances, this does happen, we suggest monitoring progress and providing activities that promote the development of the social skills of repeaters to ensure that repetition has a positive impact on students.

The consultation made the following proposals:

- Study the itineraries with excess training load, adaptation of the contents to the real needs in Multifunctional Agriculture

### 3. Conclusion

The rapid development of technologies such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence, climate change, sustainable development and its objectives within individual agricultural sectors, the development of agricultural technologies themselves, an inclusive and fair society, and a stable food supply are all contemporary demands that we must constantly keep up with and adapt to. At the same time, Spain's farms are based on such monoculture production or just a single production, that requires modernisation and not only that also an improvement in the number of productions and offers to the market.

In order to keep up with these changes, which are reflected in the labour market, it is necessary for the vocational and professional education system to constantly respond and adapt to new technologies, new ways of marketing and communicating with consumers, etc., as well as for all those involved in this system. First and foremost, teachers, trainers, school management and other educational staff, employer trainers and trainees. All other stakeholders, such as political decision-makers, the local environment and, last but not least, parents, should be supportive and helpful.

Multistakeholder Round Table held on 04/16/2024 in Cordoba (Spain) highlighted some general recommendations that follow the trends of modern society:

- Proposal for specialisation courses in multifunctional agriculture.
- Training proposals that impact current business models, making the proposals of educational centres more flexible and their adaptation to the rural environment