

# Global Trends in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

---

 [wordpress.oise.utoronto.ca/pog/2016/11/01/global-trends-in-vocational-education-and-training-vet/](http://wordpress.oise.utoronto.ca/pog/2016/11/01/global-trends-in-vocational-education-and-training-vet/)

servagela

November 1, 2016

OISE's pathways to education and work team has been commissioned by Education International to prepare a paper, to be entitled "Global Trends in VET: A Framework for Social Justice."

Education International is a federation of 396 associations and unions which represent some 32.5 million teachers and other employees in all forms of education: early childhood, primary school, secondary school, vocational, university and adult education. Education International represents organisations from 171 countries which are served in 5 regions: Africa, North America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America.

Education International commissioned a paper to respond to the big changes confronting vocational education, many shared with other education sectors and some shared with other social services. Some of these changes seem to be the result of general social and organisational developments, such as the diffusion of new technologies and globalisation. Others seem to impinge more heavily on vocational education, such as the transfer of responsibility from experts such as vocational teachers to employers, and in many jurisdictions, a related privatization of vocational education.

The team has found that vocational education is a higher proportion of all education in upper and upper middle income countries. This may reflect the economic structure of those countries needing a higher proportion of graduates with vocational education. But it may also reflect the fact that vocational education needs more resources than academic and general education. Vocational education needs more expensive equipment and facilities, it needs more practical classes, and more staff per student to protect the safety of students and the equipment they use.

Until recently major donor agencies have under invested in vocational education in lower income countries because they believed the returns to academic education to be higher than for vocational education. But of course returns to education reflect the rewards structured by society and its political and economic elites rather than contributions to economic and social development let alone the intrinsic worth of types of work. And atomistic analyses of returns to education ignore the shared benefits of balanced economic and social development.

There is a particular challenge to develop vocational education for the informal economy. All countries have an informal sector. Employment in the informal economy is around 15% in developed economies and from 50% to 70% in developing countries, and around 90% if agriculture is included. Much work in the informal economy is skilled, but most skills are developed in non formal vocational education or informally such as in traditional apprentices.

While the informal economy is by its nature difficult to reach and is unlikely to have much resources for formal vocational education, its economic and social importance provides a strong case for improving its skills development. There is a major gap in vocational programs and in understanding skills formation in the informal economy and how it may be improved.

## **Productive Capabilities as a Framework for Vocational Education**

Countries' markedly different economic resources, economic structures, cultures and societies make it very difficult to develop a policy or even goals which reflect the very different circumstances of vocational education without being too general to be informative. The team plans to use Sen and Nussbaum's concept of human capabilities to develop a concept of productive capabilities.

Productive capabilities are the resources and arrangements of work and the broad knowledge, skills and attributes

that individuals need to be productive at work, to progress in their careers, and to participate in decision-making about work. Productive capabilities are located in and concentrate on an intermediate specialised level, the vocational stream. A vocational stream links occupations that share common practices, knowledge, skills and personal attributes.

Productive capabilities rest upon broader social, economic, cultural and technological resources. For example, individuals need to have the language, literacy and mathematical skills for engaging and progressing in study and work. They need to have access to the social and economic resources such as housing, healthcare, transport and childcare that facilitate their participation in study and work and enable their participation in civic society and in their communities. And people need to have the knowledge, skills and attributes required to navigate, negotiate and engage in these aspects of life; the capacity to be skillful at work emerges from broader knowledge, skills and attributes.

The team will argue that developing productive capabilities offers a role for vocational education that is specific to vocational education yet reflects the different contexts in which it is found.