

eman ta zabal zazu



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FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL Y EMPRESA

**Procesos de aprendizaje y adquisición de competencias
en la fase inicial de la inserción profesional.**

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**“If I have seen further, it is
by standing on the
shoulders of giants”**

Isaac Newton

**“It is from the champions of the
impossible rather than the slaves of
the possible that evolution draws its
creative force”**

Barbara Wootton

*To the giants whose shoulders I
stood on...*

*To those who helped me believe that
the impossible would only take a little
bit longer...*

Sasi guztien gainera eta laino guztien azpitik...

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*Eneritz, Kerman, Julen.
Naizen bezala onartzen nauzuelako.
Zuek jakin gabe hainbat une gogorretan behar izan dudana indarra
eman didazuelako.
Eskerrik asko!*

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GLOSARIO - GLOSSARY

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning	Accreditación de Aprendizaje Experiencial Previo
BOE	Boletín Oficial del Estado	Spanish Official Gazette
BOPV	Boletín Oficial del País Vasco	Basque Community Official Gazette
CAV / BAC	Comunidad Autónoma Vasca	Basque Autonomous Community
CBET	Competence-Based Education and Training	Formación Basada en Competencias
CBVET	Competence-Based Vocational Education and Training	Formación Profesional Basada en Competencias
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training	Centro Europeo para el Desarrollo de la Formación Profesional
CEOE	Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales	Spanish Confederation of Employers Organizations
Confebask	Confederación Empresarial Vasca	Basque Confederation of Employers Organizations
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training	Formación Profesional Continua
DCB	Desarrollo Curricular Base	Basic Curricular Development
DFG	Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa	Government of the Province of Gipuzkoa
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	Sistema Europeo de Transferencia y Acumulación de Créditos
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training	Sistema Europeo de Créditos para la Formación Profesional
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management	Fundación Europea para la Gestión de la Calidad
EQF / MEC	European Qualifications Framework	Marco Europeo de Cualificaciones
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework	Marco de Referencia Europeo de Garantía de la Calidad en la Formación
ETF	European Training Foundation	Fundación Europea de Formación
INEM	Sistema Nacional de Empleo	National Employment System
ISQVT - SICFP	Integrated System of Qualifications and Vocational Training	Sistema Integrado de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional
IVAC	Instituto Vasco de Cualificaciones	Basque Qualifications Institute
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training	Formación Profesional Inicial
FBVETP - PPVFP	First Basque Vocational Education and Training Plan	Primer Plan Vasco de Formación Profesional
FP - VET	Formación Profesional	Vocational Education and Training
LGE	Ley General de Educación (1970)	General Act on Education
LOC	Ley Orgánica de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional (2002)	Organic Law on Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training

LOE	Ley Orgánica de Educación (2006)	Organic Law on Education
LOGSE	Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo (1990)	General Organic Law on the Education System
MAXQDA	Qualitative Data Analysis Software	Software para el Análisis de Datos Cualitativos
NQF - MNC	National Qualifications Framework	Marco Nacional de Cualificaciones
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications	Cualificaciones Profesionales Nacionales
OECD	Organization for the Economic Co-ordination and Development	Organización para el Desarrollo y la Cooperación Económica
OMC - MAC	Open Method for Coordination	Método Abierto de Cooperación
PBTE	Performance Based Teachers Training	Formación de Profesores Basada en el Desempeño
SEPE	Sistema Público de Empleo Estatal	State Public Employment System
SLT	Situated Learning Theory	Teoría del Aprendizaje Situado
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise	PYME – Pequeña y Mediana Empresa
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training	Formación Profesional Técnica
USOE	United States’ Office for Education	Oficina de Educación de Estados Unidos
WPL	Workplace Learning	Aprendizaje en el ámbito de trabajo
WBL	Work-based learning	Aprendizaje basado en el trabajo

Capítulo 1. Introducción

Se puede afirmar que la cooperación en materia de educación y formación entre los Estados miembro de la Unión Europea se ha acentuado en las últimas décadas, dando lugar a la definición y la progresiva implementación de un marco europeo común para la educación y la formación (Marco Estratégico Educación y Formación 2020¹). Este marco tiene como principal objetivo ‘garantizar la prosperidad económica sostenible y la empleabilidad’. Así, la relación entre la educación y el empleo se ha situado en el centro del debate europeo sobre las políticas para el desarrollo económico y la competitividad.

Las importantes transformaciones que se han producido en los procesos productivos y en la organización del trabajo como consecuencia, fundamentalmente, de la globalización de los mercados y de los avances tecnológicos, han traído consigo un cambio tanto en la naturaleza de las capacidades productivas necesarias en el mercado de trabajo como en su rápida e imprevisible evolución. Las elevadas tasas de desempleo juvenil han puesto de manifiesto la necesidad de mejorar la transición entre el ámbito educativo y el mercado laboral. Las cambiantes necesidades de cualificación y las cada vez más largas vidas laborales requieren mecanismos efectivos de actualización permanente de las capacidades productivas de las personas. Y la movilidad laboral que, junto con la de productos, capitales y servicios, representa uno de los grandes objetivos de la creación del mercado común europeo, exige mecanismos de reconocimiento transnacional de las capacidades que las personas pueden aportar al mercado laboral. Las diversas iniciativas que gobiernos nacionales y organismos internacionales (Unión Europea, Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico-OCDE, principalmente) han puesto en marcha en el ámbito de la educación y el empleo tratan de responder a estas nuevas necesidades. Las relevantes transformaciones que han afectado al ámbito de la educación y la formación a lo largo de las últimas décadas deben enmarcarse en este contexto internacional.

¹Marco Estratégico Educación y Formación 2020

<https://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion/mc/redie-eurydice/prioridades-europeas/et2020.html>

1.1. Globalización y políticas educativas y formativas

Se puede afirmar que la educación se ha visto profundamente afectada por la globalización. En primer lugar, los discursos en materia de educación se encuentran muy ligados al elevado interés de los gobiernos por mejorar el rendimiento económico y la competitividad. Como consecuencia de ello, conceptos como cualificación, trabajo cualificado y competencia, entre otros, han ganado relevancia en las esferas pública y política, ya que la adecuada cualificación de la población se considera una incuestionable palanca para el éxito de las economías modernas (Keep y Mayhew, 2010). Con el objetivo de incrementar la cualificación de la población, el diseño de las políticas educativas se ha visto transformado por el surgimiento del concepto resultado de aprendizaje², dando lugar a un fenómeno que ha sido considerado como uno de los principales cambios que ha afectado al diseño de las políticas educativas (Halász, 2017: 81). Concretamente, la educación basada en los resultados de aprendizaje parte de la premisa de que ésta debe guiarse por la obtención de determinados resultados, en lugar de estar basada en los programas de aprendizaje impartidos por las instituciones formativas (educación basada en las instituciones). La consecuencia inmediata de este enfoque es modificar la manera en que la educación es entendida, gobernada, diseñada, planificada e impartida (Souto-Otero, 2012).

En segundo lugar, la globalización ha afectado también a la propia gobernanza de la educación, ya que, mediante la incorporación de nuevas reglas ha establecido una nueva manera de relación entre los estados y el mundo. La globalización puede entenderse como un fenómeno que ‘difumina la distinción entre lo internacional y lo doméstico, lo global y lo local, dando lugar a un nuevo contexto espacial para la política’ (Ozga y Lingard, 2007: 65). De esta manera, la elaboración y gestión de políticas públicas, también las educativas, debe adaptarse al nuevo orden, en el que la capacidad de los estados individuales se ha visto constreñida. En este contexto, la influencia en la educación de las organizaciones internacionales se ha incrementado en las últimas décadas. De hecho, incluso aquellas organizaciones cuyo principal objetivo no es la

² Resultado de aprendizaje: ‘Conjunto de conocimientos, destrezas y/o competencias que una persona ha obtenido y/o es capaz de demostrar al término de un determinado proceso de aprendizaje formal, no formal o informal.’ O ‘Expresión de lo que una persona sabe, comprende y es capaz de hacer al culminar un proceso de aprendizaje; se define en términos de conocimientos, destrezas y competencias’ (CEDEFOP, 2014).

educación, como la OCDE, el Banco Mundial, o el Foro Económico Mundial³, entre otros, han incorporado progresivamente este tema en sus agendas (Leuze *et al.*, 2007), bajo la lógica generalizada de poner a la educación al servicio del interés económico y de la competitividad. La gobernanza de la educación es abordada por las organizaciones internacionales mediante diversos mecanismos, entre los que destacan los denominados de gobernanza suave, que permiten ejercer una influencia indirecta en las decisiones políticas de los estados. En el caso de la Unión Europea, el más importante de los mecanismos es el denominado Método Abierto de Coordinación (MAC), que constituye la más influyente herramienta en la compleja gobernanza multi-nivel europea.

Finalmente, como afirma Cerny (1997: 263), ‘la transformación del estado-nación en un “estado competitivo” se encuentra en la base de la globalización política’. Como consecuencia, y en lo referido a la educación, la búsqueda del éxito en los diversos rankings comparativos internacionales ha provocado que la mejora de la posición relativa de cada país se haya convertido en uno de los principales requisitos a la hora de abordar las reformas educativas en los estados. Esta dinámica ha sido impulsada a través de las agendas de las organizaciones internacionales, hasta el punto de que dichos rankings se consideran mecanismos de gobernanza suave en un ámbito en el que estas instituciones. De esta manera, los responsables de diseñar las políticas nacionales tienden a tomar como referencia cada vez con mayor frecuencia los modelos educativos *de éxito* (según esos mismos rankings) desarrollados en entidades políticas diferentes a la propia. Como resultado, se ha generalizado un enfoque conocido como préstamo de políticas, que trata de identificar ‘experiencias internacionales como ejemplo de “mejores prácticas” extraordinarias y transferibles’ (Raffe, 2011b: 1), frente al enfoque denominado aprendizaje de políticas. En claro contraste con el anterior, este último utiliza las experiencias internacionales para un abanico más amplio de objetivos, incluyendo el de contribuir a un mayor conocimiento del propio contexto y sus antecedentes, lo que permite identificar estrategias políticas que se puedan integrar más adecuadamente en las estructuras institucionales y en las culturas nacionales

³ A pesar de que esta investigación se centra en el ámbito geográfico europeo, estas agencias han extendido dicha práctica a otros ámbitos geográficos más amplios.

propias (Chakroun, 2008). El enfoque aprendizaje de políticas para el diseño de políticas se caracteriza también por implicar activamente a una diversidad de agentes y de desarrollar procesos colectivos de aprendizaje y cambio institucional.

La formación profesional no ha sido ajena a estas tendencias. De hecho, desde los primeros pasos en la organización europea (con la Comunidad Europea del Carbón y el Acero, y, posteriormente, la Comunidad Económica Europea) ha sido precisamente la agenda económica la principal impulsora de la cooperación transnacional en el ámbito de la formación profesional (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 11). Un hito lo marcó el Consejo de Europa reunido en Lisboa en el año 2000, que estableció el objetivo estratégico de convertir a Europa en la economía basada en el conocimiento más avanzada del mundo, convirtiendo el desarrollo de una formación profesional de calidad en un elemento fundamental de su estrategia. Posteriormente, la Declaración de Copenhague de 2002 subrayó la necesidad de ahondar en la colaboración internacional en el ámbito de la formación profesional con el objetivo de permitir el desarrollo permanente de competencias y cualificaciones. A lo largo de sucesivas declaraciones y mediante la aplicación de diferentes mecanismos de gobernanza, la UE ha impulsado iniciativas para mejorar la calidad y la efectividad de los sistemas de formación profesional en Europa y, como consecuencia, incrementar la cualificación de la ciudadanía europea. Las iniciativas promovidas por la UE han condicionado de manera relevante las políticas nacionales de formación profesional y buscan, fundamentalmente, dos objetivos generales.

En primer lugar, la UE considera que la transparencia, la portabilidad y el reconocimiento de las cualificaciones entre los estados, entre los distintos niveles formativos y educativos, y entre los diversos sectores productivos resultan necesarios para impulsar la movilidad laboral y aumentar el nivel de cualificación de la población. Esta consideración ha llevado a promover la implementación de diversos instrumentos, como los marcos nacionales y europeo de cualificaciones, el Sistema Europeo de Créditos para la Formación Profesional, el Marco de Referencia Europeo de Garantía de la Calidad en la Educación y Formación Profesionales, y los diversos mecanismos para el reconocimiento de los diferentes tipos de aprendizaje (formal, no formal e informal).

En segundo lugar, la Unión Europea aspira a la consecución de sistemas formativos que respondan a las necesidades reales y cambiantes del mercado laboral, mejorando la empleabilidad de las personas, la inserción laboral de las personas jóvenes y la permanente actualización de su cualificación, contribuyendo a reducir el denominado *desequilibrio entre cualificaciones* (o *'skills mismatch'*, en referencia a la brecha existente entre las cualificaciones de la población y las requeridas en el mercado de trabajo). Para ello, considera primordial la involucración activa en las políticas de formación profesional de los diferentes agentes implicados (asociaciones de empresarios y de trabajadores, centros de FP y otros proveedores formativos, cámaras de comercio, administraciones, etc.), que están llamados a desempeñar un papel central en los procesos de definición, validación y reconocimiento de las cualificaciones profesionales. Finalmente, la UE considera necesario impulsar los programas para la realización de prácticas en el entorno de trabajo y, en general, las iniciativas que promuevan el aprendizaje basado en el trabajo, tal y como se explicita en el documento de las Conclusiones de Riga⁴ y en la Recomendación del Consejo sobre un marco de calidad para los períodos de prácticas⁵.

1.2. La formación profesional. Caracterización

La conceptualización de la formación profesional ha evolucionado a lo largo de los siglos (Clarke y Winch, 2007). Las dos visiones opuestas estarían representadas, en un extremo, por aquélla que considera la formación profesional como la formación que se imparte para satisfacer los requisitos funcionales de puestos de trabajo concretos, según las necesidades planteadas por los empleadores. Esta visión, propia de la cultura anglosajona y, más concretamente, inglesa, contrasta con otra visión que integra, además del objetivo de desarrollo económico, el desarrollo personal y la educación cívica, y es característica de países como Alemania, Austria y Suiza. Sin embargo, lejos de resultar visiones contradictorias, podría decirse que la mayoría de los países han incorporado elementos que corresponden a ambas tradiciones.

⁴ Conclusiones de Riga

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

⁵ Recomendación del Consejo sobre un marco de calidad para los períodos de prácticas (2014/C 88/01)

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327(01))

En la actualidad, y en su significado más amplio, el término Educación y Formación Profesionales incluye la educación formal, la no formal y la informal que está orientada al trabajo y que es impartida por proveedores privados y/o públicos. El término educación formal incluye la educación profesional secundaria y terciaria (lo que se denomina post-secundaria y superior), pero no la educación general secundaria ni la educación general universitaria (Grootings, 2004: 14). La Educación y Formación Profesionales en un sentido europeo correspondería a una conceptualización más amplia, refiriéndose a la formación que se proporciona para facilitar el acceso al empleo, permite acceder a niveles educativos superiores y promueve el desarrollo personal y la ciudadanía activa. Esta conceptualización se corresponde con el enfoque de aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida⁶ que ha impregnado la orientación de la UE en el campo de la educación y la formación. El análisis de los diversos elementos que integran las políticas de formación profesional que son objeto de esta investigación se corresponden con esta orientación europea. No obstante, el análisis más concreto de la formación profesional en el estado español requiere tener en cuenta las especificidades propias del sistema. Así, se puede decir que en España la formación profesional ha sido objeto de una progresiva evolución y modernización, de manera que, siguiendo la orientación europea, en la actualidad se encuentra organizada en tres subsistemas más o menos interrelacionados: formación profesional inicial, continua y para el empleo. Sin embargo, en el imaginario social, la Formación Profesional se entiende fundamentalmente como aquella formación que prepara para el desempeño de determinadas profesiones técnicas. Además, cabe señalar que históricamente la formación profesional en España ha sido vista, aún en la actualidad y con algunas excepciones, como una formación que cuenta con escaso prestigio social (Homs, 2009).

En la literatura en lengua inglesa (Thelen, 2004; Green, 2013), es frecuente la utilización del término de sistema o régimen de provisión de competencias al referirse a la formación profesional. Este término hace referencia, en primer lugar, al hecho de que se trata de la formación directamente relacionada con la adquisición de la cualificación

⁶ Podría decirse que el concepto aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida se refiere a un aprendizaje que se realiza a lo largo y ancho de la misma. Así, 'a lo largo' se refiere al ámbito temporal, en las sucesivas etapas formativas que se van a desarrollar en la vida; mientras que 'a lo ancho' se refiere a los tipos de aprendizaje que toda persona desarrolla en las diferentes facetas de la vida, y que se podrían clasificar en aprendizaje formal, no formal e informal.

necesaria para el desempeño de una profesión; y, en segundo lugar, al hecho de que en torno a la formación profesional interactúan diversos subsistemas sociales (mercado laboral, educación básica y superior, estructura institucional, gestión empresarial), multiplicando las interlocuciones entre agentes y complicando el análisis comparativo de los diferentes modelos nacionales (Verdier, 2013: 70). Así, las múltiples conexiones entre subsistemas dificultan un enfoque común entre las diferentes disciplinas académicas, lo que produce una doble consecuencia.

Por un lado, los sistemas de formación profesional han evolucionado de manera dispar a lo largo de los países, habiendo estado dicha evolución condicionada por el devenir histórico, económico e institucional propio de cada uno. La desigual evolución ha contribuido a que las relaciones entre el estado, el capital y el trabajo se hayan configurado de manera específica en cada país. Este criterio (la relación entre estado, capital y trabajo) ha servido tradicionalmente para la clasificación de los diferentes sistemas de provisión de competencias (Ashton, 2004; Greinert, 2004; Bosch y Charest, 2010).

Por otro lado, y como consecuencia de lo anterior, los conceptos asociados con los sistemas de formación profesional presentan diferencias en su significado e implicación práctica. Las nociones 'Beruf', 'savoir', 'competence' y 'skill', correspondientes respectivamente a los sistemas de formación profesional alemán, francés, holandés e inglés, están fuertemente arraigados en las estructuras institucionales y procesos laborales de los países, y se han desarrollado y adquirido su significado con relación a trayectorias históricas y culturales específicas (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 548). Estos autores consideran que dichas nociones deben considerarse el resultado de 'construcciones sociales y de contextualizaciones históricas' que, en la actualidad, aún condicionan los debates y las políticas relacionados con la formación profesional. Las diferencias de significado que estos términos transmiten difícilmente pueden abordarse desde la simple traducción idiomática. Esta diversidad conceptual supone una dificultad en la construcción de un marco común europeo de cualificaciones y de formación profesional.

1.3. Herramientas para un espacio europeo de formación profesional

En el conjunto de las iniciativas que la UE ha impulsado para el logro de sus objetivos destacan dos herramientas que están siendo ampliamente introducidas por los estados miembro: los marcos de cualificaciones y el impulso de la formación basada en el trabajo. Ambas líneas de actuación ponen de manifiesto la relevancia que tiene la relación que se establece entre los sistemas educativo-formativo y el mercado laboral.

Como ya se ha apuntado, las reformas abordadas en las últimas décadas en el ámbito de la formación profesional se han centrado en la noción resultado de aprendizaje. Además, se han venido implementando de manera generalizada los denominados Marcos Nacionales de Cualificaciones, siguiendo el enfoque de los National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) que se introdujeron en Inglaterra en la década de 1980. Los marcos de cualificaciones podrían considerarse una especie de traductor o clasificador que sirve para establece la relación entre las diferentes cualificaciones (Coles, 2006), relación que está definida en términos de resultados de aprendizaje (normalmente, en referencia al conocimiento, la habilidad y la competencia) y clasificados según niveles. En línea con el enfoque de aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida, los marcos han ido integrando también, de manera progresiva, las competencias y cualificaciones obtenidas a través de la experiencia laboral, una vez éstas son certificadas por las autoridades competentes.

El valor añadido de los marcos de cualificaciones depende de su capacidad para servir como lenguaje común entre los diferentes agentes que interactúan en los ámbitos formativo y laboral. Tradicionalmente, las cualificaciones han surgido a partir de un consenso tácito con relación a su significado y alcance, por lo que, en cierta manera, constituyen una representación o prueba de lo que quien las posee sabe y/o puede hacer. Las cualificaciones pueden así ser empleadas más allá de las instituciones formativas y actuar como mediador entre instituciones educativas, entre instituciones educativas y el mercado laboral, y en el ámbito interno del mercado laboral (Strathdee, 2003; ILO, 2009b: 12; Brockmann *et al.*, 2011). En el modelo tradicional, previo a las transformaciones objeto de análisis, la confianza en las instituciones que ofrecían los programas conducentes a la cualificación de las personas aseguraba el valor de las cualificaciones obtenidas. Sin embargo, la creciente movilidad transnacional y la cada vez más compleja configuración de las sociedades actuales convirtió la confianza en las

instituciones, basada a menudo en la familiaridad y en los contactos personales, en una cuestión mucho más problemática. En este contexto, el enfoque basado en resultados de aprendizaje surgió para poder sustituir un modelo en el que las cualificaciones se identificaban con las instituciones que ofrecían los programas formativos (basado en las instituciones), por otro modelo en el que las cualificaciones se expresan únicamente en términos de resultados de aprendizaje, independientemente de las instituciones formativas (ILO, 2009b: 1). Las cualificaciones basadas en los resultados de aprendizaje aparecieron como una alternativa a la confianza en las instituciones que facilitaría la movilidad laboral y promovería la cualificación personal, y están en la base de los marcos nacionales de cualificaciones.

Existe un amplio debate académico con relación a la efectividad de los elementos mencionados en la mejora de la relación entre educación y empleo. Las principales ventajas de la implementación de los marcos nacionales serían consecuencia de una mayor transparencia en la interpretación de las cualificaciones: a) incentivar la formación y la adquisición de competencias, como resultado de un más amplio reconocimiento de las cualificaciones; b) posibilitar el reconocimiento del aprendizaje previo y el realizado en el puesto de trabajo; c) facilitar una más efectiva orientación de la trayectoria profesional y formativa; d) convertirse en una herramienta común, aceptada por sindicatos y empleadores, ampliamente utilizada en las empresas para la selección de personal y la planificación de la formación continua y, como consecuencia de esto último, facilitar la movilidad laboral intra e inter países.

Los marcos nacionales de cualificaciones se han incorporado en los sistemas nacionales siguiendo enfoques muy diferentes y, en numerosas ocasiones, los procesos seguidos se han desarrollado en medio de una mezcla de presión internacional, por un lado, y de respuestas locales, por otro (Mikulec y Ermenc, 2016). En ese sentido, los MNCs deberían considerarse construcciones sociales situadas que, aunque no escapan de las tendencias globales, reflejan la heterogeneidad de los sistemas de formación.

Adicionalmente, la UE desarrolló en 2008 el denominado Marco Europeo de Cualificaciones (MEC), considerado el instrumento clave en el proceso iniciado con la Declaración de Copenhague (Cort, 2010: 304). Este instrumento se ha descrito como un comparador de las cualificaciones entre los diferentes países ya que, a diferencia de los

MNCs, no pretende comparar directamente las cualificaciones individuales, sino facilitar la equivalencia entre las clasificaciones de cualificaciones de los diferentes marcos nacionales. Por lo tanto, se considera más como un instrumento de traducción. El principio básico del MEC es extender una descripción estándar de las cualificaciones en términos de conocimiento, habilidades y competencias, facilitando la estandarización y comparabilidad entre sistemas nacionales.

Así definido, el MEC debería ser capaz de incluir la diversidad de cualificaciones obtenidas en los sistemas educativo, formativo y laboral, y abarcar todo el espectro (desde educación básica hasta tercer ciclo, incluyendo la formación profesional), lo que convierte el necesario equilibrio entre una amplia cobertura y la consideración de detalles específicos en un complicado reto. En la medida en que un objetivo de los marcos es incrementar la transparencia y la comprensión de las cualificaciones entre los diferentes grupos de interés del ámbito socio-económico y, como consecuencia de ello, su uso generalizado en el mercado laboral, deben utilizar un lenguaje que sea comprensible tanto en los ámbitos educativo y formativo, como en el laboral ('qualification currency rates have to be tested on the market', Brockmann *et al.*, 2011: 14).

Cabe mencionar que, a pesar de que en la abundante documentación oficial de la UE sobre el marco europeo se pueden encontrar repetidas afirmaciones en el sentido de definir el marco como un instrumento neutral basado en evidencias, negando cualquier intención de *armonizar* los sistemas de educación nacionales, numerosas referencias académicas argumentan que se trata, en la práctica, de un instrumento de gobernanza europea que busca extender el enfoque basado en resultados de aprendizaje, lo que Cort (2010: 305) define como 'despliegue epidémico de políticas neoliberales en educación'. Lo cierto es que, a pesar de que existe un amplio debate académico sobre la efectividad de los marcos nacionales y europeo de cualificaciones, estos instrumentos se han implementado en los diferentes estados miembros de manera generalizada.

Por otro lado, el aprendizaje en el trabajo está siendo promovido e impulsado a través de diferentes iniciativas políticas europeas e internacionales. Dado que una parte muy importante de la vida de una persona se desarrolla en el entorno de trabajo, éste debe ser considerado un componente indispensable en cualquier estrategia de aprendizaje a

lo largo de la vida (Evans y Rainbird, 2002; Hodkinson y Bloomer, 2002). Así, el aprendizaje basado en el trabajo representa una potente herramienta para impulsar la educación de adultos y la formación profesional continua. Las cualificaciones adquiridas en el entorno de trabajo, bien sea por la experiencia o por la asistencia a cursos específicos, deben ser evaluadas, reconocidas y certificadas, encontrando su traducción en el marco, de manera que la progresiva cualificación de las personas pueda materializarse.

Sin embargo, a pesar de la importancia de los marcos de cualificaciones en la implementación de las reformas de formación profesional y el avance de un marco europeo común, debe realizarse una doble consideración. En primer lugar, constatar la existencia de una importante heterogeneidad entre los marcos de cualificaciones que se han ido introduciendo en los estados miembro, en buena parte motivada por las mencionadas diferencias en origen de los sistemas de provisión de competencias. Además, al tratarse de construcciones sociales específicas, no puede afirmarse que exista un modelo determinado de MNC válido para todos los países (Grootings, 2007; Raffe, 2009). De hecho, con relación a la diversidad de los enfoques particulares realizados en cada país, Young (2007: 446) afirma que las diferencias dependen, por un lado, del propio diseño del marco; y, por otro, de la estrategia política adoptada para realizar la transformación a partir del modelo de cualificaciones clásico, el basado en las instituciones. En segundo lugar, cabe señalar que, por relevante que sea la introducción de un marco de cualificaciones en un proceso de reformas de la formación profesional, éste sólo puede cumplir un limitado papel en contraste con otras iniciativas políticas que afecten, por ejemplo, a las instituciones, la determinación del currículum, la financiación, la formación del profesorado, etc. (Young, 2007: 451).

Como consecuencia de todo lo descrito hasta ahora, podría afirmarse que, en el contexto europeo actual, la realización de reformas eficaces en el campo de la formación profesional y de la provisión de competencias requiere, por una parte, de la introducción de marcos de cualificaciones en cuyo diseño y proceso de implantación se garantice la participación activa de todos los agentes implicados. Y, por otra parte, de la implementación de un conjunto coherente de políticas formativas complementarias que tengan en cuenta la trayectoria propia de cada país (institucional, laboral, económica,

cultural) para asegurar la incorporación de aquellas iniciativas que mejor puedan adaptarse a sus especificidades.

Finalmente, es importante poner de manifiesto que los marcos de cualificaciones, junto con el conjunto de iniciativas políticas que se adopten, deberían ‘proporcionar un “nuevo lenguaje” de aprendizaje, que deber ser hablado por usuarios y grupos de interés además de por los proveedores’ Raffe (2009: 32). Y que, sin embargo, ‘se requiere tiempo para que este lenguaje pueda ser ampliamente hablado y entendido’.

1.4. El proyecto de investigación: Objetivos y metodología

El objetivo de este trabajo de investigación ha sido profundizar en los procesos sociales que se desarrollan en el Espacio Europeo de Formación Profesional para la provisión de competencias al ámbito industrial y, más específicamente, analizar la manera en la que los centros formativos y las empresas interactúan en dichos procesos.

La naturaleza de los objetivos de la investigación ha condicionado el enfoque cualitativo de la misma. Y es que el enfoque cualitativo resulta particularmente apropiado para dar cuenta de la complejidad de los contextos sociales, donde coexisten diferentes realidades, a través de la exploración y descripción de los puntos de vista de los agentes e individuos implicados en los procesos bajo análisis.

La estrategia de investigación se ha basado en un estudio de caso. Para ello, se ha seleccionado el caso de la Comunidad Autónoma Vasca (CAV) en España, de manera que las iniciativas políticas analizadas se han desarrollado en un contexto institucional de división de competencias entre el gobierno del estado y el gobierno regional, en el que la UE ha tenido una incuestionable influencia. Además, la CAV es una comunidad autónoma que cuenta con una importante capacidad de autogobierno, lo que le ha permitido configurar un modelo de provisión de competencias diferenciado, adaptado a un modelo económico en el que la actividad industrial ha tenido y tiene un peso relevante.

La investigación ha partido de dos hipótesis principales:

1. La tradición industrial de la región ha venido condicionando el enfoque del sistema de provisión de capacidades productivas y de formación profesional que se ha

desarrollado de manera diferencial especialmente a partir de 1980 y ha favorecido la relación entre centros formativos y empresas.

2. A pesar de la cercanía entre centros formativos y empresas, los instrumentos desarrollados para la provisión de competencias al entorno productivo siguen siendo construcciones más próximas al entorno educativo, desde donde se han desarrollado, que al laboral.

La obtención de datos se ha basado en el análisis de documentos y en la realización de entrevistas semiestructuradas a personas que han jugado un papel relevante en los procesos analizados, tanto del ámbito educativo como empresarial y laboral.

Ya se ha argumentado que los factores históricos y culturales propios de cada contexto y el enfoque político seguido en el diseño y la implementación de las reformas de Formación Profesional tienen una gran relevancia en los aspectos directamente relacionados con esta investigación. Dicho de otro modo, las interacciones entre los centros de FP y las empresas en la provisión de competencias y cualificaciones se han convertido en el objeto de esta investigación: ¿hasta qué punto el enfoque seguido fomenta el diálogo permanente entre los grupos de interés implicados en los sistemas educativo y laboral?; ¿cómo operan las cualificaciones entre sus diversos usuarios (gobiernos, empleadores, proveedores de formación, aprendices y estudiantes, trabajadores) y cómo se gestionan las tensiones ocasionadas por sus necesidades particulares?; ¿hasta qué punto la confianza en las cualificaciones continúa ligada a las instituciones que imparten la formación o, por el contrario, se encuentra puramente basada en resultados de aprendizaje validados? Para ello, se adoptó la decisión de dividir la investigación en dos fases metodológicas claramente diferenciadas.

En la Primera Fase de la investigación se ha analizado el proceso de modernización de la FP en la CAV y la introducción del sistema de cualificaciones profesionales, tratando de caracterizar el enfoque político seguido a lo largo del proceso, es decir, si el enfoque más generalizado en la transferencia de políticas, el denominado préstamo de políticas, caracterizado por la *copia* de las mejores prácticas desarrolladas en otras entidades políticas, se ha realizado sin prestar suficiente atención a las diferencias en los contextos culturales e institucionales; o si se ha seguido un enfoque más colaborativo y basado en el aprendizaje colectivo, conocido como aprendizaje de políticas. Esta fase ha abarcado

la etapa que se inicia con la transferencia por parte del estado de las competencias en materia de educación y formación al Gobierno Vasco en 1980. En ella se ha profundizado fundamentalmente en la manera en que agentes políticos y formativos abordaron las reformas orientadas a satisfacer las necesidades del ámbito productivo y, por lo tanto, se centraron en el ámbito educativo. La investigación realiza una descripción cronológica de las reformas e identifica los principales procesos e iniciativas que han influido en las relaciones entre los centros de FP y las empresas en la CAV. Las preguntas de investigación planteadas para esta primera fase han sido:

- ¿En que aspectos puede considerarse que el Gobierno Vasco aplicó el enfoque aprendizaje de políticas en el desarrollo de las reformas relacionadas con la formación profesional en la región?
- ¿En que aspectos puede considerarse que la introducción del marco de cualificaciones constituyó una oportunidad para el desarrollo de un modelo más colaborativo de reformas en el ámbito de la formación profesional?

La Segunda Fase se ha centrado en el ámbito productivo y, más concretamente, en la industria metalúrgica. Para ello, se ha contado con empresas y centros de FP ubicados en los tres territorios que constituyen la CAV (Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia y Álava-Araba). Ha tratado de obtener una fotografía que refleje cómo eran las relaciones entre centros de FP y empresa en 2015 y cómo éstas influyen en los procesos formativos. La investigación se ha focalizado especialmente en las interacciones que se producen en torno a la gestión del programa denominado Formación en Centros de Trabajo (FCT), que supone para los/as alumnos/as de la formación profesional inicial la primera experiencia formativa en el ámbito laboral. También se han explorado las relaciones entre centros y empresas en la provisión de la formación continua y, finalmente, la investigación ha tratado de determinar el grado de eficacia de los instrumentos impulsados desde el ámbito europeo de la formación profesional en el logro de los objetivos de portabilidad y transparencia de las cualificaciones profesionales. Las preguntas de investigación correspondientes a esta fase de la investigación han sido:

- ¿De qué forma concreta interactúan las empresas (sistema laboral) y los centros de formación profesional (sistema educativo) a lo largo de los procesos de provisión de competencias y cualificaciones?

- Analizar la manera en que estas relaciones afectan al diseño y la impartición de la formación profesional inicial y, particularmente, el programa basado en trabajo denominado FCT.
- Analizar su papel en los procesos de formación continua en las empresas.
- ¿Cuáles son los factores que explican las diferencias observadas (sector, tamaño, tipo de actividad, personalidad jurídica de las empresas)?
- Tomando en consideración los objetivos planteados para el marco de cualificaciones (el denominado Sistema Integral de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional – SICFP) ¿en qué aspectos concretos puede considerarse efectivo?
 - Valorar la confianza en el marco y su utilidad para los principales usuarios.

El enfoque seguido para el análisis de los datos ha sido el de *análisis temático* y el proceso se ha apoyado en la utilización de la herramienta informática MaxQDA para la sistematización de la interpretación de los discursos de los diferentes agentes entrevistados recogidos.

1.5. Relevancia del proyecto

La mayor parte de los estudios oficiales abordados a nivel de la Unión Europea sobre procesos sociales e instrumentos relacionados con las políticas de formación profesional tienen como unidad de análisis los estados. En efecto, organismos oficiales de la UE específicamente orientados a la Formación Profesional, como CEDEFOP (Centro Europeo para el Desarrollo de la Formación profesional) o ETF (European Training Foundation) han realizado multitud de estudios comparativos entre países miembro, países en trámite de incorporación a la UE o países vecinos. Sin embargo, las situaciones más específicas correspondientes a regiones no son suficientemente recogidas, al menos de forma diferenciada y/o comparativa, por dichos organismos.

Además, los mecanismos de gobernanza educativa de la UE que integran el MAC están diseñados para la participación de los estados como únicas unidades de gobernanza (políticas) con participación directa. Como resultado de ello, las visiones y análisis a nivel de estado prevalecen sobre el conocimiento de realidades que corresponden a unidades políticas menores, pudiendo éstas quedar ocultas. Así, las estrategias de aprendizaje de políticas que subyacen en el MAC pueden perder una importante capacidad de

aprendizaje al no considerar en profundidad el conjunto de realidades que se puedan estar desarrollando en Europa.

También es necesario mencionar que, aunque los procesos de transferencia de políticas educativas (y fenómenos como la expansión de los marcos de cualificaciones) han sido ampliamente abordados por académicos de la educación comparada a nivel internacional, sin embargo, en la mayoría de los casos los análisis comparativos se han centrado también en los estados y, en mucho menor grado, en naciones integradas dentro de un mismo estado (Keating y Cairney, 2012; Hodgson y Spours, 2016). De hecho, los casos comparativos de sub-secciones de un estado (regiones, autonomías...) no han estado en el foco de interés de los análisis, a pesar de que dichas sub-secciones pudieran haber desarrollado un enfoque diferenciado. De esta manera, el aprendizaje sobre la manera en que la solución a problemas comunes puede adaptarse a las especificidades de entidades menores se ve limitado. Todo lo cual sugiere que una exploración en profundidad de casos regionales específicos resulta de interés para contribuir a una más rica y amplia visión con relación al diseño y la implementación de políticas de formación profesional.

El caso concreto de la CAV se eligió porque la importante autonomía política, económica y educativa de la región permitió el desarrollo de un modelo de formación profesional diferenciado con respecto al del estado, por lo que los resultados de la investigación resultan de especial interés para los sistemas de gobernanza plurinacionales y/o multi-nivel que buscan adaptar las políticas generales (tanto estatales como europeas) a las circunstancias y a los entornos socio-políticos particulares.

El Capítulo 2 realiza una introducción a la relación entre la educación y el empleo y su relevancia en el contexto de las políticas europeas orientadas a impulsar la competitividad. La expansión educativa en Europa, con la creciente importancia de la educación continua no formal; los diferentes itinerarios entre los ámbitos educativo/formativo y laboral; y las implicaciones que una progresiva introducción de la noción de competencia tiene en el ámbito laboral son cuestiones que se abordan en este capítulo, poniendo de manifiesto la conexión que las transformaciones que se están produciendo en el ámbito formativo tienen con el ámbito del empleo.

Los Capítulos 3, 4 y 5 desarrollan el marco del contexto analítico para la investigación. Así, el Capítulo 3 describe la evolución de las políticas educativas en el contexto de la globalización. La manera en que la globalización ha afectado las dinámicas entre estados y el mundo, con el auge de las organizaciones internacionales que, aunque a menudo sin capacidad normativa, ejercen una indiscutible influencia en las políticas nacionales; las transformaciones que se han producido en los enfoques educativos como consecuencia de los nuevos contextos, y la manera en que estos nuevos enfoques generales se implementan en los estados, son objeto de análisis en este apartado. El Capítulo 4 se centra en la formación profesional. Tras analizar la heterogeneidad en los diferentes sistemas de provisión de competencias en el ámbito europeo, se profundiza en los elementos más importantes sobre los que pivotan las políticas de formación profesional a nivel europeo: la formación basada en competencias; los marcos de cualificaciones, tanto nacionales y europeo, sus implicaciones y potencialidades; y el aprendizaje basado en el trabajo. Finalmente, el Capítulo 5 realiza una descripción de la evolución del Espacio Europeo de Formación Profesional.

El Capítulo 6 se centra en desarrollar el enfoque de la investigación: estrategia de la investigación, el diseño metodológico, los métodos empleados para la obtención de los datos; las preguntas de investigación y el enfoque escogido para la realización del análisis de los datos.

El informe de los resultados de la investigación se presenta en dos capítulos separados, que se corresponden con cada una de las fases en las que se ha dividido el proyecto. Así, el Capítulo 7 se ocupa del desarrollo social y político de las reformas y de la modernización de la Formación Profesional en la CAV; mientras que el Capítulo 8 describe las relaciones entre centros y empresas, así como la manera en la que éstas influyen en los procesos formativos de provisión de competencias. El Capítulo 9 ofrece las principales conclusiones de la investigación.

Conviene destacar que en la actualidad un creciente porcentaje del alumnado de FP de la CAV opta por la modalidad de Formación Dual en Régimen de Alternancia. Se trata de una modalidad que responde al diseño conjunto entre centros y empresas de programas formativos en los que los/as alumnos/as realizan una parte importante del aprendizaje en la empresa y, por lo tanto, su introducción se alinea con las iniciativas europeas que

promueven el aprendizaje basado en el trabajo. Su impacto está resultando especialmente relevante en los ciclos formativos analizados en esta investigación, es decir, en los más directamente relacionados con la actividad productiva industrial. Podría afirmarse que este formato representa un importante paso adelante en las relaciones entre centros formativos y empresas. Sin embargo, la Formación Dual en Régimen de Alternancia se reguló mediante el Decreto 83/2015 del Gobierno Vasco, por lo que al inicio de esta investigación aún no se había implantado.

1.6. La cuestión de la terminología

La cuestión de la terminología resulta relevante en el análisis transnacional de la formación profesional. Los diversos modelos nacionales de provisión de competencias reflejan una forma particular de entender la relación entre los diferentes sub-sistemas que los integran y que responde, a su vez, a la particular evolución histórica, política e institucional de cada contexto. De hecho, el análisis comparativo de los matices de los términos clave y de la correspondencia entre términos ha sido objeto de numerosos textos, tanto institucionales como académicos, que han tratado de ofrecer una base común sobre la que construir un marco europeo de formación profesional (Brockmann *et al.*, 2011) . Las definiciones empleadas por los organismos oficiales europeos se recogen en la publicación *Terminología de la política europea de educación y formación. Selección de 130 términos clave* (CEDEFOP, 2014).

Sin embargo, el objeto de esta investigación se centra en los procesos sociales y políticos en la provisión de competencias y cualificaciones, y no tanto en cuestiones puramente técnicas o de matiz terminológico de los modelos. Las referencias explicativas sobre la terminología se han ido introduciendo a lo largo de los capítulos sólo en la medida que se ha considerado necesario para entender las reflexiones y el hilo argumental de la investigación.

El carácter bilingüe del texto ha planteado también alguna dificultad de traducción. Por ello se ha incorporado al inicio de este trabajo un glosario con las principales equivalencias inglés/español de los acrónimos más empleados a lo largo del texto. Más allá de alguna cuestión específica que se aclara a lo largo del texto, no se ha considerado necesario dedicar a la terminología un apartado específico.

Capítulo 2. La relación entre educación y empleo

La relación entre la educación y el empleo se ha situado durante las últimas décadas en el centro del debate no sólo del diseño de las políticas educativas, sino también de las diferentes iniciativas para impulsar el empleo y la competitividad económica en Europa. Ya en los primeros tratados europeos que permitieron la constitución de lo que hoy conocemos como Unión Europea (Comunidad Europea para el Carbón y el Acero y, más tarde, la Comunidad Económica Europea), la formación profesional aparecía como un instrumento fundamental para el desarrollo de las políticas de empleo (Heyes y Rainbird, 2009; Brockmann *et al.*, 2011: 11). Progresivamente, la intervención de influyentes organismos internacionales como la Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico (OCDE) y la Unión Europea (UE) en cuestiones relativas a la formación y la educación se ha ido generalizando, y ello a pesar de que la educación ha sido una de las pocas áreas en las que los países miembro han invocado el principio de subsidiaridad para preservar su autonomía en la actuación política (Ertl, 2006; Cort, 2008). En la actualidad, el Marco Estratégico Educación y Formación 2020 para la cooperación europea en el ámbito de la educación y la formación recoge como objetivo primordial:

‘(...) seguir apoyando el desarrollo de los *sistemas de educación y formación* en los Estados miembros. Estos sistemas deben proporcionar a todos los ciudadanos los medios para que exploten su potencial, *garantizar la prosperidad económica sostenible y la empleabilidad*. El marco debe abarcar la totalidad de los sistemas de educación y de formación dentro de una perspectiva de aprendizaje permanente, en todos los niveles y contextos, incluidos los aprendizajes no formal e informal.’¹

Así, garantizar el desarrollo económico, la competitividad y el empleo se ha convertido en uno de los principales objetivos que ha venido justificando la cooperación en materia de educación y formación entre los países miembro de la UE hasta la implementación de un marco educativo y formativo supranacional.

¹ Cursivas de la autora. Texto de la presentación del programa marco Educación y Formación 2020, disponible en: <https://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion/mc/redie-eurydice/prioridades-europeas/et2020.html> [último acceso, abril 2018]

Al echar una mirada hacia atrás, se observa que un análisis histórico de la relación entre la educación/formación y el empleo conlleva explorar la evolución de la producción y del reconocimiento de las capacidades productivas a lo largo del siglo XX y de las primeras décadas del siglo XXI. A lo largo de ese tiempo se pueden distinguir tres grandes etapas (Planas, 2011: 1049).

La primera etapa corresponde a la primera mitad del siglo XX, aunque con diferencias entre distintos sectores y países. Durante esa etapa, la adquisición de las capacidades productivas se realizaba fundamentalmente a través del ejercicio del trabajo. Su reconocimiento se producía gracias a mercados internos de empresa y/o mediante los denominados mercados profesionales regulados por los gremios, que determinaban la cualificación necesaria para acceder a cada oficio.

La segunda etapa, a partir de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, se caracteriza por un fenómeno social según el cual cada generación ha sido más educada (en términos de titulación) que la anterior (Béduwé y Planas, 2003). Este fenómeno, denominado 'expansión educativa' (Planas, 2011) o 'empuje académico' (Green *et al.*, 1999; Raffe, 2011a), responde al compromiso adquirido entre estados, familias y empresas para aumentar la educación inicial formal de manera que, sin descartar la experiencia, fue adquiriendo un mayor peso en la provisión de capacidades productivas, y su reconocimiento fue recayendo progresivamente en títulos y certificados escolares. Planas (2011: 1050) afirma que desde la segunda mitad del siglo XX y unida a esta expansión educativa, las ciencias sociales han otorgado una enorme importancia a la educación formal en su relación con los procesos productivos, tanto desde visiones económicas (Becker, 1964) como sociológicas (Parsons, 1959).

La tercera etapa corresponde a las últimas décadas, en las que debido a la transformación de los procesos productivos y los rápidos cambios que la globalización ha acarreado, se ha experimentado una ralentización del crecimiento de la educación inicial formal. Además, se ha observado una importante diversificación de los mecanismos para la adquisición de capacidades productivas, las denominadas competencias, incrementando la complejidad de los procesos de formación formal.

Resulta un hecho objetivo que durante las últimas décadas los rápidos avances tecnológicos y la globalización de los mercados han modificado sustancialmente los

procesos productivos y la organización del trabajo y, como consecuencia, los requerimientos en términos de capacidades productivas. Los cambios que se observan en las necesidades competenciales se refieren no sólo a sus características (por lo que resultan a veces difícilmente adquiribles mediante educación formal) sino también a su imprevisible y rápida evolución. Como consecuencia de esta inestabilidad e incertidumbre, los certificados de la educación formal resultan cada vez más limitados para describir las capacidades de las personas. Esta situación plantea la necesidad de poner en marcha nuevos instrumentos de información y reconocimiento de competencias para la gestión de los recursos humanos en la búsqueda de la competitividad empresarial; para la regulación del mercado de trabajo y la empleabilidad de las personas; y, relacionado con ambos, para el desarrollo de los itinerarios de formación a lo largo de la vida (Planas, 2011: 1049) que facilitarían la flexibilidad necesaria para la permanente adaptación de las capacidades. En este contexto surge la noción de competencia como alternativa a la interpretación neoclásica de la relación entre educación y empleo, que estaba basada en la correspondencia binaria entre tipos de formación y de empleo (Sala, 2011), como se analiza más adelante en este capítulo.

Por otra parte, el análisis de las relaciones entre educación y empleo requiere considerar las dinámicas que se producen entre los principales agentes implicados, esto es, los/as jóvenes y sus familias, los estados y las empresas.

Con relación a los estados, éstos han sido en Europa los principales financiadores de las políticas educativas (y la consiguiente expansión educativa) durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Podría decirse que esta implicación ha respondido a dos discursos políticos principales: por una parte, la contribución de la educación al desarrollo económico y, por otra, la consecución de la igualdad de oportunidades. En la actualidad, aunque no se observa una disminución de la implicación de los estados, las políticas educativas están siendo objeto de nuevas orientaciones.

Un aspecto muy relevante de la relación entre las capacidades productivas y los cambiantes requerimientos del ámbito laboral es la diferencia entre las lógicas de quienes adoptan las decisiones educativas/formativas (jóvenes y sus familias) y las empresas que realizan las contrataciones. Tal y como describe Planas (2011), las

decisiones educativas de los primeros no responden a decisiones racionales de carácter puramente económico. Es más, según recoge el estudio realizado para analizar los efectos de la expansión educativa en el mercado de trabajo de cinco países europeos, (Beduwé y Planas, 2003), la producción de titulaciones no responde necesariamente a la coyuntura económica y a sus ciclos, sino que es necesario, además, tener en cuenta factores de carácter no económico, como la función simbólica de los títulos y certificados de la educación formal en la jerarquía social, o el desarrollo de las identidades personales y ocupacionales (Raffe, 2011a: 1174). Desde el convencimiento del carácter irreversible de la formación inicial (Planas y Plassard, 2000), las decisiones de los/as jóvenes se corresponden con estrategias a largo plazo, y tienen que ver con la consideración de la educación (y las titulaciones a las que conduce) como una inversión para un posterior posicionamiento, tanto social como profesional (D'Iribarne y D'Iribarne, 1993). Esta visión a largo plazo no responde a los plazos y ritmos que prevalecen en las dinámicas propias del mercado de trabajo, entrando en conflicto con las necesidades empresariales, habitualmente sujetas al corto plazo. Pero, además, los actuales escenarios productivos globales y tecnológicamente avanzados obligan a dar respuesta a una doble necesidad: responder a una creciente exigencia competencial y, por lo tanto, contar con titulaciones de nivel cada vez más elevado; pero, al mismo tiempo, cubrir las necesidades de empleo poco cualificado, lo que resulta más difícil a medida que aumenta el nivel educativo (Planas, 2011a: 1054). Esta última cuestión, que fue planteada por Richard Freeman a partir de la noción de sobrecualificación (Freeman, 1976) ha sido objeto creciente de estudio desde la década de 1980, en la medida en que sociólogos y economistas han intentado evaluar las consecuencias de la expansión educativa en el mercado laboral (Sala, 2011). Y, aunque la noción de sobrecualificación sólo se refería inicialmente al *exceso* de trabajadores con educación superior, el campo de estudio se ha ido ampliando hasta contemplar el desajuste general entre niveles de educación y necesidades de los puestos de trabajo, en lo que se denomina desajuste de competencias.

2.1. Nuevos modelos de provisión de capacidades productivas

El hecho de que las decisiones relativas a la producción, circulación y acumulación de capital estén crecientemente sometidas a dinámicas de corto plazo, mientras que las decisiones que tienen que ver con la reproducción humana y social requieren la consideración del largo plazo (Vinokur, 1998) conlleva un replanteamiento de la educación y la formación. En este contexto, tal y como se puede observar del análisis de los itinerarios formativos y de inserción de los/as jóvenes (Casal *et al.*, 2006), las nuevas generaciones tienen comportamientos más variables, flexibles y menos previsibles con relación a la demanda de educación y formación. Esta situación está conduciendo a una nueva manera de plantear la relación entre la formación inicial y la formación continua en los procesos de provisión de competencias, que no está exenta de tensiones debido a la aún insuficiente flexibilidad de los sistemas educativos actuales.

Planas (2011a: 1059) describe cuáles deberían ser las bases de un nuevo escenario de provisión de competencias y capacidades productivas, destacando entre otras: una mayor flexibilidad de la formación, que combine formación de base, de carácter general y largo plazo, con la relacionada con la coyuntura a corto plazo; la ampliación de las formas de trabajo durante la formación inicial, posibilitando compaginar estudios con actividad laboral; y una mayor relevancia del papel de la formación continua para empleados/as que les permita completar y/o adaptar las capacidades ya adquiridas a los nuevos requerimientos. Tal y como se describe en el Capítulo 5, los pasos dados por la UE en el ámbito de la formación profesional se orientan en gran medida a la consecución de dichos cambios.

Como ya se ha apuntado, uno de los principales cambios que la nueva visión de la provisión y el reconocimiento de las capacidades productivas conlleva es el abandono del sistema neoclásico que establecía una correspondencia binaria entre los diferentes tipos de formación y los diferentes tipos de empleo, que ya sólo sería válido en el caso de los sectores regulados (Sala, 2011: 1038). Esta visión, también denominada adecuacionista implica que a 'cada nivel y especialidad de formación le corresponde una gama relativamente restringida de categorías de empleo y que la dinámica del mercado de trabajo tiende a propiciar el emparejamiento entre especialidades formativas y empleos correspondientes' (Planas, 2011: 1050). Frente a esta visión, un enfoque

basado en la noción de competencia laboral invita a no presuponer la existencia de correspondencia biunívoca entre formación detentada y empleo ocupado, permitiendo analizar la relación no causal observada entre formación y empleo (el desajuste de competencias) sin considerarla una imperfección del mercado (Sala, 2011: 1026).

Como respuesta a las nuevas relaciones entre educación y empleo que se han ido desarrollando a lo largo de las últimas décadas, los sistemas educativos, en buena medida a instancias de organismos internacionales como la UE y la OCDE, han venido modificando sus enfoques metodológicos y organizativos y, como se analiza en los sucesivos capítulos, han pasado a centrarse en los denominados resultados de aprendizaje y en la producción de competencias. Además, desde las instituciones europeas se viene promoviendo el reconocimiento de todas las formas de aprendizaje (formal, no formal e informal), así como la acreditación de la formación que se adquiere a través de la experiencia, como elementos clave del enfoque denominado aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida. En este sentido, el diseño y desarrollo de itinerarios de formación; la puesta en marcha de instrumentos que permitan la comparabilidad y la acreditación de competencias y cualificaciones profesionales (marcos de cualificaciones); y el impulso de la formación continua y de la formación en el ámbito de trabajo constituyen el núcleo de las políticas formativas (y para el empleo) de las instituciones nacionales y europea.

En lo que se refiere al ámbito laboral, es necesario además tener presente el papel que las titulaciones y las jerarquías por niveles (categorías profesionales) han tenido hasta ahora en las normas que regulan el mercado laboral, actuando como referencia para los agentes laborales en la toma de decisiones (Germe y Planas, 2001: 4). Estas normas sirven aún de base en la construcción de expectativas profesionales y en la elección de los diferentes itinerarios formativos. La introducción de la noción de competencia supone pasar de normas basadas en la evaluación de los puestos de trabajo (y de las capacidades que éstos requieren) a la evaluación de las capacidades productivas de las personas trabajadoras, lo que implica un importante cambio en las relaciones de trabajo (Tanguy, 2001) y es objeto de análisis más adelante en este mismo apartado.

Teniendo en cuenta que los sucesivos capítulos exploran en profundidad la evolución de los sistemas educativos y de formación profesional durante las últimas décadas, las siguientes secciones se centrarán en el análisis de los itinerarios que relacionan la

educación y el empleo, y en las implicaciones del uso de la noción de competencia en el ámbito de las relaciones laborales.

2.2. Itinerarios entre educación y empleo

Aunque se han venido utilizando diversas metáforas para referirse a las transiciones de los jóvenes del mundo de la educación al del trabajo (Evans y Furlong, 1997), la metáfora de los itinerarios es la que más abundantemente se utiliza en la formulación de las políticas educativas nacionales (Dearing, 1996; Kirby, 2000; Nielsen, 2000; Eldridge, 2001) y en los debates transnacionales (OECD, 1998 y 2000). En la abundante literatura que aborda las transiciones de la educación al empleo, la noción de itinerario se emplea fundamentalmente para comparar las diferentes opciones educativas más allá de la escolaridad obligatoria y determinar así su papel en un sistema de transición efectivo, y para analizar las conexiones entre estas alternativas (Raffe, 2011a).

Cuando se trata de comparar las diferentes opciones educativas, se distinguen 'tres clases principales de itinerarios a través de la educación secundaria superior, y más allá de ésta, al trabajo o a los estudios terciarios: itinerarios de educación general, itinerarios de formación profesional escolar e itinerarios profesionales de tipo aprendizaje' (OECD, 2000: 58). La estructuración de los itinerarios varía mucho entre los países, y la mayor similitud se observa en relación con el estatus relativo de cada uno. Así, los itinerarios académicos gozan de un mayor prestigio que los profesionales, siendo la tendencia general un incremento de los/as jóvenes que abordan itinerarios académicos y una disminución de quienes optan por itinerarios profesionales (Raffe, 2011a: 1168).

A la hora de realizar la comparación entre itinerarios, y con relación a su papel en las transiciones, la pregunta que se plantea frecuentemente es ¿cuáles son los itinerarios que proporcionan mejores resultados ocupacionales? Esta pregunta ha sido abordada por numerosos investigadores (Payne, 1995; Van der Velden y Lodder, 1995; Ryan 1998; Sofer, 1999; Shavit y Müller, 2001, Smyth et al., 2001, entre otros), ofreciendo resultados que demuestran una amplia variación transnacional. Raffe (2011a: 1169) resume algunas de las conclusiones de estas investigaciones:

- En todos los países, los itinerarios profesionales tienen más posibilidades que los itinerarios generales de conducir directamente al mercado laboral.

- Para las personas que dan sus primeros pasos en el mercado laboral, ni los itinerarios generales ni los profesionales están asociados de forma consistente a obtener mejores resultados en el mercado laboral.
- El efecto de seguir un itinerario profesional más que uno académico presenta más posibilidades de resultar siendo positivo cuando el criterio es el empleo (*versus* desempleo), que cuando el criterio son los ingresos o el nivel de cualificación.
- Los resultados del mercado laboral varían de un programa profesional a otro.
- La formación profesional puede, a la vez, *desviar* a los jóvenes de los empleos de alto nivel y de la formación que conduce a ellos, y proporcionar una red de seguridad que los protege del desempleo o del trabajo no cualificado (Shavit y Müller, 2001).
- Todas las conclusiones varían de unos países a otros y de un tipo de programa a otro, así como dependiendo del conjunto de datos analizados y de las hipótesis empleadas para el análisis.

Otros autores consideran que apelar al mercado laboral a la hora de comparar los itinerarios entraría en conflicto con otras prioridades establecidas para la formación, como la justicia social o la inclusión (Raffe, 2011a: 1170), y plantean la necesidad de abordar conjuntamente la reforma del mercado laboral y de la educación para lograr las sinergias necesarias en una economía emergente con cualificaciones altas (Ashton y Green, 1996; Keep y Mayhew, 2001).

Finalmente, y aunque en la literatura se pueden observar argumentos en contra y a favor² de impulsar activamente un itinerario profesional fuerte en el nivel secundario superior, la realidad de las investigaciones pone de manifiesto que ‘los itinerarios profesionales se ven atrapados en un círculo vicioso de estatus y expectativas bajos’

² Los argumentos a favor de mantener un itinerario profesional sustancial en el nivel secundario incluyen los siguientes aspectos: un itinerario profesional desarrolla cualificaciones para la competitividad; vincula el aprendizaje teórico al aplicado; motiva a los jóvenes a aprender; y es socialmente más inclusivo. Entre los argumentos en contra de hacer especiales esfuerzos para desarrollar un itinerario profesional fuerte incluyen que: habría que respetar las preferencias de los/as jóvenes; que la educación general desarrolla las competencias genéricas, personales e interpersonales de las que depende la futura competitividad económica; que las actuales necesidades de cualificación hacen deseable que se posponga la educación profesional a un nivel superior; y que las cualificaciones profesionales específicas se aprenden mejor cuando los individuos ya trabajan de forma regular (Raffe, 2011a: 1170-71)

(Raffe, 2011a: 1171). En la medida en la que no resulta sencillo recuperar el prestigio anterior, el apuntado empuje académico parece irreversible en la práctica.

La segunda de las cuestiones relevantes a abordar se refiere a las relaciones e interconexiones que se establecen entre itinerarios. En este sentido, la consecución de un sistema de itinerarios coherente, flexible e interconectado es el objetivo de lo que se denomina ingeniería de itinerarios (Raffe, 2011a: 1173), que podría definir los denominados *puentes* o *pasarelas* entre itinerarios, ampliar los plazos de toma de decisiones para mantener abiertas las opciones de los individuos, o incorporar mecanismos como la modulación, la transferencia de créditos y los marcos de cualificaciones, para lograr un sistema de itinerarios más flexible (OECD, 1998).

Para la OECD (2000: 13), un sistema de transiciones que funcione debería tener cinco ingredientes fundamentales: ‘una economía sana; itinerarios bien organizados que vinculan la educación inicial al trabajo y la formación posterior; oportunidades generalizadas para poder combinar experiencia laboral con formación; densas redes de seguridad para aquellas personas que están en situación de riesgo; y procesos e instituciones efectivas’, de lo que parece que se puede concluir que lo más importante es mantener una diversidad efectiva de opciones prestando, al mismo tiempo, una mayor atención a lo que realmente ocurre en cada itinerario.

Sin embargo, y a pesar de su utilidad para abordar las transiciones de la educación y el empleo, el uso de la noción de itinerario ha recibido importantes críticas (Evans y Furlong, 1997; Dwyer y Wyn, 1998; Cohen y Ainley, 2000) que Raffe (2011a) resume en tres inconvenientes principales:

- Linealidad, lo que conlleva reducir la complejidad de las transiciones y minimizar el solapamiento entre estudio y trabajo. El carácter lineal de la noción, sin embargo, está condicionado por las limitaciones de las fuentes de datos disponibles y la insuficiencia de la evidencia empírica sobre las transiciones (Roberts, 1997; Sweet, 2001; Raffe, 2011a), al constatarse la limitada capacidad de medir los cambios sociales mediante registros longitudinales.
- Economicismo, ya que se limita a las transiciones de la educación al mercado laboral, sin tener en cuenta la influencia de otras transiciones vitales en las vidas de los individuos. Aunque esto también refleja las limitaciones de los datos, Raffe

(2011a: 1181) apunta a la responsabilidad política de quienes utilizan el concepto, ya que éste no excluye una aplicación más holística que reconozca la interdependencia entre las transiciones de la educación al empleo y otras (familia, vivienda, estilos de vida, etc.).

- Individualismo, ya que no presta suficiente atención a las estructuras sociales y a las desigualdades, dando a entender que todos los itinerarios son igualmente accesibles por las personas. Esta consideración podría llevar a los responsables políticos a percibir la desventaja como un problema individual.

Estas críticas ponen de manifiesto que al utilizar la noción de itinerario resulta relevante tomar en consideración los diferentes significados que, de forma no deliberada, la noción puede transmitir. Así, aunque ‘el concepto de itinerario resulta útil como concepto general estructurador y como puente entre la investigación y la política’, su uso no debería establecer límites al análisis de las transiciones entre la educación y el empleo (Raffe, 2011a: 1181).

2.3. La noción de competencia en el ámbito laboral

La progresiva introducción de la noción de competencia ha dado lugar a importantes transformaciones en la esfera de la educación, tal y como ya se ha apuntado y se analiza en detalle a lo largo de los siguientes capítulos. La incorporación de la noción al ámbito laboral tampoco está exenta de relevantes transforma

ciones, que han afectado fundamentalmente a la organización del trabajo y a la gestión de personal en un contexto de la búsqueda de mayores cotas de flexibilidad en las empresas (Tanguy, 2001). Estos cambios determinan la manera en la que se desarrolla la carrera profesional de las personas asalariadas, hasta el punto de que algunos impulsores, como Donnadieu y Denimal (1993), llegaron a plantear que la implementación de la ‘lógica de competencias’ en el ámbito laboral significaba que tendencialmente ‘es el individuo el que hace su puesto’ (Tanguy, 2001: 114).

Tal y como se analiza en el Capítulo 4, la noción de competencia muestra cierta indeterminación ya que, dejando a un lado las definiciones ofrecidas por los documentos publicados por la UE y otros organismos oficiales para el ámbito educativo, su significado no es exactamente igual en las diferentes culturas. Sin embargo, para una

consideración general podría afirmarse que la noción de competencia se corresponde con un saber hacer operacional que implica elementos cognitivos, aspectos funcionales y características interpersonales, y que puede ser validado mediante niveles formativos acreditados y/o procedimientos preestablecidos. La aplicación de esta noción al ámbito laboral implica que la formación se coloca en el centro de la empresa, posibilitando el ajuste permanente entre la distribución de los atributos de los individuos y las necesidades cambiantes. Los puestos de trabajo pueden clasificarse según las competencias que se precisan para el efectivo ejercicio de sus funciones. Ello plantea la necesidad de visibilizar dichas competencias y establecer los mecanismos necesarios para su reconocimiento mediante acciones sociales e instrumentos de objetivación y medición.

Sin embargo, la mayor transformación que la introducción de la noción de competencia acarrea es la de desplazar la noción de calificación, una noción igualmente compleja y cuya interpretación ha sido objeto de amplios debates en el ámbito de la sociología del trabajo, especialmente la francesa (Friedmann; 1946, Naville, 1956; Freyssenet, 1974; Rolle y Tripier, 1978). Ambas nociones, calificación y competencia, buscan 'relacionar y hacer corresponder dos órdenes de distribución, el de las propiedades de los puestos de trabajo y el de los atributos de las personas, ambas distribuciones jerarquizadas' (Tanguy, 2001: 120). En el ámbito laboral, la noción cualificación había sido durante décadas la que de forma implícita se contenía en las nomenclaturas socio-profesionales, estableciendo las clasificaciones profesionales y, en consecuencia, también la jerarquía y el orden salarial en las empresas. Y, a pesar de que en numerosas ocasiones dichas clasificaciones habían sido objeto de crítica por parte de los sindicatos de trabajadores por entender que los criterios en los que se basaban daban pie a cierta arbitrariedad, se puede afirmar que ha contribuido a hacer socialmente aceptables las diferenciaciones salariales. Ese mismo objetivo es el que persigue la lógica de las competencias, que aportaría la ventaja de estar revestida por cierta apariencia de medición científica (Tanguy, 2001: 120). La noción competencia, un término mucho más reciente, no se relaciona tan directamente con un determinado orden jerárquico, y se aplica de manera indiferente al ámbito industrial, agrícola, a la actividad educativa, etc.

2.3.1. De la noción calificación a la noción competencia.

La sociología francesa del trabajo ha analizado profusamente las implicaciones que la incorporación de la noción competencia ha tenido el ámbito laboral durante las últimas décadas. Dicho análisis ha girado, fundamentalmente, en torno a los diferentes significados de las nociones cualificación y competencia, y sus implicaciones en la organización del trabajo: la consideración de su relación con el individuo; la mayor o menor riqueza de contenido de ambas nociones; y al carácter más o menos social y colectivo de su reconocimiento y evaluación (Berton, 2006: 2). Lichtenberger (1999: 96) afirma que la competencia, de manera inversa a la cualificación, designa sin ambigüedad una característica de la persona asalariada y no del puesto del trabajo. Se trataría de un concepto de mayor riqueza que haría referencia no sólo a un determinado nivel de titulación o certificación propiamente dicho, sino también a la antigüedad, experiencia, pericia, saberes informales, capacidades diversas de organización colectiva o individual, actitudes, comportamientos con relación a situaciones más o menos imprevistas, etc. La cualificación, por el contrario, se asociaría a un nivel de titulación requerido para poder acceder a un empleo y, en general, a un nivel de clasificación en función de un acuerdo colectivo (negociación colectiva).

La cuestión de la cualificación ha estado en el centro de la sociología francesa del trabajo desde los años cincuenta, momento en el que se constata una mutación de la sociedad. En dicha mutación jugaban un papel estructurador las transformaciones que se estaban produciendo en torno al trabajo (Dubar, 1996: 180). El autor explica que dichas transformaciones se planteaban como el paso de la 'civilización natural' a la 'civilización técnica' de Friedmann (1946); del 'sistema profesional' al 'sistema de la producción' de Touraine (1955a y 1955b); o del 'trabajo mecanizado' al 'trabajo automatizado' de Naville (1956). Y, aunque los tres autores ofrecen diferentes versiones de la noción cualificación, coinciden en atribuirle la capacidad de referirse al valor social de las tareas efectuadas y de las modalidades de la formación de los trabajadores.

Según la concepción substancialista de Friedmann, se trataría de una cualidad del individuo (cualificación del individuo por la educación y por el aprendizaje de hábitos profesionales) o del puesto de trabajo (definida en función de la evaluación y análisis del puesto de trabajo: complejidad, tecnicidad, dureza, responsabilidad...) (Dadoy,

1973). Frente a ella, la concepción relativista pone el acento en el compromiso social en vigor que, depende de los lugares y las épocas, otorga mayor o menor valor a determinados aspectos de la cualificación del trabajador o del puesto. 'La cualificación no puede nunca ser entendida en sí misma. Se presenta siempre como una relación y una relación de elementos múltiples, heterogéneos... Fundamentalmente, en una relación entre ciertas operaciones técnicas y la estimación de su valor social' (Naville, 1956: 129). Berton (2006: 3) observa que, mientras que para Naville la cualificación depende del hombre y puede determinarse por el tiempo de formación necesario para el cumplimiento de las diferentes tareas profesionales, Friedman, a la búsqueda de criterios de objetivación de la cualificación, prefería definirla a partir de las características del puesto de trabajo.

Finalmente, la noción 'cualificación social' de Touraine (1955b) se refiere, además, a las cualidades individuales. Representa una visión que recoge ya muchos de los aspectos que los expertos denominarían competencia a finales de los años 1980 (Dubar, 1996: 190), al incorporar a los conocimientos técnicos y profesionales exigidos por los puestos de trabajo unas exigencias cognitivas generales y un compromiso personal. El autor la define como 'un estatus reconocido en un sistema social de producción' asociado a 'un potencial de participación en la vida social de los talleres' (citado en Dubar, 1996: 182). La cualificación social dependería de la política de personal de la empresa y, más allá de esto, de la política social de la nación considerada. De manera que las cualidades relacionales y de gestión se convierten en esenciales porque ya no se trata tanto de 'tener un puesto de trabajo' como de 'participar activamente en la realización de los objetivos de la empresa'. Berton (2006: 4) afirma que, junto con la noción cualificación real de (Freyssenet, 1978) esta última visión de la cualificación anuncia la transición a la noción competencia, es decir, a la 'necesidad de poner en evidencia y de valorar las cualidades que han estado siempre presentes en la actividad del trabajo sin ser especialmente reconocidas'. Junto a los criterios clásicos de conocimientos adquiridos y del tipo de actividad, aparecen los criterios de autonomía y responsabilidad, características de los modelos de gestión de personal actuales.

La noción competencia en el ámbito laboral surgió como tal en los años 1980 en mitad de un nuevo contexto de transformaciones de los modelos organizativos de la

producción y de la movilización de la fuerza de trabajo. En sus primeras acepciones (Paradeise, 1987; Dadoy, 1989; Mandon, 1990), la competencia se refería a saberes relacionados con acciones concretas, que debían ser observables y medibles. En la medida en que dichos saberes se hacen visibles sólo en situaciones y contextos concretos y corresponden, además, a saberes de las personas, puede concluirse que la competencia se encuentra en el punto de encuentro entre los saberes y las potencialidades de una persona, y las exigencias y potencialidades de una situación. En este sentido, Berton (2006: 3) observa que nos encontraríamos ante una tensión similar a la que caracterizaba a la cualificación ¿se trata de una cualidad de la persona o del puesto de trabajo? Por ello, diversos autores (Dubar, 1996; Oiry, 2005) han puesto en duda que se haya producido una ruptura entre ambas nociones. En la literatura, la principal diferencia entre ambas nociones aparece a menudo ligada al intercambio salarial (Paradeise y Lichtenberger, 2001: 39; Reynaud, 2001: 17): en el caso de la cualificación, este intercambio se materializa a través de la apelación a instituciones establecidas y a un juicio social; mientras que se corresponde con una relación más directa y menos mediatizada entre el individuo y su empleador en el caso de la competencia, dando lugar a unas prácticas de individualización de la gestión de la mano de obra.

Entre las consecuencias más significativas que la introducción de la noción de competencia trae consigo en las relaciones laborales destacan dos. Por un lado, mientras que la cualificación aparece como una propiedad duradera, la competencia se construye de una forma dinámica y continua, teniendo que ser sometida a objetivación y confirmación constantes. Esto implica que la persona asalariada está sometida a una validación permanente y que debe demostrar su adecuación a un puesto de trabajo que tiende a cambiar y evolucionar. Esta circunstancia tiene también implicaciones en el ámbito formativo, ya que, aunque el diploma es un título definitivo, el valor de la competencia profesional es inestable y temporal, y requiere actualización permanente. El sistema educativo coloca la adquisición de las competencias en el centro de sus objetivos, reformando la manera en la que se definen los diplomas y certificaciones profesionales y la propia concepción de la evaluación (Ropé y Tanguy, 1994). Además, la formación continua a lo largo de la vida se erige en una actividad asociada a la

empleabilidad de las personas y a la competitividad de las empresas en el contexto actual, al ser el mecanismo que contribuye a la actualización de las competencias de las personas asalariadas.

Pero, por otro lado, existe una relevante implicación con la organización del trabajo. Al contrario de lo que sucede con el modelo basado en la cualificación, que implica la negociación colectiva, el modelo de competencia tiende a desdibujar el hecho de que el reconocimiento salarial es el resultado de un acuerdo social dinámico y no de un cara a cara entre un individuo provisto de competencias y una empresa que las reconoce y las transforma en desempeño más o menos medible (Stroobants, 1993). Es decir, que mientras que las cualificaciones se corresponden con acuerdos de ramas profesionales, las competencias responden, generalmente, a acuerdos de empresa, lo que tiene importantes implicaciones con relación a la configuración y funcionamiento de la negociación colectiva. Una de las consecuencias que apuntan los sociólogos es que el contrato entre persona empleadora y empleada tendería a desligarse de la negociación colectiva (Reynaud, 2001: 26).

No obstante, en el análisis que Oiry (2005: 31) realiza sobre la evolución de las nociones competencia y cualificación, el autor concluye que no se ha producido la supuesta ruptura entre ambas. Más concretamente, considera que la última definición de competencia resulta idéntica a la más reciente de cualificación, lo que le lleva a plantear que la introducción de la gestión por competencias en las empresas debe tener como base un discurso 'fundamentado en las evoluciones y no en las revoluciones'. Esto implicaría concebir los instrumentos de gestión por competencias como procesos de hibridación entre los instrumentos pre-existentes y los de gestión de las competencias.

Finalmente, Tanguy (2001: 127) llama la atención ante el hecho de que dos instancias socialmente alejadas, como son el ámbito laboral y el entorno educativo, emplean de manera creciente visiones análogas para la identificación y evaluación de las competencias necesarias, el primero, y para la definición de saberes a transmitir y la evaluación de su adquisición, el segundo. La autora considera que este hecho demuestra una coincidente focalización en los individuos, que son 'representados como actores racionales dotados de conciencias calculadoras' en la búsqueda de la eficacia económica, pedagógica y productiva.

Chapter 3. Education and globalisation

3.1. Education scenario at the turn of the century

It has been widely argued that globalisation has profoundly affected education and its forms of governance (Green, 2002; Rizvi, 2004; Daun, 2005; Leuze *et al.*, 2007; Ozga and Lingard, 2007; Nagel *et al.*, 2010). On the one hand, it has caused a new educational discourse that underlies most of the reforms addressed by individual states, in which the increasing interest of governments to enhance economic performance and competitiveness has gained prominence. One of the impacts of this new approach to education is the high relevance of the terms 'skill', 'skilled work', and 'competence', among others, in public and political spheres. Consequently, improving the quality and efficiency of vocational education and training has become strategic for most governments, because it is directly connected to the provision of skills that are the real levers for the success of modern economies (Keep and Mayhew, 2010).

On the other hand, with the emergence of new cross-country policy flows and international actors, globalisation has modified the states traditional authority on education. Indeed, the increasing influence of rankings promoted by international organizations (IOs) has caused performativity and comparison to become main pre-requisites for national reforms and have highly conditioned policy-makers' decisions. Wanting to succeed in these rankings, policy-makers and experts increasingly refer to educational models developed in other political entities, initiating a widespread transfer of educational policies. The following sections discuss the impacts of globalisation on education in greater detail.

3.1.1. Globalisation as a phenomenon.

Trying to summarise all discussions held on the conception of globalisation would be challenging given the extent of research that has gone into this. Even though the phenomenon the term 'globalisation' refers to emerged with intensified movement across borders after the 1970s, authors (Robertson, 1995; Waters, 1995) agreed to establish the data for a broad use of the term in politics and in academics after the 1990s. Apart from technological factors such as an increase in transportation options due to cheaper energy and new information technologies linking people all over the world, political events were crucial to the emergence of globalisation too (Dale, 1999; Rizvi, 2004; Mundy, 2007). Indeed, the political settlement established after World War II started to be dismantled with the falling of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War, putting an end to the

polarised ideological battle between capitalism and communism. New financial forces emerged, constraining the capacity of individual states to control domestic matters. As a result, the discourse on globalization has been based predominantly on neoliberal economic theories that considered boundaries and borders among countries as hindrances for a real free market.

Nevertheless, some authors (Giddens, 1994; Waters, 1995) argue that globalisation is more than an economic driver: beyond all the economic relations and markets, there is a broad cultural phenomenon that surpasses boundaries. For Giddens (1994: 4) globalisation is about 'action at a distance', alluding to the way economic, political, and cultural factors transcend boundaries merely national. Bourdieu (2003) is also quite critical towards the interpretation of globalisation in a performative manner, which leads to the prioritisation of its understanding as just a neo-liberal model for economics and politics.

Undoubtedly, globalisation has dramatically changed the way the world is organised, establishing a new set of rules. Its effects are very diverse and heterogeneous among countries (Rizvi, 2004; Ozga and Lingard, 2007). But if there were a prominent change to be pointed out, it would definitely be the way globalisation has fostered a new form of relationship between nation states and the world. As Ozga and Lingard affirm, 'globalisation is understood as blurring distinctions between the international and the domestic, the global and the local and in so doing affects a new spatiality to politics' (2007: 65). Consequently, it can be affirmed that public policy and policy-making procedures need to be developed through a new framework in which the capacity for policy-making of individual countries is constrained.

3.1.2. Educational policy in globalisation.

The increase of international influence caused by globalisation has challenged the traditional relationship between nation states, identity construction, and national education systems (Held, 1995; Green, 2002), and has had relevant implications for the comparative study discipline (Green, 2002: 2). This is because the field of comparative education¹ has traditionally been based on the concept of 'national education system' as the 'keystone of the whole mental architecture of comparative education'. Nevertheless, despite the constraint exerted by globalisation on individual states' education policy-making capacity, most authors reject what Weiss (1997) called 'the myth of

¹ Comparative education is a discipline in the social sciences which entails the scrutiny and evaluation of different educational systems, such as those in various countries

the powerless state'. They argue that nation states continue to be relevant and that what has changed is the way they work in the new public management sphere, where local and global forces are in permanent tension (Ball, 1998, Ozga and Lingard, 2007). The 'vernacular globalisation' (1996) (1996) and the 'glocalisation' (1995) proposed by Appadurai and Robertson respectively are concepts that try to capture this tension. Amid these tensions, the economic neoliberal ideology² of globalisation has exerted an important influence on education. Leuze *et al.* (2007: 6–7) point out the concept of 'marketization' and 're-commodification' of education as one of the main trends in education policy today. Ball (1998: 126) argues that despite the continued consideration of education as a 'public good', it is now a market-driven one.

In order to face this changing global reality, countries have adopted a double response – individual and collective (Dale, 1999). Both responses have exerted a relevant influence on the development of the educational discourse and its governance. Individually, countries have become permanently and persistently engaged with increasing national competitiveness. This is the idea contained in Cerny's concept of 'competition state' (1997: 263) and which has caused education policy discourse to adopt the rationale of *education policies at the service of national economic interest*. As a collective response, nation states have involved international actors in order to better address common problems. Through the establishment of multilateral agreements, they have developed a framework of international organizations with whom they have voluntarily shared their political powers in education (Martens and Weymann, 2007). Additionally, international level debates have often been used to legitimise the way domestic problematic issues are addressed (Nagel *et al.*, 2010).

3.1.3. International Organizations in educational governance.

The role of IOs in education governance has evolved following what Mundy (2007: 19-20) defines as multilateralism: 'the forms of collective action among states at the international level' that 'creates a new venue for political contests over shared norms and institutions'. She charts the emergence of educational multilateralism to the policy changes brought about during the founding conference of the United Nations in 1944. Even those IOs whose main objective was not directly related to education (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD, World Bank, World Economic Forum, and the European Union, among others), have progressively incorporated the topic in their agendas (Leuze *et al.*, 2007). Economic and political events during the twentieth century

² With regard to this study, neoliberalism is the idea following which the international distribution of goods and services is best achieved by the market and that, therefore, it should be intensified and expanded (Fine, 2002, Duménil, 2005).

marked the evolution and successive periods of the IOs and influenced their increasing scope and relevance in policy. According to Sjoberg (2016), most IOs have developed their activity in education following neoliberal agendas since the 1990s, and their influence and authority in the field has grown.

Educational governance is carried out by IOs by using different mechanisms in the context of what is called multi-level governance (Dale, 1999; Galvin, 2016; Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2016). These mechanisms have been widely analysed and some authors agree on the lack of openness and accountability on the channels used by international organizations to affect national reforms (Rinne *et al.*, 2004, Leuze *et al.*, 2008). In short, it can be stated that, as IOs usually lack binding capability, they mostly use what are named 'soft government mechanisms' through which they exert indirect influence on nation states' policy decisions (Grek and Ozga, 2010). This is also the case of the European Union: although member states are fully sovereign in the matter of education, the organization has developed diverse mechanisms in order to better coordinate policies and efforts in an attempt to build a European Educational Area. The most relevant of them is the so called Open Method for Coordination³ (Lange and Alexiadou, 2010, Galvin, 2016, Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2016). The complexity of the current multi-level governance will be described in the last section of this chapter.

The role of IOs in policy-making has both detractors and advocates. Leuze *et al.* (2007: 6) mention the 'specific ideologies behind their activities' that 'might not always be consistent with national goals', which may contribute to some kind of distrustful attitude towards IOs' role. Other authors also point out that IOs have sometimes gone beyond the task given by member countries (Martens, 2007: 49), developing 'own agendas' (Nagel *et al.*, 2010: 6) and seeking to influence national policy-making by disseminating their orientation frameworks. Advocates consider IOs initiatives crucial for the development of international cooperation among states and highlight their high capacity to 'pull the string together' (Martens *et al.*, 2004: 2). They defend that IOs' expertise and broader consideration of issues might offer a greater guarantee for comprehensive solutions to shared problems.

This section has described the general educational discourse and governance scenario in which this research is located. Three additional issues merit further analysis. The first one is the so-called 'shift to learning outcomes'⁴ (CEDEFOP, 2008, 2009) that has affected educational design and provision in

⁴ The term 'shift to learning outcomes' can be understood as designating the process following which learning outcomes are

the last decades. The second one concerns the transnational flow of educational policies, which has been relevant to the manner in which national educational reforms have been addressed worldwide. The third issue relates to the educational governance model in the current globalised context, defined as multi-level governance, which has a particular relevance in the European Union's approach to educational reforms. All the three issues have set the context for a modern conception of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and its development in the Basque region of Spain and have influenced the involvement of stakeholders in the process of modernization of its skills provision system. Consequently, the issues are of high relevance to the object of study of this research project. Drawing on literature review, the following sections will address the rationale that underlies the three issues.

3.2. The shift to learning outcomes: conceptualisation

Most comparative researchers agree that the process known as 'shift to learning outcomes' can be considered 'one of the most spectacular and influential phenomena in the development of education systems in Europe and also globally' since the turn of the century (Halász, 2017: 81). In fact, the shift to learning outcomes seeks to change the way education is understood, governed, designed, planned, and delivered (Souto-Otero, 2012). The outcome-based approach to education is formed on the assumption that education should be guided by predetermined products (outputs) instead of by the learning process or curricula (input approach). This way, which will be described in more detail later on, the qualifying processes would be independent of the learning programmes or institutions that provided them. The broad implications of that movement have been widely addressed by scholars from diverse analytical perspectives such as the curriculum development and delivery perspective (Snyder *et al.*, 1992; Van Den Akker, 2005; Stanley, 2012); the Europeanisation perspective (Souto-Otero, 2011; Powell *et al.*, 2012); and the governance and policy implementation perspective (Bjørnåvold and Coles, 2007; Lassnigg, 2012) among others.

increasingly used as a curriculum regulation and educational content design and management tool. Bohlinger (2012: 279) states that the term also refers to the idea of valuing learning achievements that have been acquired throughout individuals' lives no matter where, when, and how they were acquired.

At the European level, learning outcomes⁵ (LO) were definitively incorporated to the political agenda with the launching of the European Qualifications Framework⁶ (EQF) in 2008 and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training⁷ (ECVET) in 2009. Nevertheless, as stated in (CEDEFOP, 2009), outcome-based approaches were first introduced linked to national reforms concerning qualifications in the mid 1980s and, more specifically, to the National Vocational Qualifications in England, Wales, and North Ireland (Jessup, 1991; Raffe, 2013). Functional analysis of occupations (and the learning outcomes related to them) was one of the key elements of this methodology, which sought to improve the employability of the young and the unemployed. That functional approach deeply influenced the first generation of qualifications frameworks introduced in the EU and across the world, ultimately concerning not only VET but also higher education (Melton, 1996; González and Wagenaar, 2003; Muller and Young, 2014). National Qualifications Framework (NQF) based on the learning outcomes approach has been widely introduced, as most advocates see this approach as an effective way of designing and organising teaching and learning, with a potential to improve the quality of education (Halász, 2017). Clarke and Winch also point to the weakening of social partnership throughout Europe as a reason for the learning outcome approach gaining such traction (2015: 598). Nevertheless, some sceptical groups warn against the way ‘the focus on learning outcomes draws attention from pedagogies and learning contexts’ (Cedefop, 2015: 2) and a strong awareness can be found in the literature of the risk of dysfunctional uses of LOs (Melton, 1996; Hussey and Smith, 2002; Souto-Otero, 2012; Allais, 2014).

The way qualifications are perceived and how they operate among users is a relevant issue in the analysis of educational frameworks and the significance of the use of LOs. Traditionally, qualifications have emerged based on some kind of tacit consensus concerning what they stand for. Thus, a qualification is, to some extent, a proxy for what a learner knows and can do; a (sort of) currency which a holder can take beyond the educational institution and utilise as a mediator between educational institutions, between educational institution and the labour market, or within the labour market (Strathdee, 2003; ILO, 2009b: 12; Brockmann *et al.*, 2011). A broad trust in the institutions

⁵ Learning outcome: ‘set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal.’ Or ‘Statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which can be defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence’, (CEDEFOP, 2014: 164-165)

⁶ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01)

⁷ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECEVET) (2009/C 155/02)

offering the programmes leading to qualifications is crucial to support this model. However, the issue of trust in institutions becomes problematic when cross-country mobility of users increases. The higher the mobility of people and the complexity of the society, the less feasibly can trust depend on familiarity with particular institutions and face-to-face contact. The outcome-based qualifications appeared as an alternative basis for trust that would enable learner (and worker) mobility. Willing to implement the economic principle of freedom of mobility of products, services, and people, governments have increasingly favoured the new approach.

The introduction of frameworks has traditionally sought to improve the general understanding of qualifications (degrees, certificates, or recognition of experienced learning) with a twofold objective. First, by considering the information that these qualifications may convey to employers. And second, by seeking a better understanding of the way in which qualifications relate to each other in order to help build paths within and across occupations and education and training sectors (ILO, 2009b: v). The introduction of the new approach has implied a huge change in education: a move from qualifications in programmes identified with the institutions that confer them, to qualifications that are expressed in terms of written statements of learning outcomes (ILO, 2009b: 1). Young and Allais suggest an interesting way of conceptualizing this change. They point out two contrasting 'ideal types' of qualifications frameworks – the 'institution-based' and the 'outcome-based' which identify tendencies developed over time and to different extents in a range of countries (Young and Allais, 2009: 2).

The traditional or institutional framework (Young, 2007a) is characterised by professions and education providers occupying a significant autonomy and control over qualifications. This way, qualifications are rooted in the awarding institutions, and the trust in them is based on the confidence placed in those institutions, as well as in the learning programmes they develop (this is why it is also known as input based). However, with the new economic context after the 1980s, some limitations of the traditional qualifications model became apparent to governments, because neither employers nor governments could intervene to bring qualifications more in line with their needs or priorities. That model also limited the range of choices that were available to learners for becoming qualified and the number of occupational fields with available qualifications. The term provider

capture⁸ that Raggatt and Williams (1999) made popular in the 1980s refers to these limitations (cited in Young and Allais, 2009: 8).

Some policy interventions were designed in the 1980s in New Zealand and United Kingdom to address those limitations. The outcome-based model can be thus seen as an attempt to shift the balance of power from provider-defined qualifications to user-defined ones, where *user* includes government, employers, and learners. Qualifications are defined in terms of written outcomes alone and possess no relationship with the learning programmes which have led to them. The underlying idea is that learning outcomes can capture the essence of what is taught across different learning programmes provided by diverse institutions (Allais, 2012: 333-334). It is this sense of essence that makes the outcomes capture the sameness between qualifications, in order for them to cross boundaries between nation states, different parts of education and training systems, or between education programmes and life (specially work) experiences. As stated by Adam (2008: 13)

‘Universal approaches to reference points, based on learning outcomes, make cross-border judgements as to the level, nature and equivalence of qualifications easier and more accurate’.

The ways in which learning outcomes have been introduced across countries also vary significantly. In South Africa, the outcome-based curriculum and national qualifications framework were introduced after 1995, the year following the first democratic elections. They were implemented as a tool to reform the apartheid-based education system towards a more democratic one (Allais, 2003, 2010). In the United Kingdom, it was a response to high youth unemployment whereas in New Zealand, it was triggered by a crisis in its economic model, just to mention some lesson drawn from the first frameworks developed (ILO, 2009a). Young and Allais state that, despite the diversity of specific reasons leading countries to the introduction of the outcome-based approach to qualifications, they all have something in common: they seek to restrict the autonomy of institutions and make them more efficient and effective by having them compete with each other. Consequently, they warn that ‘what is at stake is the role of educational institutions in the education and training of next generation, the balance between education institution-based and informal (in some cases work-based) learning and the ways in which trust in qualifications is established and maintained’

⁸ The concept conveys the idea that education providing institutions, both public and private, are more inclined to focus on the needs of their staff and on what they are able to teach, instead of to their role as providers of a public service, which has to be more in line with employers’ and learners’ needs. This way, educational providers would have captured the market, and would have contributed to the creation of inefficiencies and becoming themselves barriers to the entry of new players.

(Young and Allais, 2009: 7).

In addition to these cautionary remarks, it should be noted that the concept learning outcome itself is very general. Bohlinger (2012: 281) states that, from a research point of view, there is no generally accepted term for describing the results of a learning process. She argues that national policy debates are often linked to validation and recognition of the so-called prior learning, while research-based discussions have mainly addressed the models and theories on how to develop, evaluate, and assess knowledge, skills, abilities, competences, capabilities, or expertise rather than referring to the notion of learning outcomes (Colardyn, 1996; de Terssac, 1996; Bohlinger, 2008). Such a heterogeneous approach to the definition of the results of a learning process leads to a very diverse interpretation of the concept learning outcome, and it is therefore not applied in the same way in all frameworks.

Many claims have been made on what the learning outcome-based approach can achieve. It can enable comparison among qualifications across and within countries, occupational fields, and educational systems; enhance the recognition of prior and/or experiential learning; improve educational quality; and even increase the access to education. As most critics observe, all of the above is based on the assumption that outcomes can capture the essence of what a learning programme or qualification represents and that, consequently, outcomes can be transparent. Nevertheless, scholars have pointed out several flaws in that assumption. Clarke and Winch (2006) describe substantial differences in the way the terms' outcome and competence are used within Europe and argue that these limitations of the language cause relevant practical problems to an open comparability among qualifications solely based on LOs. Other authors have found epistemological problems with the disclosure of the essence of a learning programme out of the LOs, because they consider that theoretical, disciplinary, or practical knowledge cannot be derived from them (Gamble, 2002; Shalem, Allais *et al.*, 2004; Wheelahan, 2010). Similarly, Brockmann *et al.* affirm that

'Any curriculum that is reasonably complex, which seeks to develop abilities, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and dispositions, is bound to be difficult to encapsulate in simple, very precise, statements related to highly particular behaviours. This, however, is precisely what is required of learning outcomes when these are referred to performance outputs.' (2008: 102)

In the same vein, Allais states that learning outcomes are not sufficiently meaningful unless embedded in knowledge within a curriculum or learning programme, as the input-based approach does (2012: 331). Young adds that over-emphasising the portability of qualifications between diverse

occupational fields is also quite problematic, because they are characterised by different conditions for learning (2007b: 450). Finally, he refers to a much broader problem: the adoption of mandatory assessment methods which, in order to attain the necessary trust, need to be based on criteria or standards rather than on examinations (*Ibid.*: 452). In fact, the assessment of the LOs has proven to be quite complex when it comes to the operationalization of the qualifications frameworks. He also warns against the counter-productive and unintended consequences of introducing outcome-based qualifications frameworks in countries with only a relatively developed institutional provision. Allais draws similar conclusions; focusing on the experiences of developing countries where neoliberal experiments and free-market policies have had a more thorough implementation (Chang, 2010: 262), she argues that the conceptual problems of the approach appear clearer in these cases (Allais, 2012: 332).

Summarising, the increasing international interest in the idea of national and international qualifications frameworks based on the learning outcomes approach is unquestionable, and it has dominated educational policy internationally. As a result of the global economic competition, the economic relevance of non-formal, informal, and experiential learning has grown, and their accreditation through outcomes-based qualifications has become a key policy instrument (Grubb and Lazerson, 2006). The learning outcomes approach to education and training is significant in the EU where it has operated as an effective tool to implement a common educational policy within its complex governance architecture (Halász, 2017: 82). The shift to learning outcomes approach has indeed become one of the central components of the skills policy of the EU since the Lisbon Council in 2000.

With relation to the object of interest of this research, the origins of the outcomes – (or competences) based VET, as well as the way that approach to vocational education and training design and provision has been operationalised through the deployment of the NQF will be described in the fourth chapter. Inasmuch as ‘the impact of the frameworks will ultimately depend on their ability to make a difference to end-users, be these learners, employers, education and training providers, or others’ (CEDEFOP, 2016: 1), the relationships among stakeholders directly concerned with the crucial issue of trust in qualifications, become relevant and will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

3.3. The transnational flow of educational policies: main approaches

It has already been pointed out that one of the effects of globalisation in the educational governance has to do with the way policy-makers and experts have increasingly turned to models developed in other political entities when addressing national educational reforms, causing a transnational flow of educational policies and reforms. This global phenomenon has been addressed by different academic disciplines (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Ochs and Philips, 2004; Marsh and Sharman, 2009; Chakroun, 2010; Steiner-Khamsi, 2010; McGrath and Lugg, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012), resulting in very diverse conceptualizations. Some authors defend that, when considering the different ways in which policy transfer is applied to the design of educational policies, policy borrowing and lending, and policy learning are the two most representative trends which, at the same time, depict quite contrasting approaches (Chakroun, 2010; Raffe, 2011b; McGrath and Lugg, 2012; Hodgson and Spours, 2016). The following paragraphs will offer a more detailed view of these two approaches.

3.3.1. Policy borrowing and policy learning: two contrasting approaches.

Policy borrowing and lending has a long tradition in comparative education. In the last three decades, it has emerged as the primary logic used to mobilise public concern for education and has driven reforms in numerous countries (Morris, 2012). The interpretive framework used by many authors relates to the twofold political and economic dimensions of policy transfer (Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012). Politically, borrowing is often celebrated in policy conflicts since borrowed policies can act as a supposedly neutral option that can help build governing coalitions. In that sense, the international standards promoted by IOs are increasingly perceived as a touchstone for educational reform. International referencing can also become a policy-makers' strategy to either legitimise potentially contested educational reforms or to increase the legitimacy of their own education designs (Maurer and Gonon, 2014). There has also been a tendency to borrow only from those countries that feature similar political trends (Keep, 1991 cited in Raffe and Spours, 2007: 2). Economically, policy borrowing often becomes a transient process because it might be a precondition to receive external aid. It might thus only exist as long as the grant or loans remain. In such cases, especially whenever they apply to poorer countries, policy borrowing can be coercive and unidirectional. It is worthwhile to note that reforms from elsewhere cannot always be regarded as borrowed for rational reasons (Morris, 2012, Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Furthermore, when referring to federal and devolved systems, Keating and Cairney argue that the adoption of policies that are being applied elsewhere not always strictly responds to the will to improve policy performance, and that

devolved governments that seek further autonomy may compare themselves with other state level political entities due to strict political motivations (2012: 240, 244).

One of the pitfalls authors attribute to the policy borrowing approach arises when international experience is used to identify examples of transferable 'best practices' (Raffe, 2011b) in order to drive 'quick-fix' solutions that often lead to uncritical policy transfer and, eventually, to policy failure (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Morris, 2012; Chung, 2015). In fact, generic analysis about effectiveness shows that the identification of best practices is highly context-dependent and subject to judgement, and that there is a relevant component of tacit knowledge of policy-makers and stakeholders which is difficult to codify and reply to (Borrás, 2011: 730). Official documents do not entirely capture debates, conflicts, and problems experienced in a country, and whenever a complete picture of the country a policy is being borrowed from is missing, policy borrowing can be a dangerous practice (ILO, 2009a: 3). Hodgson and Spours (2016: 511) suggest that, when adopting the policy borrowing approach to policy-making, policy-makers are living in the 'expanded present' (Pollitt, 2000), with little understanding of history and limited reflection on the future.

Conversely, policy learning uses this international experience to support a much more critical and long-term analysis, leading to the development of tailored national policies which are embedded in already existing institutions and based on a broad sense of ownership (Grootings, 2007: 29). This way, although policy learning might also be considered a particular style of policy borrowing (Lange and Alexiadrou, 2010), it indeed presents quite differentiated characteristics. It entails a close relationship with knowledge and refers to the specific process by which knowledge, evidence, and experience are used by governments and systems of governance in the formulation and implementation of policies (Chakroun, 2008: 12; Borrás, 2011). Inasmuch as policy learning arguably leads to more effective policies, the interest in that approach to policy-making has increased over the last two decades (McGrath and Lugg, 2012: 703).

With regard to VET, the international debates on the complex issue of the transnational flow of policies has been more specifically revolving around the global spread of learning outcomes-based National Qualifications Frameworks and their role in the transformation and modernization of national systems (Young, 2005; Chakroun, 2010; Pilcher *et al.*, 2017). Relevant studies have addressed their development in a broad number of countries (ILO, 2009a; Allais, 2010b) and the benefits they arguably provide to users (Young, 2005; Young and Gordon, 2007; Allais, 2009; Raffe, 2009, 2011b) will be broadly analysed in the next chapter.

The following sections will describe the main concepts and theories that underlie the policy learning approach to policy-making. They will also explain the most relevant issues concerning the study of these processes.

3.3.2. Policy learning: theoretical analysis and conceptual tools.

The theoretical basis of the policy learning approach draws on literature from a wide range of disciplines (education, political science, sociology and change management, among others). A wide understanding of the approach requires the consideration of writings on theoretical accounts (Bennett and Howlett, 1992; Hall, 1993), empirical works (Raffe and Spours, 2007; Borrás, 2011; Hodgson and Spours, 2016; Tamtik, 2016) and reports on the experience drawn by the European Training Foundation from European partner countries (Grootings, 2004; Chakroun, 2008), among many others.

The origin of policy learning can be traced back to the 1980s when, following a cognitive turn in policy analysis, an interest from social scientists on learning processes in policy-making emerged (Borrás, 2011: 726) prompted by a different approach towards change in policies. Contrary to the previous beliefs that policy change could only occur as a consequence of pressure or political struggles, the new approach defended learning as an important source of policy change. This instrumental view of policy learning was concerned with its effectiveness and impact on changing policies and behaviour. Thus, Heclo (1974: 306) defines policy learning as 'a relatively enduring change in behaviour that results from experience' and suggested that the acquisition of knowledge about policies is vital for policy-makers. The concept has evolved during the last decades, and the works of theorists have increasingly highlighted the significant role of ideas and discourses in changing the thinking about policy-making (Hall, 1989; Bennett and Howlett, 1992; May, 1992). More specifically, Hall (1989) stressed the relevance of learning in transforming the 'national policy-making assumptions' (Dale, 1999: 11). From this point of view, policy learning can be seen as a highly political exercise, capable of challenging national policy-making traditions. Bennett and Howlett (1992) developed a valuable literature review on policy learning which includes the concepts developed by earlier theorists: 'political learning' by Heclo (1974); 'policy-oriented learning' by Sabatier (1987); 'lesson drawing' by Rose (1991), ranging from copying to inspiring; 'social learning' by Hall (1988) and 'government learning' by Etheredge and Short (1983). They also built a framework based on a three-level typology of policy-learning, differentiating between government learning, lesson-drawing, and social learning and argued that each of the three levels could actually lead to institutional change. Many authors

still draw on this framework to develop their theoretical approaches to policy learning.

However, it should be noted that the process of learning that can lead to policy change is neither an automatic process nor a rationalistic one. It is not an automatic process because it contains a relevant component of purposefulness because it aims to improve the functioning of policies (Olsen and Peters, 1996). And it should not be seen as rationalistic because it is embedded in complex contexts in which conflicts of interest, changing power relations, and legitimacy conditions converge (Radaelli, 1995).

Many definitions of policy learning can be found in the literature. The one still featuring the widest acceptance among scholars (Borrás, 2011: 727) defines policy learning as

'the commonly described tendency for some policy decisions to be made on the basis of knowledge and past experiences and knowledge-based judgements as to future expectations' (Bennett and Howlett, 1992: 278).

Tamtik (2016: 6) affirms that policy learning theories focus on human agency, in the way individuals process information and knowledge, learn and solve problems and, eventually, cause institutional change. In the same vein, Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) define policy learning as a process of updating beliefs concerning policies based on lived or witnessed experiences, analysis, or social interactions (cited in Tamtik, 2016: 6). Mabbett (2007: 78) focuses on the social processes involved in learning, such as 'facilitating deliberating, developing networks and enabling actors to share good practice and compare results', contributing to a more procedural definition of policy learning. Finally, policy learning is also considered a practice in which evidence and experience are used to draw lessons that are applied by governments for policy-making (Grootings, 2004; Raffe, 2011b). Following this approach, international experience is used for a wider range of purposes, including understanding one's own system better by drawing on national system history and involving a range of stakeholders; identifying policy options in comparable contexts; as well as understanding processes of change and anticipating issues. Based on this perspective, one of the challenges of policy learning is to encourage the involvement of policy-makers in a collective learning process by drawing on local and international experiences (Chakroun, 2008: 14).

The analysis of policy learning experiences needs to focus particularly on the underlying processes of learning. Grootings (2004: 14) emphasises the need for a broad policy learning specially whenever addressing VET reforms. He gathers the main features of the most recent learning paradigms by

employing the concept of 'active learning' (cited in Chakroun, 2008: 14). He stresses the idea that there are many ways people can learn apart from just receiving information from the teacher. Following these theories, learning is a situated social activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991); a lot of tacit learning is involved in any learning process, ready to be used when needed, although it is difficult to quantify or define (Schön, 1987); and it is experiential and dynamic learning that determines a good learning (Kolb, 1984). Following these theories, the acquisition and use of knowledge by people becomes more successful whenever they are involved in the process. People's engagement also increases their motivation to learn and, consequently, it makes them more likely to take responsibility for their own learning. This way, active learning creates conducive learning environments and, consequently, good learning outcomes.

Additionally, active learning-based policy processes set the scene for a more collaborative policy-making in which experience sharing, situated problem solving, and reflection are promoted, helping to develop not only a better understanding of policy issues, but also a broader ownership and embeddedness in existing institutions (Grootings, 2004). Furthermore, policy learning enhances national capacity to lead reforms. As stated by Borrás (2011: 731) 'those countries with the strongest forms of organizational capacity would be those who tend to learn and change more'. As a conclusion, advocates of the policy learning approach to educational policy reforms stress that it helps design more effective policies (Grootings, 2004, ETF, 2004, 2007; Raffe and Spours, 2007, Chakroun, 2008).

Notwithstanding all the advantages of applying the policy learning approach to policy-making, it should be noted that that benefiting from the experience of others by mutual learning is quite a rare and difficult matter. It often depends on 'accidents of meetings and personal acquaintances' (Parry and McDouglas, 2005: 8) and always implies that 'someone in the receiving jurisdiction is willing and able to undertake the necessary research and adaptation' (Keating and Cairney, 2012: 242). It is also necessary that policy-makers consider all the relevant contextual factors and avoid the constraints posed by what Simon (1976) called 'boundary rationality'. Finally, problems about linking policy and research, like different time scales or political and administrative imperatives (Raffe and Spours, 2007: 226) often arise. Consequently, pure policy learning in policy-making is arguably quite unusual and, as Hodgson and Spours (2016) suggest, the understanding of the challenges and possibilities for policy learning would be better served by considering a framework of restrictive/expansive policy

learning continuum⁹. The next section summarises the challenges posed by the study of policy learning processes.

a) *The study of policy learning processes.*

Policy learning processes can become difficult to study, because the learning involved usually gets too vague to be distinctly observed (Raffe and Spours, 2007: 4) and cannot be directly observed (May, 1992). Additionally, the relationship between policy and change is often blurred, and change is difficult to quantify and evince (Chakroun, 2008: 18; Radaelli, 2008 cited in Tamtik, 2016: 7). Consequently, the products of the overall process are usually more noticeable than the underlying learning processes (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). Olsen and Peters (1996) defend that successful policy learning can be observed through the achievement of effective policies. However, even though several frameworks have been developed to determine the success of a policy (Marsh and McConnell, 2010), the fact that policy learning cannot be considered as the sole element which determines the success of policies (Raffe and Spours, 2007: 5) undermines the strength of the argument.

The complexity of evaluating learning processes based on a comparative analysis of developed policies increases when relating to the field of VET. First, because VET systems are embedded in other social subsystems – as labour relations, basic and higher education or company management – increasing the number of stakeholders involved and the intricacy of relations (Homs, 2009; Verdier, 2013). Second, because there is little technical language available for transnational dialogue (McGrath and Lugg, 2012). In fact, the meaning of key terms underlying VET models are rooted in historical and institutional evolution (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012), which gave rise to diverse industrial and labour processes and non-equivalent socio-economic roles of qualifications (Clarke and Winch, 2006). And third, because, as acknowledged in the UNESCO World Report on TVET of 2012, it

⁹ In Fuller and Unwin's work (2008), this type of continuum has been used to analyse the experience of apprenticeships in relation to company policy and practice, and to help understand and categorise the barriers and opportunities to learning experienced by modern apprentices across case studies. Hodgson and Spours (2016) apply this concept for examining policy learning across the four countries of United Kingdom, namely England, Scotland, Wales and North Ireland and thus situate different types of policy learning in relation to national and global ideological and governance environments. The framework defines four dimensions of policy learning: policy motivation applied to the improvement of one's own system, in order to either compete or collaborate; governance structures and forms of exchange in which involvement of stakeholders and practitioners is either hindered or enhanced; international comparison and system election used for either selecting 'best practice' to compete or, on the contrary, for identifying 'good practice' to assist in the discussion of national policy options; and historical understanding, through which determine if a 'policy amnesia' climate of constant policy innovation applies, as opposed to an exercise of 'policy memory' and reflection.

is widely accepted that VET data is more problematic than general education data, making international comparisons more difficult.

The study of policy transfer becomes even more difficult in federal or devolved systems. As mechanisms for dividing and sharing power and policy-making among diverse administrative levels, they create new dynamics that challenge the understanding of the ongoing policy processes. In fact, 'multi-level policy-making can lead to divergence within the states, to convergence around negotiated solutions or to complex patterns of differentiation, co-operation and learning' (Keating and Cairney, 2012: 240). Willing to find their own solutions to political problems, sub-sections of a state can be interested in policy innovation. It should however be noted that initiating such a process of divergence requires a degree of political and economic autonomy. Whenever innovation produces successful policies, divergence can be followed by convergence when governments learn from each other and imitate the new ways to address common situations.

Because larger (mostly central) governments are likely to be better-resourced in devolved systems, they are usually more successful in policy innovation. Consequently, legislation or institutions are applied to smaller jurisdictions and cause vertical policy transfer from the centre to the periphery. A higher legal and contextual compatibility within states facilitates these processes. But vertical policy transfer might also be considered coercive when the competences are shared, and the higher level enacts framework laws that limit the scope for discretion at the devolved level. The latter has been quite a controversial matter in Spain, where the dilemma between equity and territorial diversity persists (Gallego and Subirats, 2012). Keating and Cairney (2012) argue that a complex set of relationships between political jurisdictions result in an interweaving of an amalgam of mechanisms for policy transfer. These mechanisms range from intergovernmental cooperation to intricate, and sometimes disputed, patterns of negotiation, making policy transfer especially hard to identify.

The complexity of studying policy learning processes has been pointed out hitherto. It especially applies to VET policy-making and gets even more intricate whenever federated or devolved governmental models are involved. Considering the effect of globalisation on educational policy and governance, with the increasing relevance of IOs, the analysis of multi-level governance processes becomes crucial in order to better contextualise current educational policy-making. This is addressed in the next section.

3.4. Multi-level governance in education

As previously addressed in this chapter, globalisation has involved an increasing international ascendancy on educational governance. Influential organizations have emerged during the last decades leading to a collective action among states defined as multilateralism (Mundy, 2007: 19). The way in which policy-making is conducted within this new context has been broadly addressed by scholars. Based on the idea that policy-making processes do not always follow the sequence of a rational problem-solving perspective (Sabatier and Weible, 2007), issues of ambiguity, information asymmetries, and the role of context have been identified as challenging the rational approach to problem solving by governing institutions (Howlett, 2005: 40). Drawing on the analysis of the impact of global trends on national contexts, Gornitzka and Maassen (2014) have pointed out the diverse elements that play a role in policy decisions: local institutional arrangements, path dependencies, interplays between various policies, and temporal sorting of events. Elken (2016: 629) argues that the institutional arrangement is not only a determining factor in the way policy problems are addressed but also provides rules for behaviour (March and Olsen, 1989) and for determining what is considered appropriate (March and Olsen, 2008) and where past decisions and trajectories play a role in current decisions (Thelen, 1999).

But what is governance? Governance as the 'activity of governing' generally refers to the process following which the diverse elements in society exert power and authority (ETF, 2013: 6), which includes the procedural, structural, functional, and instrumental aspects (Benz, 2004). Furthermore, governance is about power, relationships, and accountability: who exerts influence, who makes decisions, and how are those who have influence and make decisions held accountable (Abrams *et al.*, 2003 cited in ETF, 2013: 6). Governance also includes the way in which stakeholders have their say (Oliver, 2010). Similarly, Lange and Alexiadou define governance in European education as 'the exercise of power through networks that are composed of both traditional public institutional actors, such as the European Commission, the Council and the member states, as well as private individuals, such as businesses, teachers, parents, school pupils, students and academics involved in EU education policy-making' (2010: 444). They argue that the term governance suggests that power can be exercised at various levels, involving actors who are located at international, national, regional, and local levels (Telo, 2002: 249) in what is named governance in the multi-level context or multi-level governance. But multi-level governance goes further than a static distribution of political power between different levels (Wilkożewski and Sundby, 2016: 447). It also involves the dynamic

relationships between actors and their interdependency. Additionally, the mechanisms of power sharing often result in overlapping competences across levels (Hooghe and Marks, 2002) and makes new stakeholders relevant to the decision-making process (Hooghe *et al.*, 2012).

An effective policy development and implementation by multi-level governance should be based on an active partnership supported by systematic horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms (ETF, 2013: 6). These coordination mechanisms try to build on synergies between different tiers of government. In that scheme, vertical coordination refers to the effective connection from the centre to the lower levels of political action, whereas horizontal coordination alludes to the range of public and private actors interplaying at the same level.

Notwithstanding the relevance of both horizontal and vertical coordination, Wilkoszewski and Sundby (2016: 448) consider that one of the main challenges of multi-level systems is the election of a body responsible for overseeing and steering. This question especially applies to educational governance: the increasing comparability of national educational models across regions and countries actually enhances the asymmetry between the diverse governance levels and causes important governance gaps (Charbit, 2011). As a consequence of these asymmetries, vertical governance structure appears insufficient and softer modes of governance have emerged, either complementing or replacing the classical steering mechanisms of rigid regulatory controls ('hard governance'), giving rise to a differentiation between what are named *hard* and *soft* governance mechanisms. In an attempt to build a framework for qualifying specific governance mechanisms as hard or soft, Hood and Margetts (2007) defined four dimensions which they used to determine the degree of rigidity of the relations between central and local levels (regulation, organisation of governance, financial resources, and flow of information). Nevertheless, the distinction between soft and hard modes of governance is not a binary one but rather responds to a sliding scale, as each system can encompass both types of mechanisms (Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2016: 448). Additionally, because governments have increasingly considered legal regulations alone insufficient (Abbott and Snidal, 2000: 423), softer mechanisms for multi-level governance have become most applied due to their advantages: they can be less costly in terms of time and finance and easier to achieve; they allow for more effective ways to deal with complexity and, most of all, they do not threaten the overall governance structure.

One of the most relevant soft governance mechanisms is the European Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Galvin defines OMC as a 'model of multilevel governance which contributes as a policy-

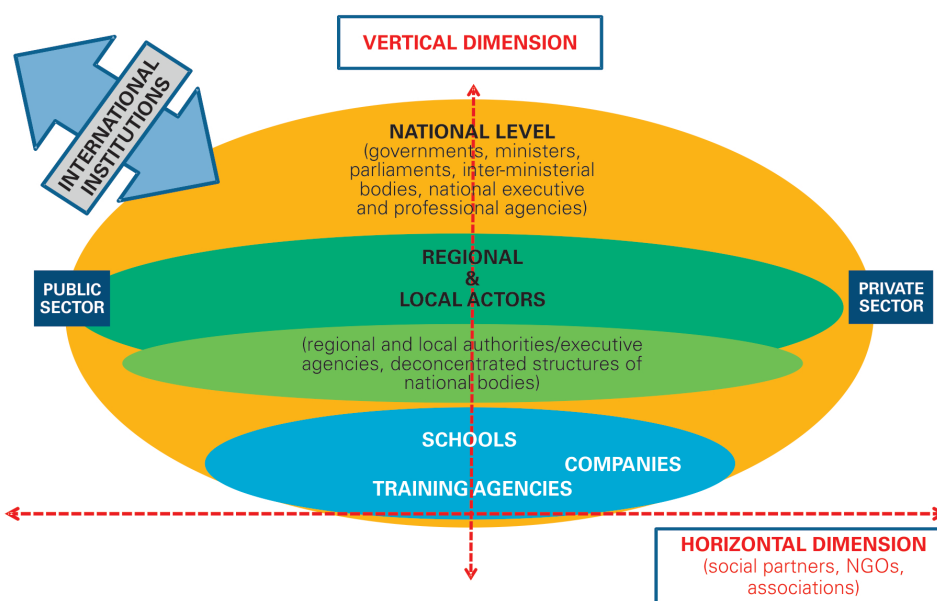
making process in the transnational coordination at the EU supranational governance level and influences national policy priorities and agendas in the education and training policy area' (2016: 495). Following Lange and Alexiadou (2010: 444), 'the OMC tries to overcome the restrictions placed by the constitutional framework of the EU' and becomes the standard mode of governance for the lesser-integrated policy areas. Thus, in education, as in other areas of social policy covered by the principle of subsidiarity, the OMC is 'a flexible means of working towards shared European objectives', and does so by setting policy priorities, outcomes, and frameworks for intervention rather than legislation (Pochet, 2005: 41; Souto-Otero *et al.*, 2008).

With a vague design of 'European education policy' as a goal, the first steps were taken to facilitate freedom of movement for European employees. Consequently, the acknowledgement of professional qualifications across member states became a key policy and the learning outcome-based qualifications frameworks spread. The process was part of a discretionary policy (Souto-Otero, 2011) based on soft governance mechanisms, without a coercive regulatory mechanism being applied. This way, the Education and Training Work Programme 2010/2020 (the umbrella term for the education OMC since the Lisbon Council 2000 challenged EU member states to develop OMC processes in the field of education) was the alternative mechanism designed to respond to the reluctance of Member States to delegate more power to the European institutions. Instead of replacing national competence, the OMC adds a relevant layer to the multi-level governance of education (Beukel, 2001), where informal normative pressures, agenda-setting, and mutual policy learning may be as powerful as legal prescription for influencing national policy-making reforms (Lange and Alexiadou, 2010: 444). The progressive introduction of VET in the OMC has caused the development of shared objectives supported by benchmarking, reporting by states, and policy peer reviews (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 25). Nevertheless, different examples of interventions show that OMC sometimes works slowly and cannot achieve policy outcomes in the short or medium term (Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2016).

The multi-level governance mechanisms for policy-making have been addressed in this section, specially focusing on the educational field. In the case of Vocational Education and Training, authors agree on the additional complexity of this particular policy area, as 'it sits at the intersection of several institutions and policy areas' (Grootings, 2004: 14). VET is 'expected to address a range of issues: the present and the future skill demands of the economy; individual citizens' needs for short – and long – term employability and personal development; and society's requirement for active

citizens' (ETF, 2013: 7). Furthermore, the pace of technological and economic change and the uncertain evolution of labour markets shape the rapidly evolving context to which VET systems have to respond. This all adds further complexity to the always intricate multi-governance mechanisms, as shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1.: Actors and policy-making levels in multilevel VET governance: vertical and horizontal coordination and the complexity of the actors involved



Source: ETF, 2013.

Consequently, governance of VET can be defined as a 'complex and evolving issue' (ETF, 2013: 24), where management should be 'based on the involvement of stakeholders at all levels for objective setting, implementation and monitoring', and governance would aim at 'reinforcing interaction between stakeholders and improving accountability, transparency, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of policies' (CEDEFOP, 2011). The next chapter will delve into the complexities and the evolution of the diverse VET systems.

Chapter 4. Vocational Education and Training

The extensive literature on vocational education and training indicates that it is a field whose conceptualisation has evolved over the last centuries. As in the case of other forms of education, its aims and the way they are addressed varies immensely across countries and cultures. Clarke and Winch state that the simplest way of perceiving VET is as a 'training for particular jobs in order to serve the needs of the employers', typically in the Anglo-Saxon tradition and specifically from the British perspective (2007: 10). The former is linked to Adam Smith's approach in *The Wealth of Nations* as well as to the product-oriented characterisation of the English labour market by Biernacki (1995). This view contrasts with a more liberal one, which is as concerned with personal emancipation and development and civic education as with economic development. Relevant figures of this second tradition are Georg Kerschensteiner in Germany (described in Greinert, 2007) and John Dewey in the United States (Lewis, 2007; Pring, 2007). Nevertheless, these two traditions should not be considered incompatible. Moreover, many countries have incorporated elements from both traditions when developing their own models.

Clarke and Winch affirm that the differences among VET systems revolve around the uneven perceptions of values for working life they imply (2007: 9). This can be conceived either as successive short-term jobs with narrow skills or as a lifelong involvement in the labour market. Often, it is conceived somehow in between. In fact, they point to a more recent slant on vocational education and training – that of lifelong learning – which has permeated the European Union's general approach to education and training. This view is linked to the idea of self-development during adulthood along with the need to permanently adapt to the increasing pace of change in the current socio-economic environment. Consequently, vocational education and training in a European sense 'seeks to provide qualifications that enable access to employment, give entry to higher levels of education (not necessarily academic) and empower people to act as responsible citizens in the community' (Grootings, 2007: 14). He also states that the latter notion of VET entails individuals playing an instrumental role in the transfer of knowledge and socialisation (personal development).

The diverse aspects of comparative vocational education have been addressed by numerous works in the English language after the 1980s; the way qualifications and skills relate to

workplace and productivity in European countries (Prais, 1995); the typology of skills equilibria developed by Ashton and Green (1996), who built upon the distinction made by Finegold (1991) between 'high skills' and 'low skills' equilibria; the interconnected relationships between education and work in Jobert *et al.* (1997) which scrutinised the questions, concepts, and analytical approaches distinctive to particular countries; the idea of the diverse qualities of labour and their links to historical, institutional, and social contexts (Maurice *et al.*, 1986); the different organization of national VET systems (Green *et al.*, 1999), the multidisciplinary-approach to the study of skill formation in Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and the USA in Brown *et al.* (2001); and the study focused on the concept of skill and its shifting usage (Buchanan *et al.*, 2004), among many others. In the light of the literature, the term that most often arises whenever vocational education and training systems is historically addressed is skill. As a matter of fact, the term *skills provision regimes* has been broadly employed to refer to VET systems across countries.

The varied approaches to VET found in the literature corroborates the statement made by Verdier:

'Any attempt to compare national vocational education and training (VET) systems comes up against the constraint of complexity, for such schemes are embedded in other social sub-systems (e.g. labour relations, basic education, higher education, labour market, company management)' (2013: 70).

Based on different theoretical and disciplinary traditions, he described several approaches to compare VET systems, one of which is particularly interesting with respect to this research project – the socio-historical approach in which comparisons are carried out by tracking the origin and evolution of national institutions, public issues, and social categorisations of work, and which also includes the relationships among the diverse actors involved.

The characterisation of different VET systems or skills provision regimes is addressed in the following sections.

4.1. VET systems as skills provision regimes for competitiveness

In the last decades countries have become fully engaged with the enhancement of their national competitiveness. This engagement has highly influenced educational policies. The

rationale underlying these movements is, in short, that countries will succeed in the new global order only if they can provide highly skilled citizens to improve national competitiveness. In fact, the differences in productivity, and thus, economic success that countries have achieved since World War II are considered to be grounded on skill differentials (Clarke and Winch, 2006). Skills, skilled work, and skill provision have gained unquestioned prominence in contemporary socioeconomic, educational, and political debates.

However, the concept of skill is quite a problematic one. On the one hand, far from being a recent concept, it has traditionally been approached by different disciplines. These multidisciplinary attempts to address the term (Mayer and Solga, 2008; Green, 2013) have resulted in very diverse conceptualisations. On the other hand, the concept of skill, together with other terms closely related to vocational training and labour (qualification, competence, knowledge), has also proven to be a socially constructed one. Its meaning is rooted in national culture (Clarke and Winch, 2006; Brockmann *et al.*, 2008), in historical and institutional evolution (Thelen, 2004; Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012), and exhibits varied cross-national resonance, which makes a harmonious approach quite a challenge. In addition, the assessment and implementation of skills occurs mostly in the workplace, an environment characterised by unequal power relationships (Rainbird *et al.*, 2008), and the concept is often linked to the sensitive issue of wages. In fact, in the contemporary collective imaginary, skilled work is linked to not just better wages but also well-being. The opportunity for performing highly skilled work in a good learning environment is considered a key ingredient of good job quality (Green, 2013).

The high popularity and frequent use of the terms skill and skilled work in political, academic, and public sphere have led to what some authors consider a 'conceptual inflation' (Clarke and Winch, 2006: 258), further complicating its conceptualisation. As Green affirms:

'Unlike constructs in the natural sciences, skill is one of those social science words in common parlance with many meanings, numerous synonyms (...) and varied imprecise translations in other languages' (2013: 9).

Although this work does not intend to develop an exhaustive description of the term, in the next section the diverse discipline-based approaches are summarised.

4.1.1. Conceptualisation of skill.

In the contemporary era, the increasing salience of the term skill should be considered a fact; however, skill is not a plain concept to be conceptualised but is rather a complex and ambiguous idea. No consensus can be found among scientists or policy-makers on its meaning (Green, 2013). Although they all share the essential concept of some kind of *proficiency* or *ability to do something well*, various distinctive and complementary meanings emerge from dictionary definitions. Numerous approaches may be considered, from those views of social philosophers who proved that executing skilled work and becoming more skilled in work is a fundamental human need to the contemporary association of the term with economic performance.

Seeking references on skill, this study refers to the theories of Adam Smith, Marx, and Weber, which offer different views considering connections between skill and work relations, jobs, and social constructions. The term has been addressed in the academic sphere recently as well (Becker, 1964; Ashton and Green, 1996; Buchanan *et al.*, 2004). Spenner (1990) emphasises the convenience of distinguishing between the skills that people bring to jobs and the skills that jobs require. This distinction is not irrelevant because it confers to the former the sense of individual possession whereas it links the latter to the characteristic features of social roles. Attewell (1990) states the relevance of the concept in sociological research in relation to the analysis of the labour process and debates over equality, outlining four different schools of thought. Green (1992) appears quite critical with the individualistic human capital view on skill, affirming that it is unable to cover its social context, thus failing to explain the relationship between the economy and education and training.

In order to analyse the distinct skill provision configurations and their socio-economic implications, the diverse approaches developed by the primary disciplines (economics, sociology, and psychology) need to be considered. Despite the fact that none of the disciplines is able to completely encapsulate all of the meanings of the term skill, the juxtaposition of their views sheds some light on its conceptualisation.

Drawing on Becker's Human Capital Theory, economists define skill as an individual's human capital. It is 'the value of a person's stream of current and future prospective earnings discounted to the present' (Green, 2013: 11). Human capital is mostly indirectly measured

through either educational degrees or the years of schooling (Mayer and Solga, 2008: 6). Consequently, education and training are considered individual investments, assuming that individuals make rational decisions regarding the quantity and type of investment to make. Nevertheless, there is an aspect of this investment in human capital that has relevant implications on its financing. This has to do with the location where the accumulated human capital would be used. In fact, considering training from either the employer or employee point of view, a greater willingness to pay for the investment is displayed if they have any kind of guarantee for collecting the benefits of their training investment: for employers by increasing their benefits, and for employees by earning higher wages. The implications that different skills provision configurations have on labour training investment will be addressed later on in this paper.

The concerns of sociologists pertaining to the configuration of institutions that involve skills acquisition include educational systems as well as the structures that regulate labour market and determine the use of skills (Mayer and Solga, 2008). Sociologists appear interested in the social consequences that skills regimes might have on the opportunities individuals encounter throughout their working life because these regimes may offer unequal access to and *pay-back* from education and training. Sociology draws on the production process and the complexity of tasks to conceptualise skill (Green, 2013). A higher ability required to perform a more complex task is linked to both further training and greater reward and, therefore, job skill becomes connected with social class. Considering that power relations and employment relationship highly condition learning in workplaces (Rainbird *et al*, 2008: 2), social constructionists assume that 'the perceived skill and prestige of various jobs are products of social manipulation' (Attewell, 1990: 444), thus leading to social classifications. Consequently, it might be stated that the sociological approach to skill involves class and status consideration in the labour environment.

For occupational psychology, mainly applied in human resources practices, skills formation is considered as an individual learning process. Research on skills thus focuses on scrutinising the ways individuals process information, get stimulated, acquire and use knowledge, and use problem solving in their workplaces. Nevertheless, the most recent and relevant concept in occupational psychology is competence, which refers to some standardised abilities that a job requires to be successfully performed. The concept of competence is of extreme relevance in

vocational education's evolution because it is located at the very core of the qualification systems being defined. Comparison between jobs is based on the competence levels they require; just as qualifications in the educational field are ranked according to the competences they certify.

In an attempt to approach the term skill from a multi-disciplinary point of view and to offer a useful theoretical framework to face social and economic analysis, Green (2013) developed the *PES* notion. The notion is the result of a conceptual evolution, responding to a broader usage of the concept of skill in academic and political discourses, as well as to the transformations caused by the knowledge economy. It encapsulates most of the usages of the term skill: 'Skills are personal qualities with three key features, Productive, Expandable and Social' (Green, 2013: 10, 25). These personal qualities can cultivate value at work, are expandable as they are liable to being enhanced by training and development and are socially determined.

The main conceptual approaches to skill have been hitherto summarised. The diverse approaches to the term will emerge when addressing the distinctive ways in which the production and recognition of skills has been approached by countries, leading to the development of very diverse skill provision configurations.

4.1.2. Institutional and conceptual grounds of VET systems.

Bussemeyer and Trampusch provide exhaustive evidence to affirm that 'development and availability of skills is not a matter of unconstrained, rational choices, but it is strongly conditioned by and reflected in the institutional context of political economies, both historically and in the contemporary period' (2012: 3). The analysis of the politics and institutions related to skill formation is extensively present in literature (Finegold and Soskice, 1988; Streeck, 1992; Bosch and Charest, 2010). It is commonplace for political economy discourses nowadays, which are closely related to this debate, to refer to the convenience of reforming VET systems as foremost elements of a country's skill provision configuration in order to improve national competitiveness. These references often come along with the borrowing of specific policies and features of successful models that presumably achieve higher degree of skills. Nevertheless, authors agree that particular orientations have displayed high tenacity in specific countries, as they are rooted in national cultures and

institutional structures (Greinert, 2004). To bridge the gap between the research on skill acquisition and cultural and institutional factors, the following paragraphs try to uncover the principles and evolutions underpinning the main features observable nowadays in most representative VET systems, which have contributed to the configuration of particular skills provision orientations.

In order to explore similarities and differences between VET systems, a socio-historical approach will be applied, according to which comparisons are carried out by tracking the origin and evolution of national institutions¹ (Thelen, 2004) and by the analysis of what Verdier (2013: 70) names 'social sub-systems'; VET systems appear 'embedded in other social sub-systems', in reference to productive relations, basic education, higher education, labour market legislation, and company management that interact to define skill provision systems. These multiple connections between sub-systems complicate the common approach from different disciplines and have a twofold consequence.

On the one hand, national VET systems have evolved in a different way depending on the historical, economical, and institutional evolution of the country, forging diverse and nation specific relationships between state, capital, and labour. From this point of view, although with minor differences, authors have proposed quite a homogeneous classification of VET models (Ashton, 2004²; Greinert³, 2004; Bosch and Charest, 2010).

On the other hand, concepts associated with national VET systems although often considered equivalent, do hold specific implications and meanings. The notions *Beruf*, *savoir*, competence, and skill of, respectively, German, French, Dutch, and English VET systems are

¹ Thelen (2004: 20) argues that 'cross-national differences in vocational training regimes can be traced back to differences in the political settlement achieved between independent artisans, skilled industrial workers, and employers in skill-intensive industries in the early industrial period', as well as to the development of collective bargaining institutions and their main actors: nascent labour unions and employers' organizations.

² Ashton (2004: 21) affirms that 'national VET systems take their determining characteristics from the underlying relationship between the state, capital and labour', created through the process of industrialization. He distinguished three different types of VET systems: the free market (e.g. US, UK, Canada), the corporatist (Germany, Denmark, Austria) and the developmental state (Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea) models (ibid.: 23).

³ Greinert (2004) develops quite an interesting theoretical framework for addressing the historical development of European VET systems by suggesting a diachronic analysis starting from the industrial revolution and focusing on the term 'work culture' and its reflection on labour legislation.

strongly associated to the labour and institutional contexts where these systems have been developed (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008). These notions are considered the outcome of 'social construction and historical embeddedness' (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 548) and nowadays still influence national policies and debates on VET systems.

Drawing on the socio-economical and historical evolution, the next sections analyse the similarities and differences of main VET models in Europe. The different meaning and understanding of notions associated with national VET systems are addressed later on.

a) Different models of VET systems.

Wollschlager and Reuter-Kumpmann (2004) affirm that although during the middle ages European countries shared a very similar craft-based training system with qualifications recognised across the countries, the abolition of the guild system in the wake of political agitation, the diverse pace of industrialisation, and the influence of political, cultural, and religious movements led to a much more heterogeneous evolution of VET systems because each country addressed skill provision in specific ways.

Despite this variety, Greinert (2004) defines three main classical models, mostly based on the relationships between state, capital, and labour: the liberal model typical of Britain, the state-regulation model rigorously implemented in France and the German dual-corporatist model. Although these models emerged during the first phase of the industrial revolution, he argues that there have not been remarkable moves, the triple classification remaining a point of reference. In fact, he affirms that other models that emerged later on were variations of the basic models.

Most of the literature points to the German and British models as the ones presenting the most pronounced contrast (Clarke and Winch, 2007, Brockmann *et al.*, 2011), thus epitomising opposite approaches to vocational education and skill provision. In fact, if the two systems would be placed at the ends of a line representing the diverse VET systems, most of the other national approaches would be located somewhere in between, closer, or farther from the German and British ones (Brockman *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, deliberating upon the evolution and main features of the German and British systems will be enough to facilitate the analysis intended in this paper, given their all-inclusive nature.

The industrial revolution developed at a different pace in Europe. Liberal economic doctrines influenced the configuration of modern societies, together with ideological, religious, philosophical, and cultural movements (Wollschlager and Reuter-Kumpmann, 2004). In that sense, socio-political and economic approaches to these relevant changes need to be considered for understanding the different evolution of British and German skill provision configuration.

On the one hand, the liberal ideology that caused the decline of the craft-based training system in Europe had essentially a different approach in both countries (Wiborg, 2010). German liberalism did not follow the theories of Adam Smith and the *laissez faire* doctrine of non-state interventionism in economics. The capitalistic society, so apparent in England, was considered as a threat to the German view of the society. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that economic liberalism and liberalism became connected (Langewiesche, 2000). Early German liberals envisioned a classless society of citizens in which state intervention was accepted in order to guarantee a tolerable society. Contrary to England, in Germany there was no rejection of state interventionism. As can be observed, different values underlay both countries' modernisation processes, the state assuming a contradictory role in each case.

On the other hand, the British Statute of Artificers that had regulated apprenticeship since 1563 was abolished in 1814, contributing to the decline of apprenticeship and plant-training. A strong economic liberalism and the free play of forces rule influenced training in Britain and caused the decline of the apprenticeship and plant-training system: representatives of labour, employers, and the providers of training negotiated *in the market place* what sort of education and training should be offered with none or little intervention by the state (Wollschlager and Reuter-Kumpmann, 2004). United Kingdom thus developed a *liberal market* model of economy and skill provision (Greinert, 2004).

In stark contrast, an independent artisanal sector survived in Germany, legally organised by a 'recognized, para-public and compulsory system for certifying skills and monitoring apprenticeship' (Thelen, 2004: 46) established by the 1898 Legislation⁴ which had an

⁴ The 1898 legislation was actively promoted by the government of Imperial Germany to support the artisanal sector as a means to counterweigh the increasingly strong movement of workers. Industries in the early industrial period in Germany could draw skilled workers from those trained in the artisanal sector. Although 'inspired by deeply reactionary political

outstanding influence in German skills provision configuration and might be considered the cornerstone of German VET. Finally, the Vocational Training Act of 1969 was enacted in Germany to pull together diverse relevant legislation and define the different role of the state, the *länders*, and the social partners. It consolidated the standardisation and uniformity of training and configured the current corporatist model typical of Germany. Bosch and Charest describe how the ‘corporatist structure comes from the delegation of responsibility for the content and control of training to the social partners and to the self-governing chambers of industry and commerce and the craft chambers. Social partners negotiate on basic standards such as occupational title, duration of training, job description and training programme’ (2010: 144). The State’s role could be considered as that of just implementing what has already been agreed upon between the two actors of industry.

The relationship between state, labour, and capital can be also considered as contradictory in both models. The liberal-free market model is characterised by a market-driven relationship. The free play of forces influences training because representatives of labour, employers, and providers of training negotiate in the market place. The market establishes the content of training, and the system might be considered employer based (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008), without the involvement of other relevant stakeholders. On the other hand, in the corporatist model social partners play an active role; employers, trade unions, and state bodies decide together on career profiles, training content, and other related issues. A chamber system acts as an intermediary institution that contributes to solving state and market deficiencies.

Brockmann *et al.* (2008) affirm that these two opposite configurations have led to what they refer to as knowledge-based versus skills-based VET systems. In the German knowledge-based system, a well-established vocational route is constructed with the active involvement of a variety of stakeholders, carrying relevant theoretical knowledge and seeking to enhance

motives and was mostly designed to weaken (definitely not strengthen and incorporate) the then-surgingly organized labor movement’ (Thelen, 2004: xii), the system created through the 1897 legislation had an outstanding influence on the skill provision system. Democratic unions happened to be mostly made up of skilled workers who had achieved their qualifications out of the artisans’ system and developed a strong interest in democratising and co-managing the system of firm-based training rather than combating it. Collective bargain content also reflected the stance of German industrial workers towards in-firm training and certification: apprenticeship would not be a disputed issue across the class divide in the industry. Employers and businessmen of the machine industry, highly skill dependent, also played a key role in the early industrial period.

occupational mobility. The main objective of the British skill-based VET system is the acquisition of task-specific skills, and therefore, knowledge is scarcely involved. As a demand-led system, it is mainly devoted to short-term results, lacking a defined program or curricula based vocational route.

b) Notions associated to vocational education in Britain and Germany.

The Anglo-Saxon concept of skill appears similar to the attributes typical of traditional apprenticeship, when learning occurred largely at work, involving little theoretical underpinning. It also indicates a sense of possession characteristic of the 19th century (Clarke and Winch, 2006). The British understanding of skilled worker involves someone possessing the technical ability, or know-how, to carry out a specific task. As the concept of skill appears differentiated from the concept of qualification, the skilled worker is not considered qualified to carry out wider tasks. The ability demonstrated on the basis of performance is just recognised by the immediate employer and does not necessarily entail the entitlement to a specific wage.

In Germany, each *Qualifikation* is the product of a long negotiation between social partners and is legally recognised. For the German *ein qualifizierte Arbeiter*, the qualified worker, the recognition of ability is conditioned to the possession of a specific qualification. That connection between ability and qualification also entitles the worker to a particular wage. More importantly, being qualified implies recognition not just in relation to a particular job but in a wider industrial context.

What is specific of the German vocational education is the notion of *Beruf* (occupation), 'a body of systematically related theoretical knowledge (*Wissen*) and a set of practical skills (*Knömen*), as well as the social identity of the person who has acquired these' (Streeck, 1996: 145). A legally recognised diploma certifies the achievement of that identity and it is awarded with a particular status, wage grade, and social value (Brown *et al.*, 2001: 79).

The sense of occupational identity, ingrained in the in the *ein qualifizierte Arbeiter* is absent in the skilled worker, which only refers to a small part of a wider capacity associated with an occupation. The former, following a qualification framework agreed by social partners and legally recognised by the state, enjoys a particular social and legal status, together with the recognition of the 'ability to apply knowledge in a practical industrial context' (Clarke and

Winch, 2006: 263). The latter is recognised as someone possessing the technical ability to perform just specific tasks and not benefiting from either status or entitlement for any particular level of wage.

As has been argued, Germany and United Kingdom epitomise contradictory VET models. The differences not only apply to the interplay between capital, labour, and state, as determined in the scheme of the three classical models. Historical reasons leading to these opposite configurations have also mediated the relevant differences in the social construction of the key terms and in the objectives pursued by each system: the production of skilled workers versus *ein qualifizierte Arbeiter*, which are *non-equivalent* constructions (Clarke and Winch, 2006).

c) Implications of distinct skill provision orientations.

The broad changes exerted by globalisation have already been addressed in this work. Having left behind industrial strategies based on mass production, the entry into the scene of low cost producers has made developed countries highly dependent on knowledge and innovation in order to maintain their welfare conditions. Streeck considers broad based and widely available skills for firms to have become a crucial competitive advantage to success in nowadays' 'technologically and economically volatile markets' (1992: 166). Although some authors have raised doubts on the survival of the German model of vocational training (Culpepper *et al.*, 2008; Dustmann *et al.*, 2008; Thelen, 2012) the collective model of skill provision typical to Germany still preserves its high consideration.

With respect to the availability of skills for advanced industries, Thelen (2004) goes beyond the Human Capital Theory when describing the two different responses to underinvestment in labour training, a phenomenon that takes place in imperfectly competitive labour markets. An uncertainty in the return for the investment done by either trainees or employers often results in a lack of incentive in training. She points to two different types of solutions. The first solution consists of the collective provision of numerous workers with highly portable skills, all the firms being involved in the contribution to and the drawing on the pool. This collective solution benefits from two relevant features. One, its standardised certification system ensures portability of skills, qualifying in relation to an industrial context rather than to a particular job and, this way, it enhances labour mobility. And two, it counts on strong

institutional mechanisms to solve some imperfections of the labour market. German VET system is an example of a collectivist solution to private sector training.

The second solution is based on strong firm-based training combined with other measures that seek to reduce trainees' interest in leaving the company. These measures usually refer to the provision of company-specific packages of generous benefits, following complementary personnel policies. This solution leads to strong internal labour markets, often lacking flexibility for permanent adaptation in the current unsteady markets and hindering labour mobility. Consequently, it can be stated that skills provision models notably influence not just investment in labour training, but also the configuration of the labour market itself.

Continuing with the economic implications, Clarke and Winch (2006: 255) draw on the wide debate on skills equilibria and vocational education (Finegold, 1991) to differentiate between two economic strategies, the high-skill equilibrium, providing high wage and high-skill employment, and the low-skill equilibrium, providing the opposite situation. The economies of Germany, Japan, and France are considered to be based on high-skills equilibrium; on the contrary, the British economy is considered a low-skill equilibrium (Ashton and Green, 1996, Brown *et al.*, 2001). The specific skill provision configuration underlies these distinctive economic features.

However, skill provision orientations not only have economic implications. As affirmed by Thelen, 'political scientist and sociologists are as interested in the social consequences of various skill development systems as they are in the economic impact' (2004: 9). These social consequences include patterns of social and labour market stratification, gender inequality, social attitudes, and civic and political engagement, and distinctive welfare trajectories. Hall and Soskice (2001), for instance, describe how liberal market economies are often linked to wide gaps in the kind of opportunities different workers can benefit from, which has relevant consequences for income inequality. They state that organised market economies, on the contrary, offer further opportunities for advancement to less skilled workers, also featuring higher wage equality. Solga (2008), from an economic-sociological approach, has developed a multidimensional framework in which education is considered to be not just skills and qualifications, but rather a social phenomenon.

A couple of cautionary comments related to the benefits of skills-based policies should be considered. Keep and Mayhew (2010: 573) argue that education and training skill-based policies recently seem to be the most important (if not sole) tools for governments to address social justice and equity, almost as substitutes for other social and economic measures. They stress the need to avoid the consideration of skills policies as ‘cure-all’ approaches and doing so by clearly clarifying the kind of problems that can and cannot be solved by these particular policies. Allais (2012) makes an interesting contribution to the debate about the idea of skill and to the relationship between vocational education and development drawing on her experience in South Africa. She warns about the important difficulties of building skills in developing countries and, consequently, raises doubts on the benefits of what can be named market-led vocational education.

4.2. Competence based vocational education and training

As already stated in Chapter 3, one of the most spectacular phenomena in the development of education systems globally has been the so-called shift to learning-outcomes. Although that move has eventually affected all types of education, either general, vocational, or higher education, its deployment was initially based on vocational education and training and, more specifically, in the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) that were launched in the United Kingdom⁵ in 1987. Although NVQs are still used, the original model has undergone diverse changes. Many countries worldwide have been involved since then in the design and deployment of qualifications frameworks based on that initial model (Allais, 2010; CEDEFOP, 2015) and have learned lessons from the mistakes and claims made by that first model (ILO 2009a; Young and Allais, 2009).

NVQs were the first attempt to develop a system in which qualifications were defined only in terms of learning outcomes, although that preliminary framework was rather based on the notion of competence. NVQs were, this way, competence-based. Although Grant *et al.* (1979) state that the first experiments with competence-based reforms in higher education were as early as in the 1970s, indeed competence appeared linked to vocational and professional qualifications and associated to the requirements of workplaces, as will be explained when describing the origin of the NVQs. In this context, competence refers to what someone can

⁵ NVQs were introduced in Wales, England and North Ireland. At that time a similar version was introduced in Scotland, the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). The considerations made in this chapter are limited to the NVQs.

do, rather than what they know (Young and Allais, 2009). The term outcome emerged as a more general and broad term that included the idea of competence. The concept of outcome is used to refer to what someone knows, capturing the broad goals of general education. There is also a view that considers the difference between competence and learning outcome to be very little, and both terms to have become almost synonymous (Coles, 2006). Nowadays, the concept of competence is extensively used in the development of both vocational education and higher education (González and Wagenaar, 2003).

In his introduction to the analysis of Competency Based Education and Training, Burke (1989: 1–2) wrote that ‘a quiet revolution is occurring in Vocational Education and Training’, referring to the deep changes that were taking place in Further Education, ‘the Cinderella’ of the education system, in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. An underlying context of ongoing general educational reforms at that time upstaged the changes taking place in vocational education, explaining the ‘quiet’ part. He argued that, among other relevant changes taking place in the educational field, the definition and implementation of a competence assessment-based system of national vocational qualifications, the NVQ, was bound to have ‘the most and far reaching consequences’. However, before considering the NVQs and the influence it has exerted on other developments, it is necessary to take a look back in order to grasp the background and the circumstances under which the ideas underlying Competence Based Vocational Education and Training (CBVET) were developed.

The competence-based approach that inspired the NVQs has its roots in the teacher education reforms undertaken in USA in the 1960s (Elam, 1971, Burke *et al.*, 1975, Houston, 1980, Biemans *et al.*, 2009). It was based on the detailed analysis of professional tasks’ performance. That explains the first terminology employed – Performance Based Teacher Education (PBTE). The approach was afterwards applied to elementary schools, to the minimum competence standards for high school graduation, and to vocational education. As a consequence of its evolution, different terms for similar approaches emerged: Outcome-Based Education, Competency-Based Teacher Education, Competence Based Vocational Education and Training, and so on⁶. This diverse terminology supports the idea that the

⁶ Some significant aspects related to the terminology used along the literature on competence-based models and approaches not included in the initial glossary are succinctly described below:

competence-based approach is a dynamic movement that has a textured nature. As Hodge explains

‘Competence Based Training (CBT) is an amalgam of separate theoretical components alloyed in the crucible of powerful political forces, and [that] responsiveness to social and cultural pressures remains a significant feature of CBT’ (2007: 181).

The competence-based approach has been considered a complex educational innovation (Mulcahy, 2000). On the one hand, it contains different and somehow dichotomous conceptualisations of competence. Mulder *et al.* (2007) refer to the behaviourist, generic, and cognitive approaches; Delamare le Deist and Winterton (2005) distinguish between behavioural, functional, multi-dimensional, and holistic approaches; and Sandberg (2000) wrote about the rationalistic and interpretative approaches. On the other hand, a significant overlapping occurs among these conceptualisations when analysing their ontological and epistemological foundations. This complexity highly mediates the way competences are delivered, taught, and learned, resulting in practice in very diverse models (Bound and Lin, 2013).

The next section will explore the origins of the competence-based movement when it first appeared in the American social and political scene in the early 1960s.

Performance-based and competence-based.

During the early stages of the teacher education movement, back in the 1960s, there was some controversy around the use of the terms performance or competence (Hodge, 2007). As the term performance seemed to put the focus on skills (Norton *et al.*, 1978), somehow underestimating professional knowledge, some authors preferred the term competence. Tuxworth (1989: 10) suggests that both terms might be treated as equivalent, since ‘competence-based curriculum design demands performance-based assessment’. In this study the term *competence* has been preferred over *performance*, as it has been considered most widespread in recent developments.

Education and training.

There were also some relevant aspects with relation to the use of the terms education and training at the time when the competence-based approach emerged. Stenhouse (1975) maintained a critical opinion about the stressing of measured outcomes of learning processes, instead of the students’ learning process itself. He considered that education, meaning eliciting learning from students (following its Latin origin), was opposed to training, considered putting planned learning outcomes into students. Glaser (1962) also pointed out a twofold distinction between education and training. On the one hand, he argued that training entails behavioural end-products that have been planned, whereas results cannot be known beforehand as accurately in education. On the other hand, he considered that the objective of training is to get similar behaviours out of individuals. Education, on the contrary, aims to develop unique behaviours in learners. As in the field of vocational systems’ description, the main focus of this study, the use of both terms together is most common, the above mention distinctions will not be considered from the terminological point of view.

4.2.1. The origins of the competence-based approach to VET.

When offering the whole picture about the development of CBET in the United States of America between the 1950s and 1970s, Hodge (2007: 180) distinguishes between its social and theoretical origins. He argues that both political and social circumstances, when juxtaposed with the evolution of educational theories, characterised the development of the competence-based approach.

a) Social contextualisation.

Three main components which influenced the public-educational debate should be considered when drawing a picture of the 1960s' American society (Hodge, 2007).

First, the significant social implications of the Cold War, following World War II, need to be considered. Several commentators (Norton *et al.*, 1978; Harris *et al.*, 1995) argue that the perception of the Soviet Union's higher technological progress, that attained its highest point with the placing into orbit of Sputnik I, the first satellite, in 1957, worked as a catalyst for changes in education and training, because the educational system was considered to be the origin of the problem. Elam (1971) argues that Sputnik also contributed to a new and more active role of the federal government in education, including the funding of significant initiatives, which will be described in detail at a later section.

Second, during President Kennedy's term of office, high dropout rates and difficulties faced by graduates to maintain their jobs led to the enactment of the Vocational Education Act in 1963. This legislation gave an unexpected boost to vocational education and increased the demand for teachers at a time when public debate on education had turned its attention to teachers' preparation quality.

Third, contributions made by certain social movements also had their role to play in the whole picture of the American society of that time and its overall stance towards education and training. Houston (1974) developed his vision of competence-based education as a cultural movement, drawing on two different trends. On the one hand, a trend seeking personalisation, that is, a general privileging of individualised treatment emerged in the society. He considered it as the reaction against the feeling of transience and uniformity that had been permeating the American society (disposable consumer goods, frequent moves of

families across the country, depersonalisation of jobs, and so on). Norton *et al.* (1978) argue that the initiatives led by groups of radical students in several university campuses were the main promoters of this personalisation trend. On the other hand, new and more accurate tools for measuring programme outcomes were fuelling the overall desire for accountability and transparency of public administrations' activity, which notably encompassed the educational field.

In the middle of this social context, an initiative of the United States Office of Education's (USOE) National Centre for Educational Research, taken in 1963, has been considered a highly decisive event for the evolution of CBET (Tuxworth, 1989; Hodge, 2007). The centre launched a programme with the aim to promote a change in the education of elementary school teachers, following which institutions were invited (and funded) to design innovative models. The new approaches were described by Swancheck and Campbell (1981) had to be characterised by 'the precise specification of competencies or behaviours to be learned, the modularisation of instruction, evaluation and feedback, personalisation, and field experience' (cited in Tuxworth, 1989: 11).

The USOE continued to direct or indirectly finance initiatives to boost this movement and, as a result, the report issued by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education was published. The paper gathered the essential characteristics of any performance-based educational programme (Elam, 1971) and has been considered to be of high relevance for the development of further competence-based approaches (Tuxworth, 1989; Harris *et al.*, 1995). In the meantime, and linked to the movement, certification policies containing performance standards and objective assessment mechanisms were introduced by the states. These initiatives aimed to satisfy increasing social demands for higher accountability and improved quality in education.

Figure 4.1.: Essential characteristics of a performance-based program, following Elam (1971)

- 1.- Competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviours) to be demonstrated by the students are
 - derived from explicit conceptions of teacher roles
 - stated so as to make possible the assessment of a student's behaviour in relation to specific competencies, and
 - made public in advance
- 2.- Criteria to be employed in assessing competencies are
 - based upon, and in harmony with, specified competencies,
 - explicit in stating expected levels of mastery under specified conditions, and
 - made public in advance
- 3.- Assessment of the student's competency
 - uses performance as the primary source of evidence,
 - takes into account evidence of the student's knowledge relevant to planning for, analyzing, interpreting, or evaluating situations or behaviour, and
 - strives for objectivity;
4. The student's rate of progress through the program is determined by demonstrated competency rather than by time or course completion;
5. The instructional program is intended to facilitate the development of competencies specified.

Source: Hodge, 2007 (186-7).

Hodge (2007) considers that the combination of both the personalisation and the accountability movements, together with the teacher education models developed under the USOE funded initiative gave rise to the Performance Based Teacher Education movement, and that that movement drew from many of the new theories on education and training that were being developed in the 1960s and that will be described in the following section.

b) Theoretical influences and contributions.

Following Hodge (2007), two essential theoretical influences constitute the foundations of the competence-based education and training-behavioural psychology and systems theory, whereas more diverse contributions have influenced operationalisation aspects of the new approach. The context in which these theories were formulated was quite particular: the challenge that the US armed forces faced during World War II and the Cold War led to their being urged to prepare numerous competent soldiers and train personnel to successfully operate weapons systems in permanent and rapid evolution. Thus, the question was about

how to design and implement the most effective training. To respond to this challenge, US military forces gathered together specialists and experts, thereby contributing to a significant breeding ground for the theoretical contributions that nurtured the competence-based movement.

Most of the psychologists among these experts showed a behavioural background. This explains the legacy left by this theory in the movement, which can be summarised by its focus on observable behaviours (performance) of the learners. The theory of behaviourism was developed along the contributions of several theorists since the beginning of the 20th century. According to Hodge (2007), relevant of these theorists are John B Watson, Ivan Pavlov, Edward Thorndike and Burrhus Frederic Skinner. Watson's views of psychology as objectively observable behaviour and Pavlov's research on the manipulation of animal behaviour and study of reflex, stimulus, and response which he applied to learning theories in differentiating unconditioned and conditioned reflexes made them prominent in the field. Thorndike's law of effect which explained externally observable behaviour of organisms based on the assertion of states of consciousness, the environment, and the conditions and Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, built upon the contributions of all the three theorists mentioned. The specific understanding of competence in strict *behaviouristic* terms, together with the assessment based on the observable behaviour of the learner, are considered the most evident legacies of the theory of behaviourism.

The interdisciplinary philosophy of Systems Theory also had a relevant influence on the foundation of the competence-based movement. It was first developed by the biologist Bertalanffy (1968: 31) when dealing with groups of interacting elements: 'there exists models, principles and laws that apply to generalised systems or their subclasses, irrespective of their particular kind, the nature of their component elements, and the relations or "forces" between them'. The establishing of the links between the systems theory and learning was carried out by Crawford (1962). She described large organisations as parent systems; the sub-parts of that system which contributed to its output were referred to as operating subsystems under which other personnel or training subsystems operated, in turn, to support them.

This theory, applied to the training of the US military forces during World War II, continued to be refined during its application to military training and significantly affected the development of the competence-based movement (McDonald, 1974). On the one hand, the

view of training as a subsystem, designed to meet the needs of the 'parent system', has influenced the contemporary idea of competence-based training as responding to industry and its requirements. On the other hand, the systems theory applied to training brought about what is called the cybernetic model of training systems, a subclass of the general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968): training activities are approached as individual systems themselves, linked by *feedback loops*, one of its main features, leading to a more modular approach to training.

All of the arguments posed above explain why the competence-based learning model should not be considered as just a single theory of learning, but rather as an amalgam of somehow heterogeneous theories of learning, which are in a permanent and dynamic interaction within its context. Hodge (2007) argues that this system-based feature holds the diverse theories together and explains its durability along decades.

The previous paragraphs described the main theoretical influences on the competence-based movement's foundation. The following section will cover the most significant contributions to practical aspects of the approach, which were developed when professionals dealt with three implementation-related issues: defining the learning objective, the learning process itself, and the assessment of what has been learnt.

Defining learning objectives.

Several scientists contributed to the establishment of the definition of the learning objectives as the most distinctive feature of the competence-based approaches. It was the educational theorist Ralph Tyler (1949) who started this defining by specially emphasising on the objectives. He defended that curricula should be designed not to detail what teachers would do, but what the students should be able to do at the end of the learning process, with transformation being expressed through behaviour. Bloom (1956: 7), for his part, continued and elaborated Tyler's ideas, and developed his taxonomy. He sorted educational goals into 'cognitive', 'affective' and 'psychomotor' domains. He also highlighted the relevance of the communicability of the educational purposes. Influenced by Taylor's (1906) approaches to industrial workplaces' management, Miller (1962) defined the theory of task analysis. Miller's theory was applied again for military training purposes during the 1950s in the US Air Force. It involved a joint effort by engineers, who developed the weapons, and the training

designers, who had to detail the tasks that all military personnel would have to perform after the machinery was ready. Miller's theory about detailed tasks description, applied in some contemporary models, has been of enormous influence in the structuring of competence standards (Hodge, 2007: 199).

The learning processes.

Hodge (2007) explains that two theories influenced the change applied to the way the learning processes are understood in the competence-based approach. On the one hand, he points out the theory of operant conditioning proposed by Skinner, which stresses the relevance of the agency of the learner in the process of learning, as well as the significance of the pace in which that reinforcement is exerted. That theory causes, first, a relevant shift in the role of the teacher, who now becomes closer to a facilitator profile, in order to trigger the learner's agency. And second, the structuring of the learning content, which should not only appropriately promote individuals' reinforcement, but also but also make possible the progress of the learners at their own pace.

As the second influence, Hodge argues that Bloom made a 'humanistic contribution' to the competence-based movement through the theory of mastery learning (2007: 203). Bloom considered that a poor educational effectiveness was being achieved in the United States, as just a third of the students were considered as succeeding in their learning. In response to this situation, he defended the availability of diverse strategies for mastery learning in order to deal with 'individual differences in learners through some means of relating the instruction to the needs and characteristics of the learner' (Bloom, 1968: 7).

The assessment processes.

The third specific aspect related to the operationalisation of the competence-based approach that needs to be mentioned is the issue of the assessment of the outcomes of the learning processes. One of the most important contributions was made by Glaser (1962) and his proposal on distinguishing between norm-referenced and content-referenced measures of the achievement of the learning process. The former measures learners' performance in comparison with that of the other students, failing to inform about their performance in relation to the content of the learning. Consequently, he advocated the use of the latter. Later on, a social and politically rooted movement that sought to avoid stigmatisation caused by

publishing rankings of students' performance promoted the use of the minimum competency notion. According to this approach, students would be assessed on a dualistic basis, being considered competent or not yet competent (Hambleton and Eignor, 1980). The Minimum Competency Testing Theory became a part of the competence-based movement.

Although quite a strong criticism on the competence-based approach appeared in the 1970s (mainly based on its lack of theoretical coherence, weak objective evidence, and a too rushed introduction of new programmes), by that time the movement had already developed quite an appealing framework for education and training that went beyond teacher education field as well as the US border (Hodge, 2007). In fact, the essential foundations of this competence-based model, gathered by Elam (1971), featured most of the elements that still define the contemporary implementations of the approach.

After having described the origins and the main theoretical components of the competence-based movement, the next section will analyse its diverse implementations, which were highly conditioned by the heterogeneous meaning of the concept of competence across countries and cultures.

4.2.2. Developments of the competence-based approach.

This section will initially address what can be considered a general evolution: from the initial behaviourist-functionalist approach of the movement to a more comprehensive view. Following this, the diverse meanings of the concept of competence will serve to explain the dissimilarities in the development of competence-based models across countries. It should be noted that many authors agree on the difficulty of arriving at a definition of competence which is capable of accommodating all the different ways it has been used (Delamare le Deist and Winterton, 2005; Sultana, 2009; Winterton, 2008, 2012). Considering this difficulty in covering all these usages and connotations and since this falls outside the purview of this paper, this section limits itself to describing the different ways in which the concept has been absorbed across cultures which has led to the inception of diverse CBVET models.

a) From behaviouristic to comprehensive approaches.

The initial competence-based movements developed in the United States of America gave rise to models that were characterised by competence being specified in detailed lists of

assessable behavioural (performance related) elements. These elements were defined through an accurate analysis of the professional tasks (Biemans *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, the concept of competence was used in a narrow behavioural sense in these models.

That approach was criticised for being too behaviouristic and reductionist (Delamare le Deist and Winterton, 2005) and even for denying 'the importance of human agencies in processes of learning' (Biemans *et al.*, 2004: 527). Moreover, the fragmented and assessable elements were not useful as guidelines for curricula design, due to the highly detailed level of description of competence (Barnett, 1994). Since the NVQs based model developed in the UK in the 1980s was quite close to these behaviouristic approaches, it was also criticised. In spite of these critiques, Clarke and Winch (2015) argue that the NVQs model has highly influenced the development of some relevant European policy tools, such as the European Qualification Framework and the European Credits Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Taking into account the criticism on the behaviouristic view, approaches to the establishing of an all-encompassing definition were developed in different countries (mainly France, Netherlands, Germany, and Austria). In these approaches, competence refers to 'integrated constructs of cognitive, functional, social, and meta-level aspects possessed by individuals' (Wesselink *et al.*, 2010: 22). Individuals should be able to demonstrate they possess them in relevant situations and specific contexts. In the comprehensive approaches, the focus is on the individual competence, based on the integration of different forms of knowledge and social and personal faculties (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, Wesselink *et al.* (2010) state that the comprehensive approach to competence-based education shows a notable resemblance to constructivism, a school of thought that defends the idea of knowledge as being actively constructed by the learner.

Wesselink *et al.* developed a framework to integrate both curriculum and instructional aspects of the more recent competence-based education movements. It is the combination of these two aspects what defines the comprehensive approach, which 'should be seen as a combination of the so-called input approach and output approach towards competence' (2007: 22), with relevant curriculum development and assessment implication.

Figure 4.2.: Theoretical framework for the Dutch CBVET system following Wesselink *et al.*

Theoretical framework integrating both underlying curriculum aspects and instructional aspects of competence-based education in the Dutch CBVET system:

- Aspect 1 The competencies that are the basis for the study program are defined.
- Aspect 2 Core professional problems are the organizing unit for designing or redesigning the curriculum (learning and assessment).
- Aspect 3 Competence development of students is assessed before, during, and after the learning process.
- Aspect 4. Learning activities take place in various authentic situations.
- Aspect 5 Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are integrated in learning and assessment processes.
- Aspect 6 Self-responsibility and (self-)reflection of students are stimulated.
- Aspect 7 Teachers, both in school and in the workplace, balance their roles as coaches and experts.
- Aspect 8 A basis is established for a lifelong learning attitude among students.

Source: (2010: 22).

The comparison of this framework with the essential characteristics of a performance-based programme, as defined by Elam (1971), helps reach a consensus regarding the evolution of the competence-based movement.

b) Dissimilarities in the development of competence-based models.

Although the general evolution described in the previous section can be considered valid for most of the national CBVET models, it is also true that each model has evolved in specific ways. The reasons for this are twofold.

On the one hand, there are evidences to support the doubtful transnationality of key VET related concepts (qualification, competence, knowledge), as they are considered the outcome of 'social construction and historical embeddedness' (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 548). Their meaning is rooted in countries' national cultures (Clarke and Winch, 2006) and in their historical and institutional evolution (Thelen, 2004, Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012), thereby influencing national debates and reforms.

On the other hand, the starting point for incorporating competence-based approaches has not been the same for all countries, due to the complexity of VET systems, which are

embedded in other social sub-systems (Verdier, 2013). Although there are several approaches for characterising and sorting VET systems (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Ashton, 2004; Greinert, 2004; Wollschlager and Reuter-Kumpmann, 2004,)), most of the literature points to the German and British models as the ones presenting the most pronounced contrast (Clarke and Winch, 2007; Brockmann *et al.*, 2011), with others (French and Dutch, for instance) placed somewhere in between. Taking into account their diverse features, Brockmann *et al.* (2011) suggest that these different competence-based models might be thought as placed along a continuum between two opposite ones, the British and the German.

The following paragraphs will summarise the most relevant developments of CBVET in Europe, according to the mentioned continuum metaphor. It should be noted, though, that VET systems are not static entities. Instead, they have continuously evolved during the last decades. Thus, this section intends to determine the most defining features of the aforementioned systems, which still influence their current developments, rather than offering a detailed description of each system.

Competence in United Kingdom.

As previously mentioned, when tracing the development of the competence-based approaches in VET, the new design philosophy that began to be applied in the UK in the 1980s, highly influenced by American competence-based outcomes movements, presents itself as an undeniable landmark. Since diverse national systems (England, Wales, Scotland and North Ireland) with particular specificities concerning education and training coexist in the country, the focus will be put on the system developed in England.

Together with other social and institutional specificities influencing vocational education evolution, which have already been addressed in this chapter, UK has been characterised by weak institutional links and other forms of social partnership. This has led to a lack of agreement on competence in initial VET, in contrast with other countries' VET configuration (Greinert, 2004; Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012). The new approach was justified by the changes occurring in the labour market and aimed to raise the standards of workforce performance as a means to improve productivity (Handley, 2003). Based on a sectorial skills development strategy, competences arguably connect education with skills, and are represented by the NVQs. One of the main characteristics of the NVQs is that assessment,

based on the testing of knowledge and performance, is independent of the learning process. Qualifications are defined in terms of outcomes, demonstration, and assessment, instead of by the learning process that has led to them (Jessup, 1991). Consequently, the NVQ model should be considered a pure outcome-based approach. As will be described in more detail later in this chapter, NVQs use a notion of competence based on the occupational standards i.e. 'description of something which a person who works in a given occupational area should be able to do' (NCVQ, 1991). The complexity of the work activity is used to determine five different levels in which the standards are classified.

Competence in Germany.

Having developed a more comprehensive approach to the competence-based movement, the German VET offers quite a different picture. Germany has been traditionally defined as a dual-corporatist model (Greinert, 2004), and qualifications and their role in the VET system have permanently been negotiated by the social partners involved. As a result of these negotiations, agreed occupational profiles are registered. The VET system, strongly regulated, is based on both theoretical and practical elements, and has been instrumental to workplace learning. Assessment consists of the demonstration of tasks and the testing of theoretical knowledge, representatives from the social partners being involved in the process.

Competence was implemented on the basis of the concept of key qualifications (seeking de-specialisation and higher abstraction). After 1996, the German VET system developed the notion of vocational action competence, referring to the readiness and capacity of the individual to act thoughtfully, individually, and in a socially responsible manner in professional, social, and private situations (as defined by KMK, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany). Vocational action competence is divided into different categories, which form the very basis of the German model: domain or subject, personal and social competence, and finally, methods or learning competence.

Following the international trends on promoting a more work-related education, the German system introduced the concept of Learning Areas, which conform with the curricular framework in order to implement the action competence approach. These learning areas, which should be derived from occupational fields, intend to link both curricula and the

learning process to the work activity. In that sense, the model might be considered as a combination of outcome and income-based approaches, instead of a purely outcome-based model, as in the UK. In fact, the challenge for curriculum developers is to identify situations that might be relevant for work activity, at the same time as also offering opportunities for learning.

As has been mentioned, the two models described above are often considered as opposite developments of the competence-based approach. Other European systems can be considered to fall in between these two main models, and have been discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Competence in France and the Netherlands.

In the French system, the government makes the decisions for most VET diplomas (Weigel *et al.*, 2007). There is a broad institutional basis for the *bilan* (or competence management process), where social partners cooperate. Both formal qualifications and knowledge and skills acquired during a person's working-life are considered in the *bilan de compétence*, a document belonging to the person

The use of the concept of competence in France is based on a sociological method for work analysis (ETED, Emploi Type Etudié dans sa Dynamique) performing a heuristic function; competence is simultaneously defined in terms of action, professional context, and professional aim (Mériot, 2005). Therefore, competence describes actions and has to encapsulate their significance and complexity.

In the Netherlands, standards of occupational competences in each industry sector were developed as the basis for vocational credits. Dutch competence is defined as the integral abilities required to deal with a complex task (Biemans *et al.*, 2004) and, therefore, it implies a more multidimensional approach. A system for the acknowledgement of non-formally acquired competences has also been developed.

Despite the diverse and particular implementations of the competence-based approach to VET, there is a global consensus among policy makers on the need to reform VET with economic goals in mind, considering the development of outcome- (or competence-) based qualifications and the frameworks they are usually organised into in NQFs, as a key policy

instrument (ILO, 2009b; OECD, 2007). This global consensus is referred to as ‘Vocational Gospel’ by scholars (Grubb and Lazerson, 2006, cited in ILO, 2009b: 9). The outcome-based qualifications frameworks arguably improve the accreditation of non-formal, informal, and experiential learning, which have been considered with increased economic relevance. Advocates of the qualifications frameworks explain how they can promote access to and progression in VET (Coles, 2006; CEDEFOP, 2008; Bjornavold and Cole, 2009; Valk, 2009) and put VET in a lifelong learning perspective by supporting the recognition of any kind of learning (OECD, 2007). Other scholars argue that they are not so useful in meeting the policy goals for which they were introduced (Young, 2003; Phillips, 2003; Allais, 2007). Some researchers stress on the difficulty to find evidence for the impact of NQFs (Coles, 2007; Johnson and Wolf, 2009; Raffe, 2012). Pilcher *et al.* (2017) even question the actual feasibility of researching the ‘impact’ of NQFs *per se*, as it is not the only yardstick to measure the diversity of claims that have been made on the achievements of NQFs. Young (2007: 445) notes that most of the international literature has taken the form of advocacy rather than adopting a more analytical approach to their real possibilities, emphasising the benefits of these models from a broad policy perspective. Notwithstanding all the above cautionary observations, NQFs have been broadly introduced worldwide and, specially, in the European area (CEDEFOP, 2015). The relevance of their expansion accounts for the following section, where the most significant aspects of the introduction and evolution of the NQFs is described. Some critical views about their effectiveness ensure an objective examination of the frameworks.

4.3. The national qualifications frameworks

Five countries were in the forefront of the development of the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and have been referred to as the ‘first generation of NQFs’ or ‘early starters’ (ILO, 2009a: 1). The first country to have an officially-titled National Qualifications Framework was New Zealand (Strathdee, 2009). It was followed by Australia and South Africa (Allais, 2009). Scotland was a mixed case. It preceded them in the sense that the reforms that laid the foundations of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) started in the 1980s; however, despite this foundational influence, the official introduction of the national framework was in 2001 (Raffe, 2003). Just following the first Scottish reforms, the National Vocational Qualifications were introduced in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in 1987. The emergence of the NVQs, the first attempt to develop a vocational qualifications system

independent of learning programmes or educational institutions, has been widely addressed in the literature because of its relevance in subsequent educational reforms worldwide (Burke, 1989; Young, 2009; Morcke *et al.*, 2013; Clarke and Winch, 2015). Despite the NVQs model receiving some critiques (Hyland, 1994; Wolf 1995; Smithers, 1999; West 2004) it has indeed inspired the emergence and expansion of national and European qualifications frameworks.

4.3.1. The National Vocational Qualifications in the United Kingdom.

Seeking to respond to the low skills profile that workers displayed in comparison to other continental European countries, NVQs were introduced in some nations of the United Kingdom. As an innovative approach⁷, NVQs became very attractive for governments of the United Kingdom willing to increase the control over public institutions in terms of accountability. The UK government argued for the introduction of NVQs claiming that as outcomes would be defined by employer-led bodies, the 'producer capture' effect (Raggatt and Williams, 1999, cited in Young and Allais, 2009: 8) of existing qualifications would be overcome (Young, 2009: 9), shifting power over the provision of VET towards employers and providing a more employment-relevant alternative. Finally, it offered a basis for international comparability, transferability, and ranking, responding to one of the most relevant effects of globalisation in education: the search for performativity and comparability by governments.

The NVQ scheme sought a more work-based VET approach and was based on the so called occupational standards (expressed as written outcomes). These standards would provide a better alternative in terms of employment than the knowledge-based standards linked to written examinations. Young notes that a key element of the new approach was the assessment of those standards. It would be based on an alleged strong involvement of employers, who would have the time, commitment, and expertise needed, and would use standard tasks as a reliable basis for judging workplace performance (2009: 12). Unfortunately, the responsibility of assessment was too time-consuming and bureaucratic in

⁷ James (2006) argues that at the basis for such an innovation was a pilot project supported by the government in the mid-1980s to develop a framework for assessing workplace learning in the Hotel and Catering sector. It aimed to replace the combination of 'master craftsman judgement' and 'time serving' associated with traditional apprenticeship. The scheme for assessment was based on the functional analysis of work tasks, causing occupational activities to be broken up into tasks with increasing level of detail. She notes the involvement of only large employers, such as hotel chains as a pitfall of the pilot project.

practice, and employers were not as involved as assumed in the definition of qualifications and qualifications were captured as much by assessors and consultants as by employers (Young, 2009: 9). Consequently, the assessment tasks were taken over by the awarding bodies, funded by the government. In order to ensure quality, these bodies developed a complex system of assessors and procedures.

The NVQs were also seen by governments as a tool to be used by employers to conduct skill audits (Raggatt and Unwin, 1990). However, this potential for accreditation of prior experiential learning⁸ of employees was recognised later and served two different purposes: one, to promote access to formal education and two, to replace formal education and provide direct access to qualification.

The VQs model was based on the functional analysis of work tasks. This analysis was used to identify the purpose of the workplace activities by breaking them down until they could be described in detail and used as standards, thereby offering an objective and systematic method to analyse the tasks required for competent performance. In this manner, the methodology adopted was based on the assumption that a statement of competent workplace performance can be identified by researchers, derived in a set of individual elements of competence (which would become occupational standards) and their associated performance criteria, and grouped together into units of competence. Each NVQ was composed of a number of related units of competence and they would be completely comprehensible to employers (Young, 2009). Additionally, the assessment of workplace performance was the key to gaining vocational qualifications. The procedures designed by the awarding bodies replaced the judgement of specialists (like professionals of master craftsmen) in assessing and awarding qualifications. Therefore, confidence and trust were placed on experts and on procedures designed to interpret outcomes. In a way, ‘trust in

⁸ The process of making skills visible and giving value to non-formal and informal learning is what we call validation. Many expressions have been used to refer to this phenomenon: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), validation of prior learning (VPL), etc. All of them are slightly different, but they all have a common aim to make the outcomes of a learning process visible, providing it with a sort of currency or value that otherwise remains hidden [in Skills Panorama, last accessed in October 2017]

<http://skillspace.cedefop.europa.eu/en/blog/making-learning-visible-european-perspective-validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>

“experts” is thus replaced by trust in following the correct procedures’ (Young, 2009: 19) and on the precision of the definition of outcomes.

Finally, it should be noted that initially the NVQs were designed as an assessment-led system⁹ (or, as already expressed, a pure outcome-based approach) and, therefore, did not take into account any programme of learning. Nevertheless, this extreme view (outcome-led) of qualifications frameworks has evolved since then into a wide range of what are known as outcome-based models.

4.3.2. The expansion of National Qualifications Frameworks.

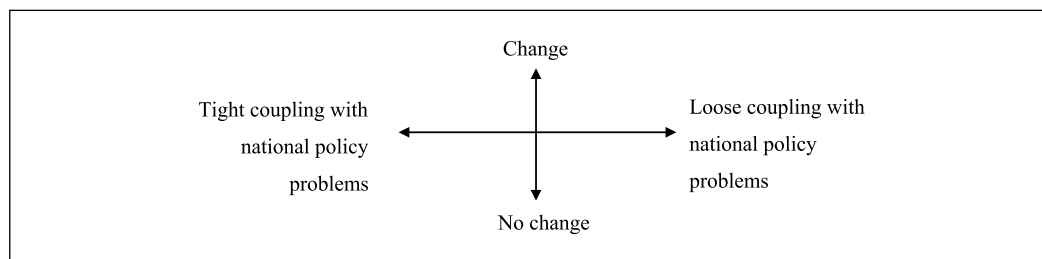
Part of the educational debates on NQFs’ spread has been concerned with the complex issues of the borrowing and lending of vocational training policies (Young, 2005; ETF, 2007). Allais states that the policy borrowing approach to policy making has been the main reason for such a broad introduction of NQFs and she argues that, more than based on their proven benefits, policy-makers seem to have been more influenced by the claims made by other countries (2010: 3). In this way, Markowitsch and Luomi-Messerer state that NQFs are instruments of ‘practical policies’ which are characterised by ‘a lack of theoretical underpinning and of a systematic foundation’ (2008: 61). Countries would have inevitably adopted the written model of a framework designed and developed elsewhere (Young, 2007: 447) without considering the differences in contexts or without the necessary recognition of the gap between the official written model and the problems faced during deployment by practitioners. However, the similarities between the written models of NQFs caused by these borrowing processes in reality mask the underlying diversity. NQFs do vary in their purposes, the design and structure, and the way in which they are introduced and used (Young, 2007: 451; Raffe, 2011a: 284) and different classifications and typologies of NQFs can be found in the literature (Young, 2005; Coles, 2006; Raffe, 2009, 2011).

The analysis of the introduction of NQF-like conceptions across countries needs to take into consideration the fact that these processes usually occur within a multi-level context. In the case of European countries, Elken (2016: 630) argues that the introduction and spread of

⁹ ‘(...) the shift to an outcome-led system of Education and Training thus means a qualification-led or assessment-led system (...) As candidates do not have to undergo any particular programme or learning, the award of an NVQ is based solely on the outcome of assessment’ (Jessup, 1991 cited in Young, 2009: 15). Gilbert Jessup was the Deputy Chief Executive of National Council for Vocational Qualifications at that time. He also stated the need of ‘an external reference point for assessment – the statement of competence’ (Jessup, 1991: 192).

NQFs are influenced by national and European level interactions and that, consequently, what takes place is a sort of a matching process between European solutions and national problems and contexts. She then suggests two possible dimensions to these intricate processes: the degree of change that the solution implies and the extent to which it is coupled with the national problems that need to be solved (loose coupling meaning not substantially coupled to the national processes and, therefore, frameworks being introduced just as compliance with the EU).

Figure 4.3.: Two dimensions of coupling problems and solutions



Source: Elken (2016: 630).

Based on this double dimension, she defines four possible patterns: superficial process (change and loose coupling), translation and contestation (change and coupling, specially whenever involvement of a broad scope of actors with diverse interests is required), no change and coupling (re-emphasising existing practices), and a technical process (change and loose coupling). Additionally, actor involvement integrally conditions the nature of the change processes undergone, because the status quo among the diverse stakeholders usually is challenged by the introduction of NQF schemes (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Raffe, 2011a: 299).

a) Motivations for the introduction of NQFs.

Considering the international debates on educational reforms, whenever the promotion of NQFs as a VET policy option is addressed, two broad policy arguments and rationales have been suggested (Chakroun, 2010: 201). The first argument concerns internal issues, because NQFs arguably facilitate national systemic policy reforms. They increase the involvement of stakeholders in developing the agreed learning outcomes for qualifications as a collective exercise (Raffe and Spours, 2007) and especially assign a more relevant role to employers' and workers' associations (Tuck, 2007). As a result, VET systems become more responsible for

the labour market. Bjørnåvold and Coles state that 'NQFs are mainly platforms for cooperation and dialogue between national stakeholders, between users and providers of qualification and certification, and their added value very much depends on the quality of this cooperation'(2010: 8). Considering these benefits, Chakroun (2010: 206) argues that the introduction of NQFs actually offers an opportunity for policy learning.

The second argument refers to the external international recognition of qualifications in a globalised labour market. The need to promote labour mobility makes governments increasingly concerned about the transparency and comparability of their national qualifications (CEDEFOP, 2008; Grootings, 2007). The expansion of national (and even international) qualifications frameworks would facilitate these comparisons. It should be noted, however, that the comparability of qualifications among the different frameworks is a challenging issue (Pilcher *et al.*, 2017). The difficulties that the diversity of NQFs pose to actual comparison are addressed later on in this chapter when the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is described.

Notwithstanding the relevance of these two general rationales, very diverse motivations for introducing NQFs have been pointed out in the literature. NQFs range from those that 'have largely been organic in their formation, those that have emerged in response to the European Qualifications Framework, and those that have emerged as part of the worldwide movements towards NQFs' (Keating, 2011: 397). Motivations to introduce NQFs can be voluntary or not (Pilcher *et al.*, 2017: 5). They can also be introduced just to follow the actions of neighbouring countries (Cohen-Vogel and Ingle, 2007). Motivations for NQFs' introduction are often grounded in political agendas of neoliberalism (e.g. New Zealand (Phillips, 2003)), to reduce the influence of trade unions (e.g. England, (Allais, 2011)) or to build a more marketable education (Young, 2011).

Despite the diversity of motivations, the claims made by countries adopting qualifications frameworks agree on the same general benefits they bring along for users (learners, providers, governments, employers): They help rationalise and increase the coherence of education systems, enable the recognition of informal and non-formal learning and the validation of prior learning, consequently promoting qualification, reduce obstacles to vertical and horizontal progression in education by establishing pathways between VET, general education, and higher education, improve the quality and flexibility of VET, as well as its

responsiveness to labour market, and finally, they make qualifications more transparent and enhance portability among different sectors of education and work, thereby, promoting labour mobility (Allais, 2009; Raffe, 2009, 2011; Young, 2005, 2007; Chakroun, 2010). These claims can be summarised by the three general benefits conferred to the qualifications frameworks in the literature: comparability, transparency, and portability (Young, 2007; ILO, 2009a, 2009b; Allais, 2010; Cort, 2010).

b) NQFs as dynamic entities.

The diversity of reasons that have motivated the introduction of NQFs has influenced their heterogeneity (Pilcher *et al.*, 2017). NQFs are indeed closely related to the overall goals of VET systems and linked to the specific national institutional contexts. The manner in which countries have introduced these can be partially understood by considering the different historical and political traditions (Young, 2007). It has sometimes marked a key political transition (as the end of Stalinism in Eastern Europe or the end of the apartheid in South Africa (Allais, 2003)). In other cases, NQFs should be understood as just one step in an evolving process (Scotland, where the process had little political impact (Raffe, 2003)). NQFs have been introduced in accordance with different approaches and, quite often, these processes have been developed amid complex schemes of global pressure and local responses (Mikulec and Ermenc, 2016). Raffe (2011: 299) argues that qualifications and qualifications frameworks are social constructs and that, as a consequence, there is not an NQF model that could accommodate all countries (Grootings, 2007, Raffe, 2009). Amid that diversity of these approaches, Young argues that the crucial issues that determine whether positive outcomes prevail over the negative ones 'are concerned with the *framework design* – the forms that such frameworks take – and *framework strategy* – how the change from older qualification systems is implemented' (2007: 446).

Raffe notes that NQFs have been very often portrayed in static terms in the literature, as merely a hierarchy of levels and descriptors, which implies that their introduction is mostly considered to be a technical matter. However, he affirms that

'NQFs are inherently dynamic entities. They are dynamic in the way they have spread globally, through various mechanisms of policy influence and diffusion. They are dynamic because they are used as agents or instruments for change in education and

training systems. And they are dynamic because the introduction of an NQF is not an event, but a lengthy process which involves complex interactions with the education and training system, with its learners and stakeholders and with its socio-economic and political environment' (2009: 23).

As a consequence of this multi-dynamic nature, assessing the success of a particular NQF becomes quite problematic. In fact, one of the consequences of this dynamic nature is that the changes that countries expect by introducing NQFs are achieved through decades of policy reforms and, therefore, it gets complicated to distinguish the framework itself from the policy changes implemented alongside. Similarly, defining a typology of NQFs requires the consideration of the particular features of the long process followed for their design, introduction, and deployment, as much as for their purpose. Drawing on previous works (Bouder, 2003; Young, 2005; Coles, 2006; Allais, 2007), Raffe (2009) built a typology of NQFs. The typology should be best understood as featuring ideal types, which illustrate the diverse logic behind the design and deployment of NQFs. These types can be represented as a continuum, where most of the cases would be located somewhere between the communications and the transformational types:

Figure 4.4.: A continuum of NQFs

COMMUNICATIONS	↔	TRANSFORMATIONAL
starts from present system	↔	starts from future system
incremental change	↔	radical transformation
tool for change	↔	driver of change
'bottom-up'	↔	'top-down'
voluntary	↔	statutory
providers have central role	↔	providers included among stakeholders
loose	↔	tight

Source: Raffe (2009: 26).

Communications frameworks would take existing education and training systems as its starting point. Its aim would be to rationalise and to add coherency to the system, and to encourage access to it. Learning outcomes would not be used to replace judgements based on *inputs*, but rather to complement them, featuring a loose design. This kind of framework

is developed drawing on a substantial involvement of educational providers and is typically voluntary. The framework is considered a tool for change and complementary policies are applied to ensure its usage.

The transformational framework posits future objectives: it defines the potential qualifications of a proposed future transformation of the system. Without any explicit reference to the already existing provisions, it has a tight and uniform design. It uses learning outcomes to explicitly drive change, allowing qualifications to be defined independent of existing standards, institutions, or programmes. It is a statutory instrument for regulating qualifications and is usually developed through top-down processes. Thus, educational providers become just one set of stakeholders among others.

Following the experience of the first NQFs models, Raffe (2005) and Young (2005) affirm that the implementation of transformational frameworks had arguably faced greater problems. Nevertheless, it should be noted that one of the difficulties associated with assessing the degree of successfulness of NQFs is the limited empirical evidence available from the later generation of models because most of them are far from being fully implemented. Additionally, the first generation of NQFs were introduced in a different international climate and, therefore, their achievements are likely to be unrepresentative.

Drawing on the experience of the early frameworks, Raffe (2009: 32) affirms that, inherent to their dynamic nature, the introduction of an NQF follows a triple dimension – technical, social, and political.

The technical dimension has probably received most attention from scholars and policy makers and has been the subject of guides published by diverse European institutions. Notwithstanding the relevance of technical issues in the successful introduction of any NQF-like conception, that focus often masks the other two.

The social (cultural and institutional) dimension is the reflection of the extensive changes brought about by the introduction of NQF. It implies a long process of cultural change since programme designs, pedagogies, and assessment are aligned with the new approach. It involves the building of trust in qualifications, the confidence that makes possible the shift from an institution-based to an outcome-based system (Young and Allais, 2009: 2). An NQF also represents a national language of learning that all users and providers can employ (Raffe,

2009: 32). Its wide use can only be achieved by a close and direct engagement of all the stakeholders involved and the crucial support of employers. Achieving relative consensus and making pragmatic compromises among users helps spread knowledge and understanding about the framework. This gets best accomplished if stakeholders are well organised (associations, unions, networks).

The political dimension derives from the fact that NQFs 'potentially redistribute power and control between different central authorities, between central authorities and educational institutions, between different sectors of education and training and between providers and "users"' (Raffe, 2011a: 299). The degree of engagement and influence of stakeholders plays a crucial role in the process. The support of education and training providers is especially important because the process is dependent on institutional logic. In the case of comprehensive frameworks covering all educational stages, the usual high influence of higher education can represent a difficulty in the process. However, the successful introduction of NQFs, designed to increase transparency and coherence of education and training, requires strong and active mechanisms for coordination. Due to this, Raffe stresses the necessity of 'policy breadth': 'the extent to which they are introduced as part of a coherent suite of measures or are expected to have a "stand-alone" impact'(2009: 25). Policy breadth would assure that the implementation is aligned with national policy, institutional priorities, and other contextual issues. Support also needs to be consistent across the branches of the government, typically education and labour ministries.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that however significant the role of NQFs might be in VET reforms, an 'NQF on its own only can play a modest role as a policy instrument, in contrast to institutions, the curriculum, the funding, and the teachers' (Young, 2007: 451). Consequently, in order to drive real reforms, the introduction of frameworks should imply the participation of different stakeholders and government departments (including employment and labour market, education, and economical areas), and the development of complementary policy measures, initiatives, and activities (Castejon, 2007; Grootings, 2007).

Finally, Raffe (2009: 37) suggests that the relative success of some of the early models (Scotland and Ireland¹⁰) was associated with several contextual factors, which include:

¹⁰ Ireland is considered an advanced second-generation framework (Raffe, 2009: 23)

- A policy culture and policy style that enhances policy continuity and incrementalism, consensus, producer dominance, and partnership;
- Small scale in terms of population;
- Relatively uniform and transparent institutional arrangement;
- Reasonably well-organised stakeholder groups, especially among providers, with the capacity to act in concert;
- Well-developed education and training institutions, and previous policies to increase their coherence, on which an incremental model of change could build;
- A developed economy, and a large formal labour market in which qualifications are a recognised currency; and
- The resources (including expertise, skills, organisational capacity and finances) to establish an NQF.

c) Some relevant issues on NQFs.

Chapter 3 has already described the radical change that the shift to learning outcomes (and the introduction of qualifications frameworks based on them) caused in the development of education systems. Two contradictory perspectives became confronted, the outcome-based logic and the institution-based logic. With relation to the development of frameworks, some authors state that the outcome-based model of VET would help weaken the links between qualifications and VET providers and facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP, 2008; Rauhvargers, 2009; Bjørnåvold and Coles, 2010). Young (2007: 446) argues that NQFs can also provide an opportunity to extend learning and its recognition, although he questions ‘how far it is possible to define qualifications independently of the institution, learning pathways and curricula which led to them’ (Young, 2007: 447). Other authors, on the other hand, warn about the risks of weakening educational institutions and of neglecting the learning processes itself (Castejon, 2007; Grootings, 2007). Young and Allais argue that ‘a reform approach which is designed to challenge educational institutions and providers is likely to have a dramatically different effect in countries where these institutions are weak or non-existent’ (2009: 9). This statement reflects the concerns of some scholars regarding the spread of the qualifications framework in developing countries.

Additionally, the shift from an institutional to an outcome-based model has relevant implications on two issues: one, the trust in qualifications and two, their interpretation and assessment (Young, 2007: 453–454); both issues posing direct mutual implication. He affirms that ‘trust is a necessary component of any form of assessment and can only be developed over time through regular collaboration between peers’. In the institutional model, trust is located in specialists of knowledge and the institutions that offer the learning programmes leading to qualifications. Qualifications are obtained following judgements of examiners (or, in the case of vocational qualifications, a master craftsman). But these judgements were called into question because they were considered ‘unreliable and subjective’ (ibid.: 453) and quite limited when comparing people from unfamiliar institutions. In the case of the outcomes or competences, there is no link to programmes or institutions, and only the criteria specified through the outcomes (level descriptors) need to be met. Assessment would rely on subjective judgements of assessors, and it would be closer to a procedural nature than to a judgemental one. Nevertheless, in order to make assessment more reliable, descriptors should be very specifically defined. However, a highly detailed specification of descriptors can, on the other hand, cause over-specification (Wolf, 1995; ILO, 2009b), leading to the trivialisation of outcomes and the lowering of standards. The excessive specification found in some models often causes doubts about the real capability of the descriptor-based outcomes to summarise all that the holder of a qualification knows (ILO, 2009a). Nevertheless, however detailed the specification of descriptors becomes, what an effective operationalisation of qualifications requires is a real capability to mediate the activities of employers, teachers, students, and workers and, therefore, the strong involvement of all stakeholders and social partners is crucial during the long development and operational stages.

Finally, the term *learning outcome* (is very general and can be interpreted in many ways (as it happens with competence, which has already been addressed in the previous sections). Again, the most contrasted views can be illustrated by the approaches followed in Germany and in the United Kingdom. Germany has traditionally had a highly input-oriented qualification system. In fact, the first national qualifications framework wasn’t introduced in Germany until 2011 (Gössling, 2016). Outcomes in Germany were defined in relation to ‘occupational competence’ and qualifications involve inputs. On the contrary, in the United Kingdom, as already explained in the case of the initial model of NVQs, competences are

understood narrowly, in terms of work tasks. Countries influenced by the United Kingdom have, consequently, developed pure outcomes models, although most models can be located somewhere in between the two contrasted ones, and their qualifications somehow still relate to input-based elements. The diversity of approaches has become an additional difficulty to the development of the European qualifications framework, described in the following section.

4.4. The European Qualifications Framework

An analysis of the expansion of the National Qualifications Frameworks across European countries has to necessarily address one of the ‘key tools in the Copenhagen Process’ (Cort, 2010: 304) namely, the European Qualifications Framework. Although the general evolution of the European approach to education and training is described with more detail in Chapter 5, the understanding of the emergence of the EQF requires tracing back to Europe’s first steps towards achieving the freedom of mobility, which was included in the Treaty of Rome of 1957. Different attempts were made to ensure workers’ mobility, although initially only vocational qualifications were concerned. It can be argued that the EQF is politically embedded in the Lisbon agenda and that it aims to ensure social inclusion and European competitiveness (Presidency Conclusions: Lisbon Council 2000, EU Commission, 2000). However, the EQF is more than an instrument promoted by the EU. The OECD is also, in reality, very interested in promoting the spread of national and European qualifications frameworks, arguing that these tools ‘allow for transparency, comparability and mobility’ (Werquin, 2007: 466). Nowadays, EQF is considered to be a means to promote lifelong learning by making education and training systems more transparent and comparable and qualifications more portable (Cort, 2010: 306) and, therefore, applies to all types and levels of education.

The EQF was first adopted by the European Parliament in 2008¹¹ and was described as a comparator for qualifications in different countries: ‘a common reference framework of eight levels of qualifications, expressed as learning outcomes with increasing levels of proficiency, whose aim was to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of people’s

¹¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01).

qualifications’ (following the Council Recommendation, 2017¹²). The ‘wider objectives’ of the establishment of the Recommendation of 2017 is ‘to contribute to modernizing education and training systems and to increase the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners’. Following that Recommendation, during the last decade ‘member states have been developing national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes and are relating these to the EQF through a “referencing” process’. The issue of trust clearly appears as a requisite for the referencing and recognition practices involved and, consequently, the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders is claimed in the Union at national levels to ensure a broad support.

It should be noted that, unlike NQFs, the outcome-based EQF is not intended to compare individual qualifications directly, but to facilitate the equivalence between classifications of qualifications from different NQFs. Designed to be applied to NQFs, the EQF is often known as a translation device, because it translates a classificatory judgement in the qualification system in country A to its equivalent in the qualification system in country B’ (Brockmann *et al.*, 208: 29) through a process that relies on different methods and authorities.

Several claims have been made and evidence provided by EU’s and official documents, supporting the conception of EQF as a neutral tool . In this way, the tool would be based on ‘reliable evidence supported by rigorous research and data’ (Bordeaux Communiqué, 2008: 10). At the same time, its aim to politically harmonise national education systems has been denied: ‘the EQF (...) is not an instrument for harmonising qualifications or parts of qualifications systems but is intended to function as a type of translation device to make relationships between qualifications and different systems clearer’ (Bjørnåvold, 2007: 9).

Nevertheless, diverse criticisms have been put forward by scholars. With relation to the methodology applied to introduce the EFQ in the EU and although the troublesome discourse of education systems’ harmonisation is elusive, the description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes has indeed been introduced in a very similar way across member states through the open method of coordination. The main principle of EQF is to spread the same standard description of qualifications in terms of ‘knowledge, skills and competence’ and

¹² Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (9620/17).

levels, facilitating standardisation and comparison of educational systems (Cort, 2010: 307). In that sense, EQF would 'help to disseminate or impose the concept of learning outcomes, at least in Europe' (Werquin, 2007: 468). Bohlinger warns about the risk 'to arise if economic policy objectives such as the promotion of mobility, competitiveness and employability take precedence over those of educational policy' (2007: 108) and affirms the need to learn more from countries with several years of experience in trying to achieve the objectives of transparency, comparability, and portability claimed by NQFs. Cort even affirms that the 'EQF is not a neutral evidence-based policy tool' (2010: 305). Markowitsch and Luomi-Messerer state that the EQF is an instrument of 'practical politics', characterised by 'a lack of theoretical underpinning and of a systematic foundation' (2008: 61).

With respect to the feasibility of the framework's main objectives, Young (2008: 135–6) claims that lessons from NQFs should be taken into account whenever establishing goals for the EQF. Thus, he doubts the real capacity of the EQF to address educational reforms because given the power of national educational systems, he considers it to be an 'important but relatively weak reform instrument at least on its own' and would likely have an enabling rather than a regulatory role. He also states that the problems of curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment are hardly addressed by qualifications alone and that completely separating qualifications from educational institutions is an unrealistic wish. Rather,

'A far more realistic approach is to link institutions to informal learners through supporting alternative access programmes. It is difficult to see who would value qualifications achieved by accreditation alone. The policy priority that arises from the knowledge economy is not to accredit existing informal learning but to use that informal learning to provide new forms of progression into further and higher education'. (Young, 2008: 136).

There is a final objection to the effectiveness of EQF that requires mentioning. As has already been addressed in this chapter, the diverse VET systems in Europe have been built on their traditional institutional structures and labour processes (Müller and Gangl, 2003; Thelen, 2004), the transnationality of key VET related concepts (qualification, knowledge, competence, skill) which are deeply rooted in countries' institutional structures and labour processes becomes more problematic than what can be inferred from the structure of EQF (Clarke and Winch, 2006, 2015; Brockmann *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, in order to implement

European educational tools, Clarke and Winch (2015: 604) suggest that ‘the incompatibility of an Anglo-Saxon employer-, performance-, and task-based understanding of learning outcomes with the educational-, social-partner-, and occupational-based VET systems in many continental European countries needs to be taken into account’. Since the ‘cognitive subdivisions of “knowledge”, “skill” and “competence” are culturally English terms’ there is a danger of important differences in the concepts in different languages not being properly appreciated (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 30). This way, if an operational common currency of the European qualifications is to be attained by the implementation of the EQF, the process should require adaptation to the diversity of national traditions in qualifications design as well as to the specificities of national and sectoral labour markets. Méhaut and Winch (2012) state that this would demand a more politically robust process for the EQF to maintain the required credibility and trust.

The next section of this chapter addresses theoretical and practical issues related to the learning that occurs at the workplace, a type of learning that is gaining relevance in the current approaches to education and training.

4.5. Learning at the workplace: theoretical approaches and practical issues

The recognition of the learning that occurs in work environments is not new (Beckett and Hager, 2002, Hager, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 2004). The Human Capital Theory of Becker (1964) developed a new view on workforce training based on the idea of investment in human beings. He highlighted the need for contemporary firms to include this view in their definition of strategy for performance and productivity enhancement. Garrick affirms that ‘the idea of investing in human beings as a form of capital has, since then, fuelled a powerful discourse of workplace learning’ (1999: 217). Stern and Sommerland (1999) on their behalf argue that the notion of learning in the workplace ‘has acquired visibility and saliently’ because ‘it sits at the juncture of new thinking concerning the nature of learning about new forms of knowledge, about the transformation of the nature of work and about the modern enterprise in a globalized economy’ (cited in Fuller and Unwin, 2002:95). The relevance of workplace learning as a field of research itself might be illustrated by the emergence of notions such as learning organisation, lifelong learning, and the learning society (Lee *et al.*, 2004).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, because companies' and firms' degree of success are mostly measured in terms of productivity and economic performance, the economic approach has largely inspired the concept of workplace learning. As already described in Chapter 4, since the early stages of industrialisation, the provision of skills for workers has been of utmost importance for either governments or for employers and unions, leading to cross-country distinctive institutional arrangements (Ashton, 2004; Thelen, 2004; Bosch and Charest, 2010). Ashton (2004) argues that the presence of workplace learning in real policy and the perceptions of its contribution to competitiveness are diverse. He states that this highly depends on the nature and historical evolution of the vocational education and training system, the relationship between the state, labour, and capital and the particular features of the production system.

Under the light of the literature review, it can be stated that there is a broad consensus among scholars on the potential of the workplace as a site for learning. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of workplace learning becomes quite problematic because learning is not the primary purpose of the organisation and it should be considered as 'activity embedded within the production and labour processes and social relations between employees' (Rainbird *et al.*, 2004: 2). Consequently, some scholars (Guile and Griffiths, 2001; Beckett and Hager, 2002; Rainbird *et al.*, 2004) have drawn their attention to the fact that the enhancement of this type of learning should be based on actual contemporary work practices. In fact, the nature of strategic decisions taken at workplaces, and power and employment relationships determine the opportunities and restrictions for learning as will be described later on.

The next sections will delve into the main aspects concerning the learning that occurs in the workplace. They will first analyse the theories on learning and the theoretical frameworks to address workplace learning. Following this, the most relevant conceptual framework to assess the quality of learning experiences in contemporary workplaces – the expansive-restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) – will be described. Finally, some of the elements that contribute to the reality of contemporary workplaces and, therefore, affect the learning experiences will be described.

4.5.1. Theoretical approaches to learning: metaphors and paradigms.

In an attempt to shed some light on the discussion on learning theories, Sfard (1998: 4) used a theorising tradition in social sciences – the metaphor method – to point out two leading metaphors in which diverse thinking about learning could be accommodated: the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor.

The first metaphor, learning as acquisition, is mainly influenced by the disciplines of cognitive and behaviourist psychology. For this metaphor 'knowledge is something that exists independent of the knower but is that which the knower can acquire, internalise, own and exhibit' (Sfard, 1998 cited in Lee *et al.*, 2004: 7). Learning is thus perceived as the gaining of some form of possession, or the acquisition of an entity. Sfard (1998) explains the types of entities that can be acquired in the process of learning (knowledge, concept, notion, meaning), and the different terms used to signify the process by which these entities are made one's own (acquisition, appropriation, development). The basic units of knowledge can be accumulated through summative methods and combined to define more complicated structures, which might be assessed.

The second metaphor, learning as participation, on the other hand, includes the approach of those scholars who prefer the word knowing instead of knowledge, which indicates action. Under the participation metaphor, the learner should be considered as willing to participate in certain activities undertaken within a social context, rather than being merely interested in gathering possessions. This way, individuals learn as part of their engagement with other people and resources. Learning here consists of becoming a member of a community where the learner *participates* and doing so through the development of forms of knowing associated with the community.

The relevance of Sfard's work is not only due to her definition of the two metaphors, but also due to the conclusions she formed about their use when theorising and researching on learning. She warned about the consequences caused by a too strong attachment to a particular metaphor and affirmed that learning theorists and researchers should consider adequately combining both metaphors in order to highlight the advantages of each one while mitigating their respective shortcomings.

‘It seems that the sooner we accept the thought that our work is bound to produce a patchwork of metaphors rather than a unified, homogeneous theory of learning, the better for us and for those whose lives are likely to be affected by our work’ (ibid.: 11).

Another relevant binary approach to the conceptualisation of learning was carried out by Beckett and Hager (2002), who compared two major understandings of learning: standard paradigm and emerging paradigm.

Formal learning found in educational institutions is considered to operate under the standard paradigm, to a great extent downplaying the importance of social, organisational, and cultural factors. This paradigm is based on three assumptions: that learning is a process of accumulation of ideas, the interiority of mental events and activities, that is, learning as based on thinking instead of on action, and the transparency of learning, meaning that learning must be retrievable, contrary to tacit knowledge or informal learning. Such learning would be contrary to other types of learning that occur at the workplace, such as the learning of skills by apprentices, which is concrete, context dependent, and somewhat intuitive, and would be considered to be of a second-rate status (Hager, 2004: 244). Notwithstanding the enormous influence of this conceptualisation of learning on academic processes which decisively shapes formal education systems, understanding and measuring learning at the workplace happens to be very problematic.

The emerging paradigm, although encompassing different disciplinary perspectives and various understandings of the social, seeks to gather workplace learning theories that share a higher concern regarding informal learning processes and on the social perspective of learning. It conceives learning as an action in the world which changes both the learner and their environment. Beckett et Hager (2002) formulate the main principles of the emerging paradigm of learning are (cited in Hager, 2004):

Knowledge, as integrated in judgements, is a capacity for successfully acting in and on the world.

- The choice of how to act in and on the world comes from the exercise of judgement.
- Knowledge resides in individuals, teams, and organisations.

- Knowledge includes not just propositional understanding, but cognitive, conative, and affective capacities as well as other abilities
- Not all knowledge can be or has been expressed verbally and written down.
- Acquisition of knowledge alters both the learner and the world (since the learner is part of the world).

Hager (2004) considers the emerging paradigm to serve better the understanding of how learning is embedded within the context in which it occurs and, therefore, becomes more appropriate for conceptualising learning at work. Nevertheless, both paradigms should not be considered contradictory. Rather, the standard paradigm should be perceived as a limited case of the emerging paradigm. In fact, the learning labelled by the standard paradigm represents only a part of the whole learning occurring in the work environment.

Following Sfard (1998), Hager (2004) argues that learning as participation perspective informed the dominant approaches of the emerging paradigm. The participation approach was further developed through the social theories of learning, as described next.

4.5.2. Theoretical frameworks for workplace learning research.

A relevant landmark for providing a theoretical framework to consider workplace learning emerged with the Situated Learning Theory (SLT) of Lave and Wenger (1991). Not comfortable with the asocial nature of traditional learning, they considered learning as situated and intrinsic to human activity. As Fuller *et al.* state, Situated Learning Theory (SLT) represents a

‘move away from the concerns of traditional learning theorists who had conceptualised the learner as the receptacle of (taught) knowledge and learning as a discrete cognitive process that largely ignored its meaning “in the lived-in world”’ (2005:50).

Lave and Wenger developed their theories through case studies based on the modes of apprenticeship within diverse communities of practice. SLT explains the process through which novices in a workplace become experts or competent not just by learning particular task-related skills, but also by acquiring the habits, and by learning how to be a legitimate member of that professional community. Nevertheless, drawing on empirical research Fuller *et al.* (2005) suggest that further conceptual attention should be paid to the following areas:

- SLT has been developed out of the analysis of new entrants entering the workplace and learning to become full members of a community of practice by means of legitimate peripheral participation. Nevertheless, the theory does not seem to be as useful to address the learning that experienced workers develop after they have become full members.
- The theory doesn't refer to the influence that organisational factors, such as structure, history, and culture, exert on workplace learning. The controversial nature of workplace, where conflict and unequal power relations are inherent, is not considered either.
- Formal education and the role of teaching in both workplace and off-the-job settings are dismissed in SLT. This might be caused by the attempt to surpass the almost exclusive focus on formal education typical of the standard theorisation of learning.
- Finally, the focus being on the ways in which a person's identity is developed through their belonging to a *community of practice*, not enough attention is paid to the equally important external contribution from the workers themselves.

The focus on the way learning occurs within communities of practice shifted with the proposal of the Activity Theory by Engeström (1994, 1995, 2001). He developed a social perspective of learning centred in the way learning is constructed through and across interacting communities of practice. Engeström *et al.* (1995) addressed the ways learning takes place in work situations that are not necessarily stable and bounded, but rather influenced by workplace rules and procedures that make interrelations between the individual and different communities or networks more complicated. Thus, Engeström's approach seeks to detail the processes involved in what he calls expansive learning, where the notion of activity theory replaced that of community of practice.

Notwithstanding the relevance of Engeström's contribution to revitalise the learning theory and conceptualising it outside of behaviourism and cognitivism (Young, 2001: 157), Fuller and Unwin (2004) argue that the expansive learning theory has not sufficiently considered the organisational aspects of workplace activities or the work context itself. They consider the assumption of the workplace as an even playing field for participation and decision making as highly problematic.

Despite their limitations, both theories, Situated Learning Theory and Activity System Theory, 'represent some of the most influential attempts to transcend the dualistic tendencies of the dominant theoretical paradigms of educational research, such as theories of structuralism and educational theories that place mind and mental processes at their centre' (Arnseth, 2008:289). They both have laid relevant foundation to the theories and research on workplace learning.

a) Formal and informal learning.

In the light of the reviewed literature, the conceptualisation of the different types of learning – formal and informal, and the analysis of the extent to which they are present in the learning that occurs at the workplace is essential.

Formal learning is traditionally conceptualised as the standard paradigm of learning (Beckett and Hager, 2004; Hager, 2004). Eraut (2000) argues that formal learning can be defined as the one that occurs within a predetermined learning framework (education institution) with the structured learning content being delivered by a person designated as a teacher or trainer. The learner is awarded certain types of qualifications following an externally specified outcome scheme.

The conceptualisation of informal learning becomes more problematic and is often 'defined in relation to what it is not formal' (Colley *et al.*, 2002: 5). Lee *et al.* (2004) suggest four broad organising principles which apply to workplace learning: context, as it occurs outside of classroom based formal educational settings, cognisance, meaning either intentional or incidental learning, experiential, learning through practice and judgement; and relationship, learning as part of social interaction.

Marsick and Watkins point to a wider definition: informal learning would 'take place wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning' (2001: 28). They also argue that 'it is usually intentional but not highly structured' and 'includes self-directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring, and performance planning that includes opportunities to review learning needs' (*ibid.*: 25-26).

This sense of ubiquity of informal learning hinders differentiation of both types of learning. In fact, drawing on empirical data from diverse fields of activity, Colley *et al.* (2002: 5) suggest

that ‘there are few, if any, learning situations where either informal or formal elements are completely absent’. This statement is aligned with the one made by Sfard (1998) about the use of the two metaphors of learning, acquisition and participation, which have already been mentioned in this section.

The issue of status increases the reluctance of some scholars towards forming a sharp distinction between formal and informal learning when approaching workplace learning situations. Beckett and Hager point to the traditional lower status given to training and workplace learning because it has been considered an ‘intellectually uninterested activity’ (2002: 19). Other scholars (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Hager, 2004) defend the superiority of informal learning because it presumably encompasses both practice and the new emerging paradigms. On his behalf, Billet (2002) defends the appropriateness of considering discussions on workplace learning outside the strict informal learning framework in order to overcome the traditional lower status attributed to the learning which cannot be included within the standard paradigm. In fact, he states that workplace learning occurs in a highly structured way:

‘As with educational institutions, in workplaces there are intentions for work practice, structured goal directed activities that are central to organisational continuity, and intentions and judgements about performance that are also shaped to those ends. Therefore, describing learning through work as being “informal” is incorrect’ (ibid.: 56)

From what has been described up to now, it can be asserted that, although addressed by different disciplines and traditions, and also encompassing some elements typical of the traditional paradigm, learning as participation has become the dominant approach to the understanding of workplace learning. It can be also concluded that research and even theorisation on workplace learning should shift from binary considerations: acquisition or participation metaphor, traditional or emerging paradigm, and formal or informal learning. Although these concepts are of high value, in isolation, neither of them is enough to comprehensively address the learning that occurs at workplaces.

For Billet (2002), ‘rather than focusing on modes of informal, formal or non-formal learning, attention should rather be paid to structures, norms, values and practices within workplaces

and how they structure the opportunities for, and participation in learning. This is the key to understanding both the quality and distribution of learning within the workplace' (cited in *Lee et al.*, 2004: 19). If learning is embedded in social interactions in the workplace, it seems quite reasonable to regard not only the practices of the workplace and the nature of the social interactions as a starting point for enhancing workplace learning, but also the context and structures where they occur as well.

The following section will describe the conceptual framework developed by Fuller and Unwin (2003), which has become functional not only in analysing the different apprenticeship schemes in terms of the quality of learning, but also in addressing the potential offered by workplace environments to experienced members.

4.5.3. The restrictive-expansive continuum.

As already described in this paper, Lave and Wenger developed a novel theory primarily addressing the way in which newcomers learn to become full members of a community of practice. They based their research extensively on the metaphor of learning as participation and focused on traditional craft-based activities.

Fuller and Unwin (2003), in their behalf, were aware that the complexity of current industrial and commercial organisations and the new institutionalised apprenticeship models applied transcended the newcomer versus the old-timer trajectory as conceptualised in the Situated Learning Theory. Based on empirical research, they moved beyond that theory, providing a broader conceptualisation of participation in communities of practice. They carried out their research based on the Modern Apprenticeship programme developed by the UK government in 1993 which provided additional features to the traditional apprenticeship notion considered by Lave and Wenger. The development of the programme in three different companies associated with the steel industry in England was scrutinised.

UK's Modern Apprenticeship configured an apprenticeship model in which, unlike prior models, the State had a direct role not only in funding the programme, but also in setting specifications. There was thus a third stake-holder in the model, in addition to employer and apprentice. As a distinguishing characteristic, apprentices needed to achieve a specific outcome, namely required qualifications, in order to successfully complete the programme. Thus, modern apprenticeship 'can be conceived of as an institutional intervention which

overlays the generic processes and relations involved in the newcomer to old-timer journey' (Fuller et Unwin, 2003: 409), pursuing a more ambitious aim than just providing youngsters a transition to labour by learning jobs. Consequently, the programme advocates a learning and teaching environment where the configuration of both formal and informal learning processes determined to a large extent the quality of the learning experience.

The expansive-restrictive continuum was intended to be a tool to describe the opportunities for, and obstacles to, the learning that the apprentices acquired. All the features listed in Figure 4.5. (next page), used for describing the continuum, can be condensed through three main themes: participation, personal development, and institutional arrangement.

The evidence collected showed that apprentices encountered different participation experiences depending on the scope, the purpose, and the speed of the apprenticeship process. The most expansive features were connected with the company offering a well-defined programme which require a long-term journey before becoming a well-rounded expert. In this company, the apprentices gained access to a wide range of communities of practice, by participating in inside, outside, and near the workplace experiences. Off-the-work activities, either formal or informal, and the inward boundary crossing offered ensured rich opportunities for learning. In stark contrast, those companies in which apprenticeship either did not have a clear purpose or was just a way to address recruitment difficulties, participation did not lead to good quality learning. The access to communities of practice, not strictly planned, was further limited, both inside and outside the company and the process to become *full participant* was for a shorter time period.

The degree of personal development achieved in each case study was analysed through three aspects: the opportunity to reflect on practice, to envision career trajectories, and to develop one's own identity by belonging to different communities of practice. The expansive possibilities for personal development were identified with the company that offered a wider range of activities, whereas those companies restricting participation to tightly bound communities were defined as more restrictive. The case studies also showed differences in young people's attitudes, bringing to light the relevance of individual agency and identity. In this sense, Billet and Somerville (2004) address this particular aspect of workplace learning and describe the way individuals decide whether to engage or not in the opportunities they are offered through the exercise of their individual agency. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004)

also describe the reasons for this uneven engagement and response in terms of individual biographies and dispositions for learning that can influence both the nature of the working environment and the attitude they might develop towards and within it.

Figure 4.5.: Expansive-restrictive continuum

EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE
Participation in multiple communities of practice inside and outside the workplace	Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice
Primarily community of practice has shared 'participated memory': Cultural inheritance of apprenticeship	Primarily community of practice has little or no 'participated memory': no or little tradition of apprenticeship
Breadth: Access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences built into programme	Narrow: Access to learning restricted in terms of tasks/knowledge/location
Access to range of qualifications including knowledge-based vocational qualifications	Access to competence-based qualifications only
Planned time off the job including for college attendance and for reflection	Virtually all on the job; limited opportunities for reflection
Gradual transition to full participation	Fast: Transition as quick as possible
Apprenticeship aim: Rounded expert/full participant	Apprenticeship aim: Partial expert/full participant
Post apprenticeship vision: Progression for career	Post apprenticeship vision; Static for job
Explicit institutional recognition of, and support for, apprentice's status as learner	Ambivalent institutional recognition of, and support for, apprentice's status as learner
Apprenticeship is used as a vehicle for aligning the goals of developing the individual and organizational capability	Apprenticeship is used to tailor individual capability to organizational need
Apprenticeship design fosters opportunities to extent identity through boundary-crossing	Apprenticeship design limits opportunity to extent identity; little boundary-crossing experienced
Reification of apprenticeship highly developed (e.g., through documents, symbols, language, tools) and accessible to apprentices	Limited reification of apprenticeship, patchy access to reificatory aspects of practice

Source: Fuller et Unwin (2003: 411).

Finally, the empirical data illustrated the impact that institutional arrangements have on the quality of the learning experiences. Employment relationships, including work contract, salary, and status recognition; deployed managerial strategies; existence and use of learning objects such as certificates and training programmes linked to practice and easy to access by apprentices – all these features describe the degree of institutionalisation of apprenticeship and, as a consequence, its more restrictive or expansive approach.

The authors developed an increasing concern on understanding the interactions between institutional context, workplace environment, and individual learning.

4.5.4. Grounding workplace learning on the reality of contemporary organisations.

The various notions and conceptual frameworks that might help develop a better understanding of the learning that occurs in workplaces have been addressed hitherto, bringing to light the potential of the workplace as a learning environment. Nevertheless, Fuller *et al.* state that 'the possibilities for enhancing learning must be grounded in the reality of contemporary work practices' (2004: 300). This way, conceptualising learning at the workplace solely as a participative activity risks trivialising the complexity of the environment. The employment relationships; the organisational structures of production and the nature of the strategic decisions that they imply; and the instability of current workplaces due to the global economic pressure and new developments in communication and information technology are some of the elements that affect the configuration of contemporary organisations. In fact, the workplace does constitute a dynamic learning environment. It is permanently configured by the changing relationships between organisational factors, social relations, and individual agency. Opportunities and barriers to learning are structured and unevenly distributed across organisations and groups and lead to intended and unintended consequences (Fuller *et al.*, 2004).

With regard to the employment relations, Rainbird *et al.* (2004) explain how they influence workers' access to learning by operating at three different levels. The first level refers to the relevance of the role played by the state in shaping education and training systems and in framing labour legislation and industrial policy. The employment relationships can also be regulated at the organisational level. Here, the way in which the relationship between the employer and employee is built becomes essential for understanding the context of workplace learning. Although some theories assume equal interest of employers and employees, they argue that training strategies must be placed in an environment of tension between different management objectives and functions and the individual interest of workers. The third level refers to the fact that training strategies in organisations need to be placed in the social relation of the workplace. This is the level where contested issues such as the control of the access and type of learning, employee entitlement, and the organisation of work are relevant.

Contemporary workplaces also face the risk posed by the strong emphasis on situated learning by the latest approaches to learning (Fuller *et al.*, 2004: 3). It tends to assume that all knowledge is situated, and that the knowledge required to perform particular jobs is embedded within associated tasks, processes, and employees who are already competent. The most recent pedagogical approaches promote learners' participation in diverse workplace activities and encourage learning from more experienced workmates. One advantage of this approach is that individuals don't need to address knowledge transfer because their knowledge was gained in the same context in which it is being applied. However, this approach fails to recognise that there are types of knowledge which are not always accessible on-the-job. This is the case of theoretical ideas which are not connected to specific contexts. Denying individuals access to underpinning knowledge can contribute to workforce inequalities and hamper employees' progression to positions which benefit from sound theoretical grounding. On the contrary, effective support to facilitate the transfer of learning from one context to another enhances the integration of theory and practice.

Finally, when considering the relevance of organisation of production and the nature of strategic decisions, Evans and Rainbird state that

'The discourses of Human Resources Management, the 'learning organization' and the 'knowledge management' would seem to suggest that learning is a central concern in the workplace. Yet the harsh reality of operating environment of many public and private sector organizations means that the rhetoric is not even an aspiration'(2005: 10-11).

All of the elements described above form part of the everyday reality of contemporary workplaces and, as a consequence, affect how learning opportunities are offered to, and used by workers. The enhancement of the learning experiences in work place environments should therefore take into consideration the way those elements contribute to shape the context where learning is to occur.

Chapter 5. The European VET space.

5.1. The precedents of a common european VET

The major driving force in European VET policy-making has been the EU economic agenda (Brockman *et al.*, 2008: 11). The predecessor of the European Economic Community and the EU, the European Coal and Steel Community, already considered the mobility of workers and the transnational recognition of qualifications as an issue relevant enough for the establishment of a common market for coal and steel (Cort, 2008). The European Economic Community maintained the same stance towards VET when the community policy domain expanded to incorporate the agriculture and transportation sectors. Article 128 of the original Treaty of Rome of 1957 reveals the ambition to define a policy on VET that would cover all sectors, because VET was defined as a suitable tool for enhancing labour market policies (Heyes and Rainbird, 2009)

‘The Council shall (...) lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development of both the national economies and of the common market’

(Treaty of Rome (1957: 45)

It wasn't until 1963 that the principles to implement common vocational training policy were agreed upon among the Commission and the Member States, that the policy area of the Commission was expanded to general education. It paved the way for an extension of action from vocational training to a wider view of the VET field (Pépin, 2006). Nevertheless, ‘most Member States did not consider the ten principles of 1963 legally binding’ and the joint action in VET was quite limited until the economic oil crisis of the 1970s (Erlt, 2006: 7). In fact, VET has been an area in which governments have been able to subsidise producers without transgressing competition policy (Rainbird, 1993). The high youth unemployment that the oil crisis caused laid bare the need for a European policy, and several activities were initiated to tackle unemployment. Although these initial activities lacked cohesion, the need for a supranational education policy that would include VET and general education was being increasingly felt at the community level.

The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992¹ gave momentum to the European VET policy making. It stated that 'the community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of Member States' (Article 127). Following this article, the Commission was encouraged to launch comprehensive programmes in order to coordinate policies in education and training. Although Member States limited in practice the impact of more integrated European activities by citing the principle of subsidiarity (Ertl, 2006; Cort, 2008), the initiatives developed in higher education (the Bologna Declaration of 1999) progressively opened the door to more ambitious initiatives in the field of VET (Ert and Philips, 2003).

The Lisbon European Council was a landmark in the evolution of the European VET Area. The 2000–2010 programme that was launched in the Lisbon Declaration defined the EU's competitors in strong and emerging economies and stated that the coordination and cooperation among Member States were crucial to competing in the global market. Its policy goals aimed at ensuring 'social inclusion' and European 'competitiveness' (Presidency Conclusions: Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000; EU Commission, 2000). Following this, the Council stated the role of education as an integral part of economic and social policies, as an instrument for strengthening Europe's competitive power worldwide and as a guarantee for ensuring the cohesion of the societies and the overall development of its citizens. In order to become the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy, attainment of a high-quality vocational education and training was set as a strategic aim.

Following the literature on the contribution of VET to the European competitive strategy, two main policy aims can be identified (Brockmann *et al.*, 2008: 13). First, the vision that high-quality VET and better access to it is crucial to produce a better qualified labour force in Europe. Qualified workers are required in order to ensure that Europe is not positioned among the cheap, low value-added mass producers in the global market (Ertl, 2006; Pépin, 2006). The second aim is the creation of an open European market for qualifications and the free mobility of workers. Cort argues that the relevance of the transnational recognition of vocational qualifications is based on the old ambition to

¹ Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 [Available at] https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europa.eu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf

create a European internal market 'where goods, capital, services and labour can flow freely' (2008: 109).

Although the Lisbon agenda triggered a process to coordinate European educational policies, the development of an effective common VET policy took its time. As Brockmann *et al.* point out

'Time is essential in European policymaking; the building of Europe is an ongoing process of permanently setting and resetting targets, of framing and reframing ends and means. The EU's dealing with VET is a perfect illustration of this seasoned policy approach' (2008: 13).

The overall process of building an enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training as a means to attain these general aims has been developed thorough successive council meetings, declarations, and recommendations.

The Stockholm European Council of March 2001 endorsed the report on the 'Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems', which identified three strategic objectives: to improve quality and effectiveness of education and training systems, to facilitate access to education for all, and to open up education and training systems to the wider world.

In Barcelona, the European Council held in March 2002 agreed upon the Work Programme to make European education and training a world quality reference for 2010 (Education and Training 2010, ET 2010). It established for the first time a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training and promoted actions similar to the Bologna process to ensure transparency of diplomas awarded to the field of VET.

In 2009 a new strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training was launched ('ET 2020'²). Although it acknowledged the significant progress that the cooperation under the ET 2010 had led to (especially in support of the national reforms of lifelong learning, modernisation of higher education, and the development of a

² 2009/C 119/02 Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'). [Available at] <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f349e9ff-9cb8-4f73-b2f6-0a13452d22b4/language-en>

common European instrument promoting quality, transparency, and mobility), it confirmed the presence of substantial challenges. ET 2020 stated that the primary goal of European cooperation should be to ‘support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States to ensure personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens and sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue’. The framework would ‘help the European Union achieve its objective of becoming a world-leading knowledge economy’ by addressing four strategic objectives:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship and
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

A mid-term stocktaking of the ET 2020 strategic framework was carried out in 2014. It involved Member States and key stakeholders and confirmed that serious challenges remained. Consequently, new priorities as well as additional governance and working methods³ were established.

With relation to vocational education and training, the development of cooperation frameworks and initiatives has occurred intertwined with that of general education. For example, the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission convened in Copenhagen in November 2002 launched the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training. This strategy has been commonly referred to as the ‘Copenhagen process’. The links between the Copenhagen process as the European cooperation platform for VET and the ET 2020 Strategic Framework were considered to be of immense importance in ensuring consistency between VET and other sectors of education and training.

³ 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). New priorities for European cooperation in education and training – Council conclusions (23 November 2015). [Available at] <http://www.eucen.eu/post/2015-joint-report-under-the-et-2020>

5.2. From the Copenhagen Declaration to the Riga Conclusions

The Copenhagen Declaration gathers the main objectives and policy approaches on vocational education and training that would be followed hereon:

‘Strategies for lifelong learning and mobility are essential to promote employability, active citizenship, social inclusion and personal development. Developing a knowledge-based Europe and ensuring that the European labour market is open to all is a major challenge to the vocational education and training systems in Europe and to all actors involved’.

‘The social partners play an indispensable role in the development, validation and recognition of vocational competences and qualifications at all levels’ (European Commission, 2002: 2).

The declaration conveys the aim of the EU to ‘increase voluntary cooperation in vocational education and training, in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, and thereby establishing a basis for increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning’. The main priorities through which this aim would be pursued were set as follows:

1. European dimension.
2. Transparency, information, and guidance.
3. Development and recognition of competences and qualifications between different countries and at different levels, as well as at a sectoral level, especially involving social partners.
4. Development of a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning.
5. Quality assurance.

The main ideas agreed upon in the Copenhagen Declaration were reaffirmed in successive Communiqués (Maastricht, 2004; Helsinki, 2006; Bordeaux, 2008; Bruges, 2010). After eight years of cooperation, the Bruges Communiqué⁴ acknowledged the

⁴ Communiqué of the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission, meeting in Bruges on 7 December 2010 to review the strategic approach and priorities of the Copenhagen process for 2011-2020

relevant contribution of the Copenhagen process in raising awareness regarding the importance of VET at both national and international levels. It defined long-term strategic objectives for the decade 2011–2020 along with short-term deliverables (2011–2014) in order to provide new impetus to VET in Europe.

In 2015 the ministers in charge of vocational education and training convened in the Baltic city of Riga and drew the Riga Conclusion 2015⁵ on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015–2020, ‘in order to meet the ET 2020 strategic objectives and to reaffirm our support for the wider European growth and jobs agenda’. The medium-term targets stated by the Riga Conclusions 2015, described later on in this section, configure the current European policy framework for VET.

In the last decade, aligned with those political statements, several tools have been developed by European institutions in order to promote transparency, portability, and recognition of learning outcomes and, as a result, making lifelong learning and mobility a reality. The most relevant of these are as follows:

- The European Qualifications Framework⁶ for lifelong learning, as stressed in the joint reports of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010.
- The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for vocational education and training⁷ (EQSVET), as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of VET systems.
- The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training⁸, to be used for the transfer and accumulation of individuals’ learning outcomes achieved in

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

⁵http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

⁶ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Frameworks for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01). [Available at] https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf

⁷ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for vocational education and training (EQSVET). [Available at] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2009.155.01.0001.01.ENG

⁸ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), (2009/C 155/02). [Available at] [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32009H0708\(02\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32009H0708(02))

formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal contexts. The ECSVET built on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) established in 1989 within the framework of the Erasmus programme awards credits for formal learning based on learning outcomes and students' workload, as well as on the EQSVET.

- The validation of non-formal and informal learning⁹, a follow-up of the process initiated with the European Inventory and the European Guidelines published in 2009. It is considered a necessary mechanism for recognising prior learning and experience gained outside formal education and training.

5.2.1. The Riga Conclusions.

The context of the shared reflections and the attained agreements among Member States (together with Candidate Countries and European Economic Area Countries) is linked to the aspiration of growth and job creation as the first objective of the European Commission (2014–2019), identified by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. Thus, the Declaration highlights the determination of the countries to enhance their contribution to the international competitiveness of the labour force developed by the European VET as well as the improvement of the recognition of VET qualifications in Europe and in the global context.

The importance of investing in VET and skills' policies is reaffirmed in the statement. These policies contribute towards raising the employability of people: reducing skills' mismatches and enhancing up-skilling of the workforce; meeting the enormous challenges posed by high youth unemployment and allowing for smoother transitions into employment, which is specially favoured by work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeship programmes; and promoting personal development of individuals.

The states committed to implement VET reforms in compliance with national, regional, and local developments and demands, and by promoting the existing dialogue and cooperation with social partners and other relevant stakeholders. They also highlighted

⁹ Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01). [Available at]

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

the need for boosting efforts to better understand the skills needed in the labour market, including monitoring of sectoral and regional trends.

With relation to the outcome-based national qualifications frameworks, the document points out their relevant contribution to national reforms in VET and the fact that they have been increasingly linked to validation of non-formal learning. In that sense, the effective use of EU transparency tools, especially the European Qualifications Framework, as a common reference for EU comparison and transparency to facilitate mobility of students and workers in Europe is considered crucial.

Finally, the document observes that the potential for continuing VET is not yet fully used, and that the involvement of employers and trade unions in VET governance and management could be strengthened.

Five medium-term deliverables for 2015–2010 were set. These deliverables gave prominence to the promotion of work-based learning by involving stakeholders (social partners, chambers, companies, VET providers), as a means to develop high quality and labour market-relevant vocational skills and outcome-based qualifications. They also stressed that efficient and integrated guidance services and available validation of non-formal and informal learning would enhance access to qualifications for all, further improving people's informed choice of pathways, career choices, and long-term employability and adaptability to evolving the skills needed. Among the specific actions included in the European Commission (2015), the encouragement of Initial I-VET programmes that combine learning in schools and enterprises; the expansion of modularised offers of C-VET in order to enable both the up-skilling of workers and a rapid response to emerging skills requirements in companies; and the following-through of the implementation of the National Qualifications Frameworks linked to the EQF stand out. Figure 5.1. summarises the four medium-term targets set by the Riga Conclusions:

Figure 5.1.: The four medium-term targets for VET policies

THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SET OF MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES 2015-2010

With a view to developing high quality and labour market relevant vocational skills and qualifications, based on the learning outcomes approach:

1. Promote **work-based learning** in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.
2. Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the EQAVET recommendation and as a part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous **information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes**.

For people's informed choice of pathways and long-term employability and adaptability to evolving skills needs:

3. Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all** through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.
4. Further **strengthen key competences** in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.

In support of successful implementation of reforms and to raise the overall quality and efficiency of VET:

5. Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work-based settings**.

Source: Ministers of vocational education and training, Riga 22nd June 2015.

Some of the specific aims that were included in the Riga Conclusions 2015 are linked to the core elements that constitute the theoretical framework of this research project:

- Boost the share of work-based learning in VET programmes;
- Support SMEs in providing apprenticeship programmes;
- Develop capacities of local and regional authorities and VET providers to use information for designing curricula and development of occupational profiles and the content of VET qualifications at all levels in response to new economic and technical requirements;
- Set up systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Expansion and modularised offers of Continuing VET (CVET) as a means to enable up-skilling of workers and a rapid response to emerging skills requirements;
- Integrate guidance and counselling services provided by both education and employment sectors for Initial VET (IVET) and CVET;

- Continue work on implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks linked to EQF by also incorporating qualifications achieved outside formal education and training systems;
- Professional development of VET staff; and
- Effective partnership of all relevant stakeholders to support professional development (including arranging training placements for VET teachers directly in companies, incentives to support companies to invest in their trainers' professional development).

Considering the significance of work-based learning for the theoretical framework of this research project, a brief description of the main aspects of the European view on WBL are described in the following section.

5.3. Enhancing work-based learning in Europe

As stated in CEDEFOP (2015), the conceptualisation of work-based learning in the European space, for example, distinguishing it from similar concepts such as work-place learning or experiential learning, is problematic. Describing work-based learning is also challenging because it may take various forms, such as apprenticeships, traineeships, or internships at IVET level, or guided on-the-job training, job rotation, job shadowing, or mentorship at CVET level. CEDEFOP considers work-based learning as intended and structured non-formal learning, which is of direct relevance to the current or future tasks of the learner, which takes place in a work-based context with specific learning tasks that must be directly applied in the workplace and reflected upon afterwards (2015: 7). Therefore, it can be affirmed that the notion of work-based learning involves a broader set of experiences and situations than the notion of workplace learning, whose conceptualisation has been addressed in Chapter 4.

Member States and social partners committed themselves in the Bruges Communiqué to the objective of introducing work-based learning in all initial VET courses and developing WBL for adults (CVET). The Communiqué highlights WBL as a source of professional and personal development and social cohesion and identifies WBL as one of the areas that require more attention and strategic action. The Riga Declaration included the promotion of work-based learning 'in all its form', referring to knowledge and the skills acquired through carrying out – and reflecting on – tasks in a vocational

context, either at the workplace or in a VET institution (Cedefop, 2011). It accorded special prominence to apprenticeships and called for the involvement of social partners, companies, chambers, and VET providers.

5.3.1. Work-based learning in IVET.

The European Council in an informal meeting in January 2012 agreed that Member States should increase ‘substantially the number of apprenticeships and traineeships to ensure that they represent real opportunities for young people, in cooperation with social partners and where possible integrates into educational programmes’, as experience suggests that this type of education can meet the twofold goal of improving individuals’ employability and increasing economic competitiveness (European Commission, 2013). Both the Rethinking Education Communication¹⁰ and the Youth Employment Package¹¹ agreed on the value of VET - and specially of dual training systems - to facilitate youth employment. Thus, active participation by employers and strong elements of work-based learning raise the employability of people by reducing current skills’ mismatches¹², and contributes to reduction of unemployment; it also facilitates young people’s transition into the workplace by providing the knowledge, skills, and competence required for successfully entering the labour market. Therefore, WBL should be a fundamental aspect of initial vocational education and training. In July 2013, The European Alliance for apprenticeship was launched with a joint declaration by the European Social Partners¹³ (ETUC, Business Europe, UEAPME and CEEP), the European Commission and the Presidency of the Council of the EU and followed by a Council Declaration by EU countries. The aim of the alliance is ‘to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships across the EU and to change mind-sets towards

¹⁰ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Rethinking education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes (the Rethinking Education Communication)
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0669&from=EN>

¹¹ See <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1036&newsId=1731>

¹² According to the European Company Survey (ECS) 2013, the last available, 39% of employers’ report that they find difficulties recruiting staff.

¹³ ETUC: European Trade Unions Confederation; Business Europe: The organization that gathers main employers’ associations in Europe; UEAPME: European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises; CEEP: European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services and Services of general interest.

apprenticeship-type learning through a broad partnership bringing together key stakeholders from the employment and education sectors'. In 2015, the European Commission published the guide, 'High-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning: 20 guiding principles'. The publication contains examples of beneficial practices that might be 'especially valuable for governments, business, social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders looking for inspiration on how to develop work-based learning and apprenticeships systems'.

The Rethinking Education Communication defines three main models of work-based learning in IVET:

1. Alternance schemes or apprenticeships, typically known as the *dual system*, which are based on the integration of companies as training providers together with VET schools or education institutes. The learner spends a significant time training in companies and in 'alternation' periods, and they also acquire general and vocational-related knowledge and other practical skills in VET schools or other educational institutions. The terms alternance and apprenticeship are often used indistinctly across EU countries. Following CEDEFOP (2014)¹⁴, alternance training is 'education or training combining periods in an educational institution or training centre and in the workplace'. Apprenticeships are considered specific forms of alternance training, and defined as 'systematic, long-term training alternating periods at the workplace and in an education institution or training centre'. Apprenticeships usually imply longer training period and contracts linking the apprentice to the employer, who must offer training leading to specific occupation. In this approach, social partners assume responsibility for the quality of the company-based training.
2. A second model is school-based VET. It includes on-the-job training periods in companies, typically covering internships as a compulsory or optional element of

¹⁴ CEDEFOP (2014), Terminology of European education and training policy – A selection of 130 key terms. 2nd Ed. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4117>

VET. They usually represent less than 50% of the whole training programme duration.

3. Finally, WBL that is integrated in school-based programme by on-site labs, workshops, junior or practice firms, and simulations of business project assignments which aim to create *real life* work environments, establish contacts with real companies and develop entrepreneurship competences. Schools or training centres are assigned the main responsibility to create close to real life working environments and teachers design learning activities in cooperation with companies.

It should be noted that many countries in Europe combine these three general models of WBL and that terminology and definitions may vary (CEDEFOP, 2014).

In March 2014, the Council Recommendation¹⁵ encouraged Member States to promote quality traineeships by developing appropriate frameworks and offered specific guidelines to proceed. The recommendation defines traineeship¹⁶ as ‘a limited period of work practice, whether paid or not, which includes a learning and training component, undertaken in order to gain practical and professional experience with a view to improving employability and facilitating transition to regular employment’.

Those relevant steps towards more effective work-based learning schemes show that it is considered that their benefits exceed their difficulties, as described in the European Commission (2013). Thus, despite the cost borne by the employer in hosting a learner (apprentice or trainee), the benefits are diverse: WBL can represent a tool to react to the needs of the company in a flexible, efficient, and concrete way, which is of special interest for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and for those sectors facing skills

¹⁵ Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (2014/C 88/01). [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327(01)&from=EN)

¹⁶ Traineeships is translated into Spanish as ‘período de prácticas’ and defined as ‘los períodos limitados de práctica profesional, remunerados o no, que cuentan con un componente educativo o formativo, emprendidos con objeto de adquirir experiencia práctica y profesional con vistas a mejorar su capacidad de inserción laboral y facilitar la transición hacia un empleo normal’. (Recomendación del Consejo de 10 de marzo de 2014 sobre un marco de calidad para los períodos de prácticas).

shortage. Learners also bring into the companies new perspectives and challenges, thereby enhancing organisational learning through the broad engagement of staff in training and mentoring. The cooperation between VET teachers and companies brings about new opportunities for the former to follow the evolution of workplace contexts in terms of processes, management, equipment, and technology. These links enable access of teachers and learners to the latest technology, which is especially relevant in the case of industrial activity. In those cases, the purchase of schools' equipment is more likely to be supported by companies. This way, whenever SMEs are dominant, the VET centre can become the regional hub that offers technological solutions to the industrial fabric.

Additionally, the European Commission (2013) also identifies three relevant aspects that determine the efficiency and success of work-based learning experiences. These are as follows:

1. Governance of WBL programmes, which includes the articulation between school-based and work-based instructions through planning and good coordination; a clear regulatory framework to avoid employers using apprentice status to replace workers; and a close involvement of social partners to ensure that WBL remains responsive. This aspect specifically warns about the particular challenges SMEs face.
2. The quality of the qualifications and the learning process, which refers to the definition of a broad range of knowledge, skills, and competences acquired in the learning process, by offering diverse and rich learning opportunities. This will enable learners to get a holistic understanding of the profession. A clear definition of the WBL learning outcomes and objectives and placing dedicated personnel in charge of the training experience also enhances the learning experiences.
3. Finally, the school–company partnership is relevant, as VET schools need to operate in connection with local businesses. In fact, 'the extent to which schools develop and maintain relationships with employers is a core determinant of high quality WBL' (European Commission, 2013: 18).

5.3.2. Work-based learning in CVET.

WBL in CVET appears as a more problematic field to be studied. Here the disparity of the types of WBL is particularly significant, because CVET contexts are strongly shaped by professional, sectoral, and institutional frameworks which in turn influence the way WBL can be implemented on the ground (European Commission, 2013). CVET is also usually less regulated than IVET and is often part of companies' internal human resources development strategies. Consequently, there is not a universally accepted definition of WBL in CVET (CEDEFOP, 2015: 7) and notions 'vary between and within countries and there are overlaps with other concepts such as on-the-job training, workplace learning, or work-relevant training'. This heterogeneity also brings about fragmentation of available knowledge and a lack of reliable and comparable statistical data at the European and national levels that specifically cover WBL in CVET:

Notwithstanding this broad understanding of the concept, work-based CVET has been assigned a key role in contributing to one of the goals of the Education and Training 2020 related goals – achieving a 15% average rate of adult participation in lifelong learning by 2020. Several aspects explain the increasing policy attention and expectations from the field. Trends towards an ageing society, longer working lives, and increasing globalised competition make it necessary for adults to regularly update and broaden their skills through CVET, and work-based CVET has the potential to promote inclusion and social cohesion, to tackle adult unemployment and underemployment, and to support company and country policies and strategies for innovation, competitiveness, and growth (CEDEFOP, 2015). Therefore, a range of major European Union policy statements have acknowledged the potential of work-based learning for adults and tried to define initiatives that would contribute to the promotion of these practices. Despite this increasing concern, the potentials of work-based learning in CVET do not seem to be fully utilised yet (CEDEFOP, 2015: 1).

Chapter 6. The research approach

As described in Chapter 5, the European policy on VET has evolved in a dynamic way since the Lisbon European Council endorsed education as an integral part of its economic and social policies (European Commission, 2002). The Council set a strategic goal for the EU to become the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy; the development of high quality VET was considered crucial for this. Successive meetings of the Council and Declarations have stressed the need for further action and cooperation in VET in order to introduce programmes and tools to ensure mutual trust, transparency, comparability, transferability, and recognition of competences and qualifications between different countries and at different levels. The qualifications frameworks and the outcome-based descriptors they are based on are the most significant tools developed this way.

In the Riga Conclusions 2015 (European Commission, 2015) the ministers in charge of VET recalled the importance of investing in VET and skills provision policies as a means to raise the employability of people, help reduce skills' mismatches, and allow for smoother transitions into employment. Prominence was accorded to the promotion of work-based learning by involving stakeholders (social partners, chambers, companies, VET providers) in order to develop high-quality and labour market relevant vocational skills and outcome-based qualifications. Among the specific actions included in the European Commission (2015), the implementation of the NQFs linked to the EQF; the encouragement of IVET programmes that combine learning in schools and in enterprises; and the expansion of a modularised offer by CVET to enable a rapid response to emerging skills requirements in companies stand out.

However, the role played by the qualifications frameworks will ultimately depend on their ability to act as a credible reference point for all stakeholders in education and training and the labour market, as well as to make a difference to end-users, that is, training providers, employers, learners, and so (Cedefop, 2013). Brockman *et al.* denominate 'currency' of the qualifications frameworks as follows: the less the agreement and involvement of all those concerned, the weaker the currency on the labour market of the framework is likely to be, the less effective it would be (2011: 140). Consequently, the attainment of collaborative relationships between the diverse

stakeholders represents a requirement for the effectiveness of the qualifications frameworks. The strength of these relationships also helps develop VET systems that are more responsive to the labour market needs and facilitates the promotion of work-based learning opportunities for youngsters and adults, among other benefits.

As a consequence of all of the above, it can be affirmed that the nature of the relationships between the main stakeholders participating in VET is crucial for the effectiveness of the skills provision systems. The current research becomes more comprehensible in this context. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the socio-economic and educational processes involved in the provision of skills and competences within the European VET space and, more specifically, the relationships between two relevant stakeholders: VET centres and companies.

Chapter 3 described the policy borrowing and policy learning approaches to policy-making and Chapter 4 addressed the diversity of NQF-like conceptions. In the light of the analysed literature, it has been argued that the policy-making approach followed to introduce NQF-based VET reforms has an important effect on the nature of the relationships between the stakeholders and, consequently, on the way qualifications operate among users. More specifically, whenever addressing VET reforms, the appropriateness of a collective exercise of active learning (Grootings, 2004) has been pointed out, which would enhance people's engagement in the process and, thereby, boost their motivation to learn. In this sense, it has also been stated that advocates of policy learning consider this approach to policy design and implementation as helping countries enhance their capacity to initiate reforms; to develop more collaborative models of policy-making by involving stakeholders and, as a consequence, change and produce more successful policies. Consequently, the analysis of the process of development and modernisation of the VET system itself represents a pre-requisite for understanding the interplay of VET centres' and companies' representatives.

Finally, it should be noted that, although the socio-economic processes for the provision of skills and competences have been widely debated in the European VET context, most analysis has focused on nation states and, subsequently, cases of sub-sections of a state have been insufficiently considered. Fewer EU agencies' reports detail the diverse ways social and economic problems can be addressed within a state, even though state sub-

sections may have developed more effective approaches to common problems. The learning-on-the-way solutions can be tailored to the needs of smaller particular areas and might be thus restricted, causing an incomplete contextualisation of some of the 'best practices' identified and, consequently, a lack of relevant information for other governance systems seeking to implement those policies.

All of the above was taken into consideration when designing the research approach.

I started by selecting the research paradigm for the study, that is, what Guba defines as the 'basic set of beliefs that guides action' (1990: 17). The objects of study were the processes developed around vocational education and training in Europe. Although I was aware that actual studies rarely exemplify all the ideal characteristics of each of the available paradigms – quantitative and qualitative (Creswell *et al.*, 2007) – I selected the qualitative paradigm. The appropriateness of qualitative research in representing the complexities of a social world where multiple realities exist was the primary reason behind this privileging. Thus, I initiated a study in which I relied on the views of the individuals involved in the processes under study; I posed broad and general questions, collecting data mainly consisting of words from participants and texts; and described and analysed the recorded words by themes (Creswell, 2005: 39). Two other relevant reasons for leaning towards the qualitative paradigm merit mentioning. On the one hand, I was aware that the processes under scrutiny needed to be *explored*, because the variables were not explicit enough and the theories needed to be further developed. In the same vein, I also considered the most appropriate approach to be *descriptive*. On the other hand, I wanted to be involved in fieldwork and become the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. I also wanted to become an active learner who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than an expert who would judge participants (Creswell, 1998).

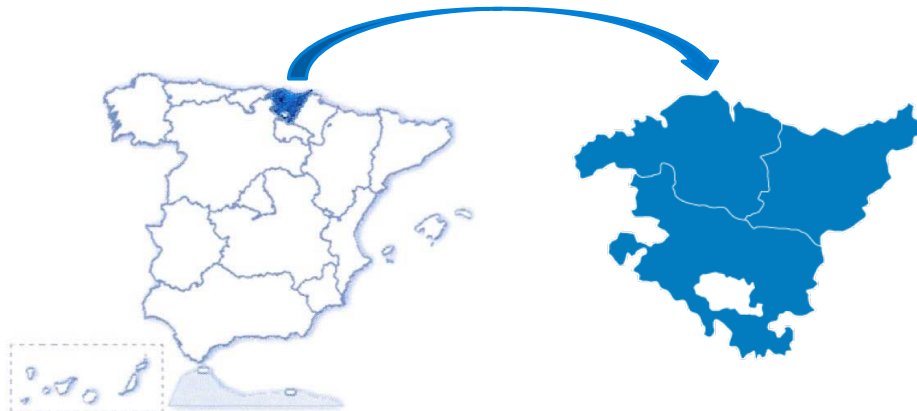
6.1. Research strategy: case study

Drawing on literature (Descombe, 1998; Creswell *et al.*, 2007; Baxter and Jack, 2008; Cohen *et al.*, 2010), The qualitative research for this study was designed based on 'case study tradition (Creswell, 1998), an approach that, with a long history across many disciplines, has become especially widespread in small-scale research.

Creswell *et al.* consider case study research a 'qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (...) and reports a case description and case-based themes'(2007: 245) . As Descombe argues, by concentrating efforts on one case, the researcher gains insights that might have relevant implications, and which would not have been gained when trying to cover a large number of instances (1998: 30). This approach focuses on relationships and processes, which usually are interconnected and interrelated within social settings, and helps unravel the complexities of a particular situation.

As already stated, most of the studies on the socio-economic processes for the provision of competences found in the literature focus on nation states. Cases of sub-sections of a state have not been sufficiently addressed. Therefore, to address the gap in the existing research caused by the exclusion of sub-sections of states from these studies, a regional case within a devolved state has been studied in this thesis. Subsequently, the case of the vocational education and training system in the Basque Country¹, a region in the devolved state of Spain, was chosen:

Figure 6.1.: Autonomous communities in Spain and the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC)



Source: Administración General del Estado.

¹ The term Basque Country (*País Vasco*) defines cultural and geographically a region straddling the border between France and Spain, politically divided into three different administrative units: one under the French jurisdiction; and the other two, created after the Spanish Constitution of 1978, the Regional Community of Navarra and the Autonomous Community of Basque Country (or Basque Autonomous Community, BAC). It is quite common, though, the use of the term Basque Country to refer to the BAC. I will indistinctly use the terms Basque region or BAC to refer to the latter, which is made up of the three Spanish provinces Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia, and Araba-Álava.

6.1.1. The case: VET system in the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain.

The Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) is a political entity located in the north of Spain. With a population of 2,175,819² and extending over 7,234 km², this small region presents a high density of population. A strong and modern industry is the foundation of its economy, supported by associated relevant services (consultancy, engineering, financing, and so) which contribute to the significance of the tertiary sector in the region:

Figure 6.2.: Share in the GDP of the economic sectors in Basque Autonomous Community and in Spain

	BAC (%)	SPAIN (%)
Primary	0.8	2,9
Industry	24.2	18.1
Construction	5.9	5.8
Tertiary	69.1	73.3

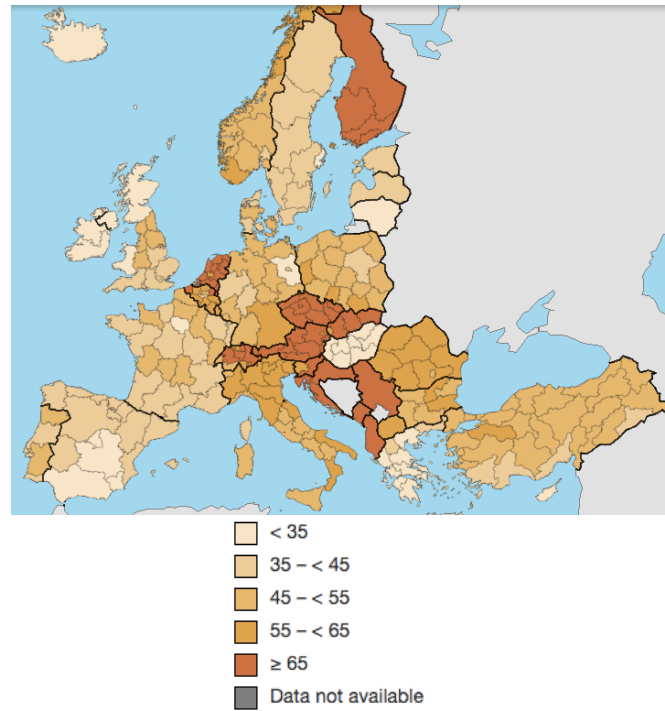
Source: Eustat, 2017.

The region features a significant self-governance and economic capacity compared to other regions in Spain, as described later on. With relation to educational data (Eurostat Statistics³, 2015) the Basque region is among the European regions with the highest participation rates of four-year-olds in pre-primary and primary education (>99%) and share of persons aged 30–34 with tertiary education (>50%); and the lowest share of young people aged 18–24 who withdrew from education and training (less than 10%). With relation to Vocational Education and Training, the share of students enrolled in VET in Spain has traditionally been low compared to other countries in European Union and the Basque region to some extent shares this trend.

² Eustat, the Basque Official Statistics Institute. November 2017.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistical_themes

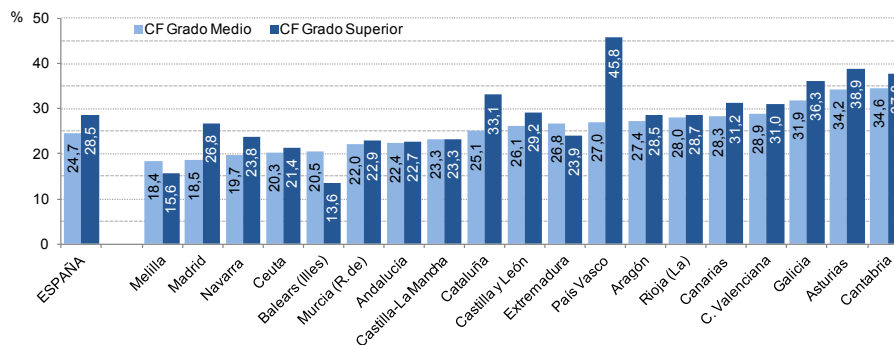
Figure 6.3.: Share of students in upper-secondary education who were following vocational programmes by NUTS 2 regions (%), 2015.



Source: Eurostat Regional yearbook 2017

Nevertheless, the Basque Autonomous Community (País Vasco) exhibits a slightly different situation with relation to the other autonomous communities in Spain, especially considering the higher level of IVET⁴. The gross rate of VET students is higher than the average at state level:

Figure 6.4. Gross rate of VET students in the autonomous communities during school year 2014-15.



Source: Spanish Ministry of Education.

⁴ In Spain Initial VET is made up by what is called Básica (*Basic VET*, for those who have not finished Secondary Education), Ciclos Formativos Grado Medio - CFGM (medium level technician) and Ciclos Formativos Grado Superior - CFGS (higher level technician)

The pattern of enrolments by the type of qualification is also quite distinctive in the BAC, where the enrolment rates in those qualifications directly related to the industrial activity are higher:

Figura 6.5. : Different pattern of students' enrolment (% of total) by type of qualification. Comparison between the BAC and in Spain.

	BAC	SPAIN
	School Year 2016-17	School Year 2014-16
MEDIUM LEVEL QUALIFICATION		
Electricity and Electronics	9.2	9.2
Mechanical Manufacturing	14.1	3.5
Installation and Maintenance	6.9	3.7
HIGH LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS		
Electricity and Electronics	11.57	6.6
Mechanical Manufacturing	13.8	2.3
Installation and Maintenance	6.4	2.3

Source: Spanish Ministry of Education and Eustat.

The share of students in the dual model of VET is higher in the BAC and has increased especially after the Basque government enacted the Decree 83/2015 to regulate the dual VET in the region. During the academic year 2017–18, the share of dual VET students enrolled in the BAC has been 5.18% of the total VET students. However, this share increases until an average of 23.6% is reached in those qualifications directly related to the industrial production activity (the ones this research has focused on: Mechanical Manufacturing; Electricity and Electronics, and Installation and Maintenance).

6.1.2. Reasons for the choice of the case.

I followed Creswell *et al.* (2007) in their differentiation between case study and narrative research. Thus, I considered that the *case* chosen, the VET system in the Basque Autonomous Community of Spain, a dynamic process, would help to shed some light on the *issue*, the socio-economic processes for the provision of skills and competences in the European VET area. It was also observed that the case contained different components within. My focus was on the nature of the relationships between stakeholders, which is a relevant issue concerning the effectiveness of VET systems.

The focus of my approach was, therefore, *on the issue*, and the individual case was selected to help better understand it, in contrast to the narrative approach, which would have focused on the individuals and their stories. I decided to use the case study method also because I wanted to cover contextual conditions, relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003) and to investigate the complex dynamics and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships, and other factors in this particular case (Cohen *et al.*, 2010).

The methodological basis for the choice of this particular case was suitability (Descombe, 1998) and the assumption that findings would be the object of generalisation in other cases. On the one hand, and although it features some specificities, the Basque case represents a regional government that shares power on educational policy with the state, just as many other regional governments do. On the other hand, drawing on literature about the processes and the systems for the provision of skills and competences, I observed that many works address cases of countries that are undergoing changes in their political systems, sometimes even restoring democracy after periods of upheaval. In those cases, the modernisation of the VET system is considered as a part of the process of democratisation. In some cases, international aid determines the policy approach applied (Grootings, 2004, Young, 2007, Chakroun, 2010). As described below, the case of the Basque Country to some extent shares that sense of opening, although the focus is on a regional government rather than on a state.

The Basque Autonomous Community was created as an administrative entity after a turbulent historical period of Civil War followed by the dictatorial regime of General Franco. The Statute of Autonomy of 1978, granted an important level of autonomy to the region and determined the restoration of the Basque government within the reinstated Spanish democracy. The Basque government formed through elections in 1980 was committed to the modernisation of its economy, based on industry to a large extent, and its VET system played a crucial role in this endeavour. Notwithstanding other financial sources, and in stark contrast with other autonomous communities that could have been studied within Spain, the Economic Agreement⁵, a cornerstone of Basque

⁵ The Economic Agreement (*Concierto Económico*) can be considered an evidence of the historical differentiated relationships of the region with the diverse monarchies governing Spain since the Middle Age, foundation of the so called Historical Rights. Although it had been in effect since 1878, the Economic Agreement was partly abolished by

self-governance, helped provide the Basque region with the economic sufficiency to finance its own policies, institutions, and infrastructures that devolved governments often lack. This represents a crucial point because, as Keating and Cairney note, differentiated policy-making for governments requires a degree of capacity and autonomy for developing their own policies (2012: 241).

There were also reasons related to prior knowledge of the author behind the choice of the case. I had important knowledge regarding the case myself and, as a former participant in both policy-making and VET systems, I could easily access to data significant for my study, either by obtaining documents or by reaching individuals closely involved in the process.

6.1.3. Methodological decision.

It has already been argued that the specific policy-making approach followed to design and deploy VET reforms represents a key element for understanding the relationships among the stakeholders involved in the education and labour market, as well as the way qualifications operate among users (governments, employers, providers, learners, workers). Additionally, whenever addressing the introduction of NQF-like conceptions, their dynamic nature needs to be taken into account, as well as the fact that it is a lengthy process whose impacts only become evident over time (Raffe, 2009: 23). Consequently, I made the methodological decision of dividing the research into two different phases.

The First phase investigated the VET reforms pursued by the Basque government in the 1980s and henceforth within the Spanish shared-power policy arrangement. The policy-making approach followed during the modernisation of the VET system would have influenced the way in which the relationships between different stakeholders have

the Francoist Regime. With its restoration in 1981, the BAC recovered full authority to collect taxes and to set most of them. Out of the collected amount, the Basque Government pays to the Central Government the 6.24% (approximately the region's weight in the state economy) of the Spanish expenditure in those state functions not transferred to the region. The payment is also a contribution to support less prosperous areas in Spain (Fondo de Compensación Interterritorial or Inter-territorial Compensation Fund). Porter *et al.* (2013) state that, since then, the Basque public spending per capita has been the highest in Spain, thanks to the combination of a higher tax revenue caused by a stronger economic activity and a more efficient tax setting and collection.

developed along the reforms, thus determining the way they interact in the provision of competences.

The Second phase of the research focused on the current relationships between representatives from VET centres (education system) and the industrial companies (labour market), at a time when the most relevant VET reforms (introduction of the qualifications framework and other policies related to it) have been implemented over about two decades. This phase scrutinised the way these relationships interplay in the provision of IVET, both in the definition of the educational content and the development of work-based programmes; their role in the provision of continuing education and training in the companies; and it also evaluated the trust in and usefulness of the diverse tools developed to enhance qualifications' transparency and to design CVET programmes for workers and the unemployed.

The relevance of this study lies in the substantial contributions it makes to the understanding of VET policy-making due to several reasons. First, the case would offer an opportunity to delve into VET policy transfer processes developed within governance structures which share power, an area of research still insufficiently covered by scholars. Second, the case would contribute to a better understanding of the way common problems may be addressed in differentiated ways within a state, as particular solutions seek to better respond to the specificities of smaller areas. I argue that the process following which a differentiated VET model emerged within a state deserved the interest of other systems of governance seeking to better adapt general policies to particular circumstances and socio-political environments. Finally, the third contribution that this work would make to policy-making in VET is its varied approach to VET reforms. As argued by scholars (Raffe, 2015; Allais, 2017: 14), before getting involved in 'another round' of qualifications reforms, policy-makers should consider qualifications themselves as primarily the products of their contexts. It should also be acknowledged that literature too often 'portrays NQFs in static terms' (Raffe, 2009: 23), giving most attention to the technical dimensions of their development process and, as a consequence, paying less attention to the social (cultural and institutional) and the political dimensions (ibid.: 32-33). Thus, rather than casting a static glance at qualifications, it is necessary to consider the system along its evolution: other related

reforms being successively implemented within the specific socio-political context; the institutional arrangement of the system; the role of the qualifications in the labour market and how they are developed, used, and reformed; what happens in the workplaces in permanent evolution and how curriculum is designed; and so on. I argue that what makes this research work distinctive is that it adopts a broad look at the VET reforms issue and therefore forms conclusions relevant to the literature and policy-making in the field.

6.1.4. Setting boundaries to the case.

Setting boundaries to a case under study responds to a twofold motivation. On the one hand, it can prevent researchers from attempting to answer questions that might be too broad (Baxter and Jack, 2008). In that sense, boundaries point out what falls under the purview of the study of the particular research. On the other hand, as Creswell explains, the choice of a case study methodology responds to the assumption of the researcher that aspects of the social life can be separated and differentiated from its social context, thus being able to 'define a self-contained entity within distinct boundaries' (1998: 38). Boundaries might be physical, social, or historical, although none of them are usually unambiguous, since case studies normally apply to objects that exist prior to the research (Ragin and Becker, 1992). For this particular case, I defined four relevant boundaries.

First, an institutional boundary specifically demarcates the First phase of the research. The interest of the study lay on the decisions related to VET modernisation that were taken by the Basque government. Therefore, the project did not aim to analyse decisions made by the Spanish government, although I was aware that those decisions highly determined the regulatory framework in which the Basque government developed its own policy.

Second, political and social boundaries apply because vocational education has conformed to a quite isolated field within the general policy-making dynamics in education. Considering the significant role of education systems in the construction of states and the nurturing of nationalistic feelings (Green, 1990), regulation in general education has often involved strong political and social debates: bilingual models of

education; profiles of teachers in the public system; the way recent history is taught; the need for the inclusion of democratic and nonviolent values in educational programs; and so on. Debates associated with VET policies, on the contrary, although intense at particular moments, have been more specific, and have mostly focused on VET usefulness for enhancing employability and economic competitiveness. As Mériaux (1994–95) affirms, vocational education and training seems to be a pacified public space characterised by the absence of debates and controversy regarding objectives and meanings.

Three, time boundaries clearly delimit the case. The research covered the period between 1980, when the Basque government was restored and capacity for policy-making in education was transferred to the state government, and 2015, right before the Basque Decree 83/2015 regulated the deployment of dual VET programmes.

Finally, a fourth boundary applied to the second phase of the research. The analysis of the relationships between VET centres and companies focused on the qualifications (or *familias profesionales*) directly linked to the industrial productive activity, instead of being open to any kind of vocational qualification (like health and care, catering and hotel management, or aesthetics). In addition, the research was focused on the moment when transition from the educational system to the labour market occurs for students.

6.1.5. Type of Case Study.

Authors (Baxter and Jack, 2008, Creswell *et al.*, 2010; Cohen *et al.*, 2010) differentiate variants or types of case studies. Drawing on the definitions provided by Yin (2003) and Stake(1995), as gathered in Baxter and Jack (2007: 548–549), I believe that this case study should be defined as instrumental (rather than intrinsic) when referring to most of the research questions posed (research questions of first phase in section 6.4. and the first two questions of the second phase in section 6.5.). Thus, the case ‘plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else’ (the issue). However, the case study should also be considered explanatory (rather than exploratory or descriptive) when addressing the third research question of the second phase. As Yin (2003) explains using evaluation language, the explanation would link the programme implementation (development of the Integrated System of Qualifications and

Vocational Training – ISQVT, see section 6.5.) with the programme's effects (its effectiveness).

6.1.6. Advantages and disadvantages of using case study methodology.

The advantages and disadvantages of employing the case study methodology has been widely addressed in the literature (Descombe, 1998). Cohen *et al.* (2010) also refer to its strengths and weaknesses. Scott and Morrison (2006) mention an early critique of case study research made by Atkinson and Delamont (1985) in relation to its lack of perceived rigour. Despite this critique, I found a relevant advantage to the fact that case study approaches allow researcher (such as myself) to concentrate their efforts on a single research site, thereby accommodating the needs of a small-scale research. The approach also allows to deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations, while encouraging the use of multiple methods and sources of data to gain extensive insight into the reality under study. I argue that the latter would help reduce any impression of lack of rigour, which is considered a disadvantage of the research design.

An additional argument posited by Baxter and Jack (2008) is that converting complex phenomenon into a format easily understandable by the reader, a prospective advantage of case studies, is the responsibility of the researcher. Following this idea, the results of the study were composed in a non-professional language, becoming less dependent on specialised interpretation and, as a result, facilitating dissemination.

Finally, as Descombe notes, the primary scepticism that case study researchers might face is the one arising from doubts on the validity of generalisations formed based on the findings of just one case (1998: 36). Although the aim of the researchers using case studies is not always the generalisation of findings (Scott and Morrison, 2006), because facilitating understanding on processes of provision of skills and competences was one of the purposes of this particular study, some kind of generalisation was expected. Therefore, the case itself was selected in order to help generalise. Additionally, I have included information and provided further details when reporting the findings in order to facilitate informed judgements on their relevance for other instances. Other than

that, the responsibility of forming generalisations will fall on the reader (Descombe, 1998: 37)

6.2. The researcher's role

While designing the research approach of this study there was no interest in going deep into a qualitative versus quantitative debate. I considered both paradigms as representatives of very different ways of perceiving the world (Holliday, 2002). However, references on this debate are too numerous to be included in this work and deserve to be accounted for in a separate dedicated study

Instead, it was believed appropriate to acknowledge that the special approach to collection and analysis of data does grant a distinct identity to qualitative research. Specifically, both collection and analysis of qualitative data demand a reflection concerning the role that the researcher's self plays as well as its impact on the research itself (Descombe, 1998). A reflection on the two different ways in which I, as a researcher, could deal with the involvement of 'my self' took me to establish a compromise between assuming a completely detached manner, distancing my research from my actual beliefs, and taking a stance in which I should come clean about how personal experiences shaped my research agenda. Thus, I can assert that I approached the research with an 'open mind', a mind that is informed about an area, but which is, at the same time, fully open to encountering new factors and views of relevance. Following Glaser and Strauss:

‘To be sure, one goes out with a particular (...) perspective, and with a focus, a general question or a problem in mind. But the researcher can (and we believe should) also study an area without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, “relevancies” in concepts and hypotheses’ (1967: 33).

Therefore, I should say that, without ignoring my previous background and experiences on the issue under research, I decided to embark 'on a voyage of discovery' (Descombe, 1998: 215). This approach to the research has characterised the whole research process.

6.3. Data collection

Creswell describes data collection as ‘a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions’ (1998: 110) and, therefore, when collecting data, the researcher becomes involved in multiple phases. In case studies bound systems are traditionally studied, such as a process, a programme, an activity, or multiple individuals. In this particular study, the case is defined by the processes that are developed in the provision of skills and competences in the BAC.

Descombe (1998) refers to four main methods for collecting data: questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents. All the four methods might be perceived as either competing or complementing each other. He also notes that certain research strategies tend to be associated with the use of certain research methods, since the various methods contain their own set of assumptions. In fact, employing multiple methods allows for collecting different types of data on the same topic. It also allows to view the object of study from more than one perspective and, therefore, helps improve the quality of the research. The possibility of checking findings from one method against findings from another one can enhance the validity of the data (Descombe, 1998: 85).

Two methods were selected for collecting data for both phases of this research study: document analysis and interviews with individuals involved in the processes under analysis.

6.3.1. Documents.

Apart from the literature review, which I have conducted in order to provide a foundation for the research project, I have used documents as a source of ‘data in their own right’ (Descombe, 1998: 159). Therefore, I would claim that documentary research has helped me synthesise the focal points of my study in the initial stages of my research. It has been especially useful to better understand key concepts related to the issue under scrutiny and to define the boundaries of the case. I have also used documents as a source of data on the case. This was of particular use, because some of these documents were written in the same language used by the subjects of the research.

I have drawn on books and journals covering both the issue and the case within its context. Relevant information on the case, such as documents concerning regulatory

development and public plans and programmes, has been obtained from government publications accessible on official web sites (Basque and Spanish Governments and Official Bulletins) and web sites of other institutions involved, like the Association of Entrepreneurs, the Association of VET centres, Basque VET Council, and the Basque Institute of Qualifications. Two pilot sessions helped me identify and gather older documents not accessible on the internet (doctoral thesis on the history of Vocational Education in Basque Country; studies on VET systems around Europe funded by entrepreneurs' associations; and assessment of a pilot apprenticeship project among others). Therefore, it can be said that the type of document used is *public domain* (Descombe, 1998). I also consider the kind of documents and information gathered to have met the fourfold criteria underpinning the quality of evidence (Descombe, 1998: 167; Scott and Morrison, 2006: 76): authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning.

6.3.2. Interviews

It might be asserted that the use of interviews in research implies a move 'towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans' (Kvale, 1996 cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2010: 267), thus considering the centrality of human interaction in the process of knowledge production as well as highlighting the social contextualisation of research data. This is precisely the approach sought in this particular study. Furthermore, the decision to use interviews as one methodology for data collection was based on the need for *depth* rather than *breadth* in the information gathered.

Descombe proposes two questions to consider the reasonableness of using interviews as research methodology. First, with relation to the need for the kind of detailed information that interviews might provide, I assumed that straightforward factual data was already gathered through the documentary research, as previously described. I was also seeking data based on personal experiences to help me gain a deeper insight into the case. And, second, the appropriateness of relying on information gathered from a number of informants and their experiences, which I considered 'privileged information' (1998: 111). Therefore, 'information rich' (Patton, 1990: 169) criterion and purposeful selection was applied when choosing participants in this qualitative research. Although authors describe diverse typologies of sampling strategies (Miles and Huberman, 1994;

Scott and Morrison, 2006), purposeful sampling might be considered the general research term used in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2005). However, the purposeful selection of informants was conducted following different approaches for each of the two phases of the research, as described in the later sections of this paper.

The typology of interviews is quite wide and often depends on the source. The most common approach to defining typology found in the literature is by setting interviews in different positions along a continuum from quantitative to qualitative research. Morrison (1993:34–6), for instance, defines a continuum along which five different ways of conceptualising interviews are positioned. At one end of the continuum, he sets numbers, statistics, objective facts, and other typically considered quantitative data; at the other end, conversely, he places transcripts of conversations, comments, subjective accounts, and essentially, word-based qualitative data. The latter becomes easier to start with and gather, because the themes do not need to be worked out in advance. They rather emerge either during or after data collection, when conducting the analysis. Consequently, the analysis of the data becomes more complicated and takes considerably longer (Cohen *et al.*, 2010). Along that continuum, Patton(1980: 216) outlines four different types of interviews: informal conversational interviews; interview guide approaches; standardised open-ended interviews; and closed quantitative interviews. In a similar vein, Descombe defines three main types of interviews – structured, semi-structured, and unstructured – which I have followed while making my choices as a researcher (1998: 112–13).

I found structured interviews not appropriate for different reasons. First, I did not want to exert a tight control over the responses of the interviewees. I had *discovery* rather than *checking* as my main objective. Second, as profiles of interviewees were varied, I did not wish to expose all of them to identical questions and, therefore, I wanted to avoid standardisation on interviewing guides. And, third, as I wasn't interested in collecting a large volume of information, I did not choose the more survey-like interviewing type.

Accordingly, I opted to follow the semi-structured type of interview. Although I had already composed a list of topics to be addressed, I was interested in letting the interviewees develop their own ideas and raise points of interest that I might not have

considered in advance. The relatively open framework provided by semi-structured interviewing would result in new ideas and issues emerging in the course of data collection, contributing to a deeper insight (Scott and Morrison, 2006). At the same time, I wanted to minimise the risk of omitting some relevant topics from the interview and, therefore, I discarded a completely unstructured type of interview.

Finally, I decided to conduct one-to-one interviews by personally meeting each of the interviewees, which is the most common form of semi-structured interview (Descombe, 1998: 114). I also made this decision based on my particular situation with relation to informants (I personally knew most of them) and due to reasons of feasibility (geographical and time related issues).

a) Some practical issues concerning interviewing.

Descombe (1998: 110) warns about how the similarities between a conversation and an interview can generate an illusion of simplicity, leading to a relaxed attitude with relation to the preparation of interviews. Despite similarities, interviews are more than mere conversations. To start with, they are not reciprocal interactions between two equal participants (Kvale, 1996). Besides, a set of assumptions about the situation which usually do not apply to plain conversations have to be taken into consideration when interviewing (consent to participate, agenda for discussion, use of information gathered etc). Drawing on literature that describes this particular data collection method, I designed an interview protocol form and prepared a list of tips to be taken into account when entering the field. All interviews were recorded, and data was safely managed (see section on ethics).

I prepared the individualised guides by translating the general aims of the study into more detailed and specific objectives for each informant, so as to facilitate the production of the appropriate kind of data necessary to answer the research questions (Cohen *et al.*, 2010). I then decided on the format of the questions to be used and selected open-ended questions because they put minimum restraint on the answers while, at the same time, supply a frame of reference (Kerlinger, 1970). Open-ended questions allow to probe and ask for further details if necessary and help test the limits of the interviewee's knowledge. Using open-ended questions led to unstructured

responses, most likely reflecting the richness and complexity of the participant's views, to some extent also encouraging non-expected information to be provided. I was aware that, in return, information gathered would be more difficult to codify.

Figure 6.6. : Tips for interviewing.

- Have a plan, but be flexible.
- Adequately move from ice-breakers to questions in interview.
- Listen more and talk less.
- Be attentive and tolerate silences.
- Be adept to using prompts, probes and checks.
- Avoid interrupting participants.
- Avoid being too directive, although need to keep the interview moving.
- Refrain from debating with participant.
- Keep participant focused and motivated.
- Match the 'level' of questions to the level of participants.
- Be respectful and courteous.
- Complete within time specified.
- Bracket personal bias.
- Monitor progress (main points addressed, inconsistencies, keep a discrete eye on time).
- Keep a suitable level of eye contact.
- Make a note of non-verbal communication which might help a later interpretation of answer.
- Respect the rights of the interviewee.

Source: Own elaboration, drawing on (Creswell, 1998, Descombe, 1998, Cohen *et al.*, 2010).

Qualitative case study strategy was applied to both the first and second phases of the research. Both phases used document analysis and interviews as data collection methods. Nevertheless, each research phase had a specific purpose and, consequently, featured particular characteristics that are further described in the following sections.

6.4. First phase of the research

The purpose of the first phase was to delve into the policy-making process from 1980 onwards following which the VET system was consolidated with a modern conception in the Basque region.

As described in section 4.1., the historical development of the European VET systems, often referred to as skills provision systems, has been widely addressed in the literature, and most of the references go back in time until the early industrialisation stages to explain the reasons for the diversity (Ashton, 2004; Greinert, 2004; Thelen, 2004; Wollschlager and Reuter-Kumpmann, 2004). Consequently, when analysing the

evolution of the Basque VET system, the period extending from the early stages of industrialisation needed to be taken into consideration. In fact, as described in further detail, relevant specificities observed in the region at that time explain to some extent the divergent approach to VET reforms that was taken in comparison to the policies developed by the state from the moment the Basque government attained a degree of economic and political autonomy in 1980. The description of this first period was based on literature.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 and the Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Country that was approved in 1979 mark the beginning of a second period, the one that laid the foundation of the current system. Both contributed to the building of a particular political relationship between the state and the region, as a relative economic self-sufficiency and autonomy for policy-making was agreed upon. In particular, the state services in the matter of education were transferred to the Basque government. The enforcement of the Statute also implied other capacities for the region that played a relevant role in the development of a differentiated VET model in the region. Therefore, the Basque VET can to a great extent be considered a differentiated unit of analysis in relation to the provision of competences.

This second period has been the object of study of the first phase of this research. I was particularly interested in delving into the process of modernisation of VET in the region in order to gain knowledge regarding the policy-making approach followed by the Basque government because that particular approach would have conditioned the nature of the current relationships between stakeholders as well as the role played by the NQF-like scheme. More specifically, the research aimed to determine the extent to which Basque VET reforms followed a policy learning approach that would have helped enhance the region's capacity to lead reforms and cause change. That particular approach would have challenged policy-makers to lead certain collective exercises of learning based on a broad involvement of stakeholders, which would have highly conditioned the relationships between VET centres and employers.

Chapter 3 described the transnational flow of policies that has increasingly occurred during the last decades as one of the consequences of globalisation. The two main approaches to policy-making – policy borrowing and lending and policy learning – have

been contrasted. With relation to the study of policy learning processes, the chapter included a brief literature review on the most general theoretical frameworks applied. Drawing on the concepts suggested by policy learning scholars (Bennett and Howlett, 1992; Radaelli, 1995; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Grootings, 2004; Borrás, 2011; Raffe, 2011b; Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013) and, particularly, on tools developed to examine policy-making processes (Raffe and Spours, 2007; Chakroun, 2010; Borrás, 2011; Hodgson and Spours, 2016) a specific theoretical framework was defined to analyse the policy-making approach developed by the Basque government. Linking together the types of learning relationships that underlie policy learning processes among the government lead reforms and other political and social stakeholders; and considering the way these relationships help build knowledge and set policy goals, the framework was used to determine the capacity for policy learning developed in the process of modernisation of the VET system. Since the study focused on a regional government in a devolved country, Spain, some considerations concerning policy process drivers in multi-level systems were also included in the theoretical framework.

Figure 6.7.: Theoretical framework developed to analyse Basque VET modernization process.

LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS between	APPLIED TO	RELEVANT LANDMARKS
Government and practitioners	Learning on own historical understanding ('Policy amnesia' or 'policy memory')	Royal Decree (1980) Transfer of State Services in the matter of Education to the Basque Government
Government and researchers	Approaching international comparison and selection ('Best practice' or 'good practice')	LOGSE (1990) on the General Arrangement of the Education System
Within Government and policy community	Setting goals for improvement of own system (competitive - collaborative)	LOC (2002) of Qualifications and Vocational Training
Regional and supra-regional Govs.		Royal Decree (2012) for Dual VET

Author's own elaboration based on the mentioned sources.

The use of policy memory and the avoidance of *amnesia* (Higham and Yeomans, 2007; Pollitt, 2008) requires, among other conditions, a relevant involvement of stakeholders with old policy memory and a continuity of the policy approach itself, with less turbulence in the communities and more built-in space for evaluation and reflection (Hodgson and Spours, 2016: 515). They argue that a culture of constant policy innovation can lead to too much focusing on 'the new' and, therefore, to a climate of 'policy amnesia'. Additionally, the search of good practice instead of best practice means

considering comparing ‘examples of practices which vary according to time, place, context and circumstance’ (Raffe, 2011: 4) instead of just transferring (or borrowing) the best practices observed without sufficiently considering the contexts. Borrowing the best practices from successful systems can be considered a way to compete within the dominant Global Education Reform Model (Sahlberg, 2007). In the same vein, setting goals for improvement in a policy learning approach would help avoid the imperatives of competitive globalisation as the only existing order (Hodgson and Spours, 2016: 512).

The first landmark defines the transfer of the state services in the matter of education to the Basque government. The three following landmarks included in the framework are state level laws which were selected because of their relevance in the configuration of the Spanish VET system. The Law on the General Arrangement of Education (or Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo – LOGSE) of 1990; the Law of Qualifications and Vocational Training (Ley Orgánica 5/2002 de las Cualificaciones y la Formación Profesional – LOC); and the Royal Decree for the development of training and learning labour contract and the establishment of the basis for dual vocational training (Real Decreto 1529/2012 por el que se desarrolla el contrato de formación y aprendizaje y se establecen las bases de la formación profesional dual).

The Research Questions defined for the first phase of this research are as follows:

- To what extent did the Basque government develop a policy learning approach to policy-making when introducing VET-related reforms in the region?
- Was the introduction of the NQF-like conception used as an opportunity for a more collaborative model for VET reforms?

Purposeful sampling was applied to select interviewees. This way, all the participants in the project played a specific role in the process of modernisation of Basque VET. It should be noted that, considering the limitations of the research in terms of time and resources, the size of the sample had to be small. Consequently, maximal variation sampling was applied as the main strategy to select informants.

As a result of applying maximal variation sampling, individuals who featured different experiences on and visions about the process under analysis were selected. The process commenced with the determination of the diverse profiles of people who were involved

in the development of VET reform policies during the defined period. Members of the government (both politicians and public servants) informed of the policy decision-making process, as well as on the diverse relationships and reasons involving these decisions. Informants from the Basque Institute of Qualifications (IVAC) provided a deeper insight regarding the design and deployment of the Qualifications Framework. Representatives from VET Centres who also participated in the Basque VET Council offered a perspective from the educational and training system's point of view of the actual involvement of stakeholders. They also informed on the scope of the collective learning that might have taken place. Finally, a representative of the Basque employers' association (Confebask) offered the employers' view on the process.

After determining the most appropriate profiles of informants, I used my personal knowledge to select and reach most of them. The five interviewees selected were as follows:

- A public servant from the Department of Education during the period 1983–2014, who followed the design and development of normative and plans that were developed by the Basque Government (OFFICIAL_1);
- A representative from the Basque Qualifications Institution (IVAC), involved in the technical development of the NQF (DR_IVAC);
- A former headmaster of a VET centre, who actively participated in the Basque VET Council and was involved in the deployment of reforms (HEADMASTER);
- A renowned representative of the Department of Education of the Basque government who, from diverse positions and along the last two decades, has been involved in the process (GOV_REPRESENTATIVE);
- The person in charge of training in the Basque Confederation of Employers Organizations – Confebask, who also worked as a public servant in the Department of Education during the period 1980–1986 (OFFICIAL_2).

As the reforms were led from the Department of Education of the Basque government, the first phase of the research focused on the views from the educational field.

6.5. Second phase of the research

The purpose of the second phase was to scrutinise the relationships between VET centres and companies. This phase examined the dynamics involved in the design and provision of IVET and particularly focused on the work-based⁶ learning period called *Formación en Centros de Trabajo* (FCT or training in the workplace), which should be considered the first step of the transition from education and training to employment and attending which is compulsory to attain initial vocational qualifications. The analysis of the relationships between VET centres and companies focused on the qualifications (or *familias profesionales*) directly linked to the industrial productive activity, instead of being open to any kind of vocational qualification (like health and care, catering and hotel management, or aesthetics). Additionally, the research sought to determine the degree of trust in and usefulness of the diverse VET tools and policies developed following EU's recommendations to enhance the transparency and portability of qualifications. More specifically, the learning outcomes-based qualifications framework and the work-based learning programmes were analysed.

The Research Questions defined for the second phase of this research are as follows:

- How do the relationships between the companies of the metallurgical industry (labour market) and VET centres (education system) interplay throughout the processes of provision of skills and competences?
 - To look at the way these relationships affect the design and provision of IVET and, particularly, the workplace learning programme called FCT;
 - To look at their role in the processes of continuing vocational education and training (CVET) in the companies;
- What are the factors that explain the differences observed (sector, size, type of activity, legal personality)?
- In which specific aspects can the initial objectives of the competence-based qualifications framework (the so-called Integrated System of Qualifications and Vocational Training – ISQVT), be considered effective?

⁶ The FCT is considered a *work-based learning* programme following the terminology used in the EU educational policy documents. Nevertheless, the programme takes place in the firms' venues and, although there is not a labour contract to rule the relationship between student and employer, many of the workplace related situations apply. Consequently, the term *workplace learning* could be also applied to the programme.

- To assess the trust in and usefulness for users involved in the framework developed.

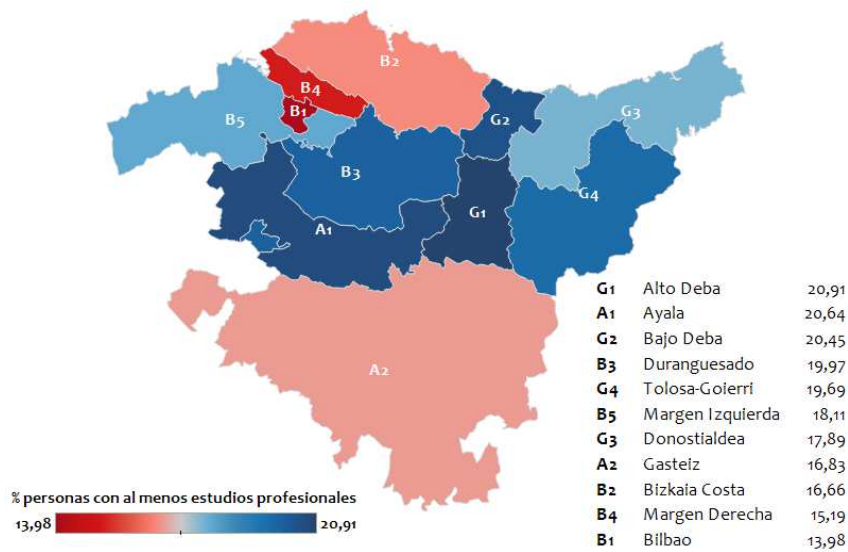
In a manner similar to the first phase, purposeful and maximal variation sampling was applied to select interviewees who would be able to offer different views of the relationships between VET centres and companies. Since the research specifically aimed to scrutinise the work-based programme for IVET called FCT, the profiles to be selected needed to possess a direct relationship with this period of training. In this way, three different profiles that share the common space built between VET centres and companies for the provision of FCT were selected: two of them develop their activity in a company, while the third one works in a VET centre.

The two profiles with the closest relationship during the training period are tutors from VET centres and instructors from the companies where the FCT programmes take place. Tutors provided the view from within the educational system and also informed on the way they interplay with companies' representatives in the design and provision of education and training programmes. Instructors appointed in the companies to conduct and supervise the training period of the students contributed the view from the companies. The third profile selected corresponded to persons in charge of Human Resources management (in some cases, the employers themselves) in the companies. They were expected to provide a broader point of view on the skills provision system. In addition, the standpoints of all the three profiles were used to assess the trust in and usefulness of the competence-based qualifications framework and other tools and policies developed. Therefore, this phase of the research specially sought to gather the attention of the companies.

I started by selecting four VET centres. All of them are considered reference centres because they played a relevant role in the design and testing of the diverse initiatives (quality models of management; involvement in the deployment of qualifications framework; design of training for workers; guiding service to the unemployed; teaching methodological changes; and so on). Reference centres have been designated as such usually because of their strategic location in the middle of highly industrialised and relatively small areas or *bailara*, often specialised in some industrial sub-sector (machine tool, machining, stamping). These centres (see Figure 6.8.) have traditionally developed

a closer relationship with the productive environment and, therefore, feature the *best case* of VET centres as the object of study of this research. The three centres chosen were located in the *bailaras* named Alto Deba (G1), Bajo Deba (G2), and Duranguesado (B3). In these three *bailaras*, the percentage of the population who have pursued VET studies is higher than in other areas of the region:

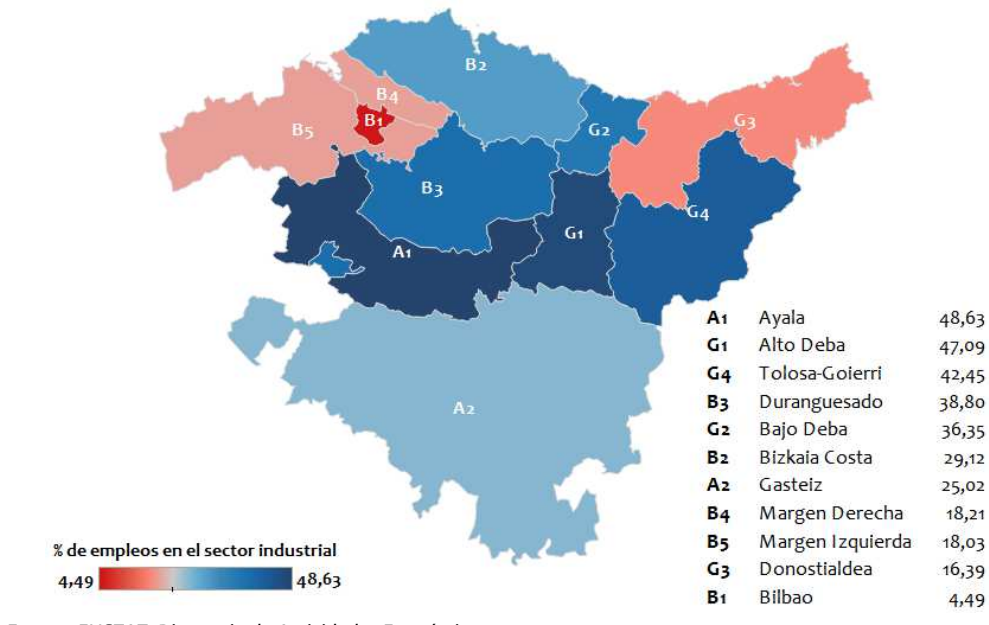
Figure 6.8.: Share of population with VET studies in the different BAC areas.



Source: Eustat, 2011. Census of Population and Housing.

The higher percentage of population with VET studies is considered related to the relevance of the industrial activity in those areas (Figure 6.9):

Figure 6.9.: Share of jobs in the industrial activity



Source: Eustat, 2013. Directory of Economic Activities.

The fourth centre was chosen as a contrasted type of centre. It is the biggest VET centre of the CAV and is not located in an industrialised *bailara*, but in the vicinity of a city (Vitoria-Gasteiz, A2) with very spread out and heterogeneous industrial companies around. Two of the centres are public and the other two form part of the private (*concertado*) network. All of the details on the VET centres, the companies, and the profiles of the informants involved in the research are portrayed in the report of the findings.

Direct contact with people in charge of the VET centres (or of the particular department of the biggest one) helped me designate eleven (11) tutors of FCT from the three different qualifications: Mechanical Manufacturing, Electricity and Electronics, and Installation and Maintenance. Some of the tutors were, in turn, the person from the centre responsible for the relationships with the companies. They were asked to point out some instructors from companies they usually work with for managing FCT programmes. Out of those companies, a selection was made by applying the maximal variation sampling strategy. The criteria followed to select instructors were the size of the company; the sub-sector of the industrial activity; the geographical area where the company was located; and the legal personality of the company. This was, again, a *best-*

case situation, because, as they were pointed by tutors of VET centres, these instructors and the people in charge of Human Resources from the companies were supposed to maintain quite fluent relationships with the centres. In contrast, a different criterion was applied to RRHH_3, RRHH_6, and RRHH_7. They all are managers of companies located in the same geographical areas and were selected without previously considering whether they had a direct relationship with VET centres.

As can be noticed, particular situations apply to the small and very small companies. INSTRUCTOR_4_G and INSTRUCTOR_5_G were also the managers of the company, although they were chosen as instructors. Furthermore, although RRHH_3 was selected because of his position as manager, he also assumed the role of instructor of FCT students in the company. Additionally, EMPRESA_2 and EMPRESA_6 possess the legal personality of a cooperative⁷. For the classification of companies in relation to their size (big, medium sized, small; and micro or very small) the UE criteria which takes into account the staff headcount in the company was applied⁸.

With relation to the type of activity of the companies selected, machining and machine tools were included, which are among the most common sub-sectors in the region. In the case of machining activity, two different cases were taken into account: first, those companies working for a specific metal sub-sector, as automotive. And, second, multi-sectorial companies, the ones that work for a range of metal sub-sectors (including automotive, railroad, aerospace, and others). Forging (*Estampación*) for automotive sub-sectors was also included because it is a widespread activity in a particular *bailara*. In this way, the influence that the type of activity of the companies around the VET centres has on the provision of competences could be better analysed.

⁷ The term cooperative (cooperativa) designates a different typology of company with relation to its corporate form. 'A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise', statement at <https://ica.coop/coop/principles.html>. [Last accessed on Feb 2016].

Following the Basque Law for Cooperatives (Ley 4/1993, de 24 de junio, de Cooperativas de Euskadi) 'La cooperativa es aquella sociedad que desarrolla una empresa que tiene por objeto prioritario la promoción de las actividades económicas y sociales de sus miembros y la satisfacción de sus necesidades con la participación activa de los mismos, observando los principios del cooperativismo y atendiendo a la comunidad de su entorno'.

⁸ The EU criterion to classify companies by size following staff headcount: micro < 10; small < 50; medium < 250; big > 250.

http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_es

VET centres and companies located in the three provinces (Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia, Álava-Araba) of the Basque Autonomous Community were selected because, as described in the literature (as well as by one of the interviewees in the first phase of the research, DR_IVAC), they all have developed a different tradition in relation to VET.

6.6. Ethical issues

I was fully aware that, as a social researcher, I held responsibilities not just to the pursuit of knowledge, but also and specially towards the individuals I was depending on for carrying on my work. I applied the approach to ethics defined by Cavan (1977: 810) to the research as a whole (which has included preliminary and pilot studies)

‘a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature’ (1977: 810).

Although, due to the age of the participants and the nature of the research topic, the present study should not be considered as ethically sensitive, I was especially careful with relation to the confidentiality and anonymity issues of the interviewees. In our first conversation, I informed them all about the purpose of the research and the reasons why their participation was relevant. I also explained to them the whole procedure pertaining to consent and rights. All the participants had a high literacy level, so I was sure that all the information provided to them was comprehensible. Nevertheless, I was also careful about the amount of information I provided participants in order to avoid any kind of predisposition. I also kept in mind that I was dealing with a policy-making related study conducted in a quite politicised region and, therefore, there would have been some risk of acquiring socially accepted responses if informants had suspected any use of the findings different from those genuinely academic. That risk especially applied to informants of the first phase of the research, as the policy-making approach of the Basque government was under scrutiny.

Prior to each interview, I made sure the interviewees understood their rights to either withdraw at any point of the research or skip any question I posed, as well as the purpose of the data. I also clarified their preferences on anonymity which I respected

when writing the findings. With relation to data storage and security, I offered plenty of guarantee on their protection and management. Finally, the interviews were conducted in public spaces in which I was sure that a calm interaction with the informants would be possible. I also ensured that the participants felt comfortable during the interview by creating a friendly and respectful environment.

Since in the past I had held relevant positions in institutional activities (Department for Transportation and Public Works of the Basque Government as well as the Basque Confederation of Employers Organizations, Confebask), which gave me some public visibility, I realised that the risk of informants getting the academic nature of the process distorted was plausible. In order to avoid that risk, I explained in detail that the research responded exclusively to academic purposes and insisted on the absence of any other objective. I consider that, in the end, participants were fully capable of understanding the scope and context of the research.

6.7. Data analysis approach

I selected thematic analysis as the analytic method because, as independent from theory and epistemology, it provides wide flexibility while considered, at the same time, theoretically and methodologically sound (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be defined as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (ibid: 79). I was aware that the whole process would involve decision making based on my personal judgements as a researcher.

The process that leads the move from raw data to meaningful understanding is not a linear one (O'Leary, 2010). It implies successive cycles in which both deductive and inductive reasoning is often involved. In this particular study, the thematic analysis was mainly driven by the theoretical framework and the specific research questions defined, thus forming some specific themes in mind. In that sense, I state that an inductive reasoning prevailed in the analysis. Nevertheless, consistently with the overall approach of the study, I was also open to any data-driven theme emerging during the analytical process and, therefore, deductive reasoning was also involved. Consequently, although some initial ideas were noted, new concepts were also included and linked to the analysis throughout data immersion.

My study sought to understand participants' lived experiences and was mainly concerned with the content of what they said, rather than being focused on language and narrative analysis. The analytic process involved a progression from description to interpretation, ultimately looking to theorise the relevance of the patterns and their broader meaning and implication (Patton, 1990), in accordance with the theoretical framework and literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The consensus of the authors I drew on to define the process of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King and Horrocks, 2010; O'Leary, 2010; Kuckartz, 2013) is that, as a systematic scientific method, its implementation can (and should) be described precisely, which I have tried to achieve in the next section.

6.7.1. The process of thematic analysis.

I realised that, to some extent, the analysis started before all the data was collected. This way, information that emerged from the first interviews in both the first and second phases was relevant enough to cause the inclusion of new documents in the data set to be analysed. Other data caused a change in the theoretical framework. In particular, there was a change in the landmarks to be considered along the process, as will be described in the following section, the presentation of the findings of the first phase of the research. I defend that both facts might also be considered as part of the deductive reasoning conducted, which achieved a place within the dominant inductive approach.

The new documents included in the first phase of the research were related to a study conducted in 1987 by the outstanding academic Professor Dr. Santiago García Echevarria, following the interest of Confebask. It focused on the Basque VET centres' and companies' situation and needs, as well as on their readiness to collaborate in order to develop a new VET model. I considered the study relevant enough to be included in the data set. Based on the mentions made by the interviewees, which were corroborated by the literature (Olazarán and Brunet, 2013), I also considered the First Basque VET Plan, developed by the Basque government and agreed within the Basque VET Council in 1997, needed to be included, as it played a very significant role in the subsequent development of Basque VET.

In the case of the second phase of the research, I decided to include a specific document provided by a tutor from a VET centre. In the educational context it is referred to as DCB (Diseño Curricular Base, or Basic Curricular Design). It is a document that, among other relevant information for teachers and tutors, gathers all the competences and learning outcomes that a particular qualification should involve. Therefore, there is a specific DCB for each qualification. This document was considered relevant for the analysis of the way relationships with companies and the developed tools (learning outcomes-based qualifications) interplay in the definition of the learning programmes.

Consequently, the entire data set under scrutiny following thematic analysis was formed from fieldwork notes, transcripts, and documents:

- For the first phase: five interview transcripts; notes from the interviews; the study of 1987 on VET centres and companies (García Echevarria, 1987, unpublished); and the First Basque VET Plan.
- For the second phase: twenty-four interview transcripts, sorted into three different groups (eleven tutors, six instructors, and seven persons responsible for Human Resources management in the companies); notes from the interviews; and the document titled DCB Electrical and Automatic Installations.

For the two phases of the research I drew on literature on the history of VET in Spain and Basque Country (Homs, 2009; Olazarán and Brunet, 2013; Murua, 2015); the official web pages of Confebask, the Department of Education of Basque Government and the Ministry of Education of the Spanish Government (and associated institutions); and the Official Bulletins of the BAC (BOPV) and the State (BOE), in order to complement and better locate the events, relationships, and other elements at the time of building the theoretical framework, analysing data, and recording the findings.

In order to facilitate the analysis, the MAXQDA program was used.

For each of the two phases, and in separate ways, I pursued a complete coding of the entire data material and followed a multi-stage process of categorising. This way, the analysis process was divided into three stages, which were successively applied to both phases of the research:

1. FAMILIARISING WITH DATA AS A WHOLE.

At this stage, I tried to identify all the passages in the data that were likely to be helpful in addressing my research questions. Any idea that appeared interesting to the analysis or that I thought could contribute to a better understanding of participants' view on the process was used to define my initial codes. It should be noted that, as my thinking about these codes was progressing along the transcripts and other data items, I often had to revert and modify the coding on earlier ones. At this stage, I avoided interpreting what those codes meant, as I understood this stage as just descriptive.

2.- ANALYSING DEFINED CODES.

At this stage, I tried to focus more on the interpretation of the meaning of the codes, often returning to data in order to clarify meaning and relationships between codes. Some of the initial codes were grouped together, as part of a broader pattern.

3.- SEARCHING FOR THEMES.

King and Horrocks note the difficulty to set strict rules on what should be identified as a 'theme', which they define as follows:

'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (2010: 149-50).

Kuckartz offers some rules to define what he names 'category system' (the structure of themes), as the convenience of being defined in close connection to the research question, avoiding too detailed or too broad themes, and even having the report of findings in mind (2013: 9).

Considering all of the above, I proceeded as follows: I first sorted the different codes into potential themes based on whether they captured relevant ideas with relation to the theoretical framework and research questions. Along that process, I often turned to the literature. Afterwards, I collated relevant coded data extracts and carried out a review based on two level checking (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 91–2), considering the themes themselves, 'whether they appear to form a coherent pattern', and each theme

in relation to the others, 'the validity of individual theme in relation to the data set'. The overarching themes defined in the analysis will be described in the following sections.

In accordance with the methodological decisions already described, the presentation of the findings of this research project has been divided into two parts, which correspond to each of the two phases defined. The first phase covers the modernisation of VET in the Basque Country. By analysing the policy-making approach applied in the region, it considers the way relationships among the diverse actors involved in the dynamics for skills provision have evolved along the whole process. The second phase delves into the relationships between VET centres and companies after the process of modernisation (and the reforms involved) that has been going on for two decades. It specifically focuses on the dynamics that occur around the workplace training period that all IVET students need to go through before obtaining their certificates. This training period can be considered the transition from education to labour market for most students.

Chapter 7. First phase: the modernisation of Basque VET

Following the research approach defined, I decided to report the findings of this first phase following a chronological description of events and relationships that were relevant to the reforms applied to modernise VET in the Basque Country. I considered telling a story from the participants' view as helpful in better explaining the complex dynamic of events, human relationships, and other factors involved, while contributing to locate stakeholders and their relationships along that process of modernisation. The themes defined during the data analysis helped link the story that emerged with the theoretical framework designed, as described later in this section. Having described the process, the last section of the chapter moves on to address the research questions that are posed in this phase.

With relation to the chronological sequence and the periods to be considered in the process, it should be recalled that, following literature and official documents, the theoretical framework designed for the study included four landmarks. The first one was the Royal Decree 2808/1980, which approved the transfer of the state services in the matter of education to the Basque government. In addition, three relevant State regulations related to VET were defined as landmarks: The Law on the General Arrangement of Education (LOGSE) in 1990, the Law for the creation of the Qualifications Catalogue (LOC) in 2002, and the Royal Decree for regulating Dual VET in 2012. Thus, the period between 1980 and 2015 was analysed under the first phase. The latter was the year when the Decree 83/2015 of the 2nd of June by the Basque government was enacted, aiming to adopt the dual model for VET in the region. The fieldwork concerning the second phase of this research was conducted in June 2015. The structuring of the period, following the four landmarks mentioned, was based on the significance that these regulations had in the definition of the overall framework within which the Basque government formulated its particular policy. Nevertheless, despite the undeniable significance of these legal dispositions, participants' views of the process suggested a modification on the structuring of the process.

As described by GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, in April 1995, right after the beginning of a new governance term in the Basque Country, an important meeting was called in the government. The different departments concerning with economy, industry, and labour

participated and, for the first time, the Director of VET from the Department of Education also attended the meeting. The Directorate for VET was an administrative unit that had been created recently within the government. The aim of that meeting was to co-ordinate efforts in order to address the extremely complex socioeconomic situation of Basque Country at that time: the steel-based traditional industry, which contributed immensely to the region's economic growth, was in the middle of extensive restructuring. In addition to the quite complex political situation that the region was going through, the need for modernising the sector caused the closure of big emblematic companies, high unemployment, and social disturbance. GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, who was at that time the Director of VET, participated in the said meeting. He expressed the atmosphere in the meeting as follows:

'We were sinking, and our industry was starting to collapse, just as a house of cards', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 17.

As a result of this joint reflection among diverse departments of the government, three strategic courses of action were defined. Each of them were to be addressed following a specific plan. These three lines for action were: modernisation of the equipment and technology in the industry; design of a new vocational education and training scheme for training people; and promotion of the Information and Communication Technologies, an innovative issue at that time. GOV_REPRESENTATIVE was responsible for the preparation of a plan that *'would change the way people were being trained'* [quoted verbatim].

Following the information gathered from the interviewees, I argue that a completely new period in the development of Basque VET began after 1995. This is why I decided to divide the whole process under study into two main periods. The first one begins in 1980 with the transfer of the state services in the matter of education to the Basque government. The second period begins in 1995, when the process to design the First Basque VET Plan (FBVETP) was launched; and ends in 2015, when the Decree 83/2015 that regulated dual VET in the BAC was enacted.

It should be noted that the Spanish Labour Legislation, an exclusive function of the state, did not regulate apprenticeships' contracts that would allow dual approach to be

completely applied until the end of 2012. Notwithstanding that obstacle, two VET programmes – *Ikasi eta Lan* (learn and work) in 2008 and *HEZIBI* in October 2012 – were developed thanks to a joint effort between the Basque government, employers' association Confebask, and VET centres, trying to temporarily respond to the demand of the employers. The extremely high youth unemployment and the EU's increasing pressure to encourage work-based learning approaches in Europe finally led the Spanish government to regulate the labour related aspects of what would be the Spanish approach to dual VET. The Basque Decree enacted in June 2015 aimed to complete and adapt the state regulation to the region's specificities, which was characterised by a competitive industrial environment, with the prevalence of small and medium companies (SMEs). As it could be observed during the fieldwork carried out for the second phase of the project, by 2015 companies that participated in the research were quite familiar with a dual approach to VET, due to the programmes that had been developed previously in the region.

I assumed that once the Decree was in effect and dual programmes had spread, the relationships between the stakeholders involved (Government, VET centres, and companies) would change. Therefore, I determined that 2015 marked the beginning of a new period that would be excluded from this research.

Although four of the interviewees retired around 2010 and, as a consequence, they stopped being directly involved in the process, all of them admitted that they continued to be close to the VET field afterwards. The fifth interviewee, GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, who was still in office when this research was conducted, contributed with some interesting information on the use of NQFs corresponding to more recent years, which was taken into consideration to address the question on the effectiveness of the tools developed to increase the transparency of qualifications.

As an inductive reasoning prevailed in the analysis, most of the themes defined were directly related to the theoretical framework and the elements it included. The themes captured the nature of the learning relationships between the Basque government and practitioners (Involving Stakeholders and Experts); the ones developed within the government and the policy community (Relationships within the Policy Community); and the learning relationships between regional and supra-regional governments

(Relationships with Regional and Supra-regional Governments). The theoretical framework defined a fourth learning relationship, the one between government and researchers, which did not appear significant enough to be ultimately considered a theme. The approach to international comparison and selection of practices, another relevant element of the theoretic framework, is captured by the theme Use of International Experience. Additionally, the role of the different stakeholders, primarily VET centres' and companies' representatives in the design and deployment of the reforms will be permanently taken into consideration along the different phases defined.

Finally, two deductive themes emerged from the data itself. These are leadership and the theme that considers the aim, implementation, and evaluation of the qualifications framework. The following paragraphs give a succinct description of the overarching themes:

1. Involving stakeholders and experts.

This theme captures the involvement of experts and stakeholders in the process, the relevance of that involvement for building agreements and collaboration and for enhancing motivation among practitioners. It also considers the relationships between the people directly involved in the deployment of policies and members of the government, either politicians or officials, most of them with professional experience in the field of vocational training.

2. Relationships within the policy community.

This theme considers the kind of relationships developed within Basque government's departments and between the Basque government and other regional institutions or policy actors. It also accounts for the degree of continuity of the process within the overall economic and political context.

3. Relationships with regional and supra-regional governments

This theme collates the relationships that the Basque government maintained with other governments (regional, Spanish, European Union, and from other countries). It considers the episodes of collaboration with and differentiation from

the Spanish path and pace, and the mechanisms used for intergovernmental policy-making within the Spanish scheme of shared power.

4. Use of international experience.

This theme covers the use by different stakeholders of the knowledge acquired from the analysis of international experiences in order to introduce changes to the VET system.

5. Leadership.

This theme captures the demonstrations of leadership by key people and/or institutions. These demonstrations, together with strong implication and active involvement, proved to be instrumental for the process.

6. NQFs: Aims, implementations and evaluation.

The aims pursued by the introduction of a qualifications framework scheme, the way its deployment was carried out, and the evaluation of its attainment are gathered in this theme.

The presentation of the findings starts with a succinct description of VET development in Spain, in order to better contextualise the situation at the beginning of the related account. This part of the VET history is mostly based on the literature. Afterwards, the two periods defined are chronologically described. The themes appear on a permanent basis along the description, in a way to ensure that the inductive elements that had been included in the theoretical framework together with the deductive factors that emerged from the data are adequately addressed in the description. I considered this approach to the presentation of the findings, with a permanent connection to the theoretical framework, to facilitate an understanding of the conclusions.

7.1. First part: description of the process

7.1.1. Historical, political and socioeconomic evolution until 1980.

When describing the Spanish educational system, Prats affirms that, until as recently as 1970, the country suffered from a historical deficit compared to most European countries (2005: 177–8). He also points out a certain tradition of permanent normative change, which has often introduced instability into the system and has hampered its evolution. In relation to VET, Homs affirms that the Spanish political and economic evolution since the 19th century influenced the late development of its VET system (2004: 19). He states that the Spanish VET system wasn't consolidated under a modern conception until 1990, when the LOGSE was enacted.

Some specific characteristics of Spanish political and economic context had a dramatic impact on the late development of its VET system (Merino, 2005). Its guild system was abolished by the Constitution of 1812, after the occupation by the Napoleon forces. Spain experienced a late industrialisation, caused in part due to the prioritisation of its agrarian property, with the exception of the iron, steel, and mining industries concentrated in the north of the country, including the Basque region, and the textile activity in Catalonia. The 19th century was characterised by political and military turbulence. The loss of the colonies had a high impact on the economy. Most employment was concentrated in agriculture and in small factories and was characterised by low salaries and no training. In his detailed work on the Spanish labour system of the 19th century, Sarasúa (2006: 22) affirms that the factors mentioned above are key to understanding the economic and educational backwardness, the low welfare levels, and serious political conflicts of the country when entering the 20th century.

The few industrial firms that existed in that period had to train their workforce in their own premises. Only few centres offered training. Most of them had religious character and followed the social doctrine of the Catholic church, which was strong in Spain. Homs suggests that its private and religious character influenced the perception of vocational training as a path for popular classes, instead of being considered a necessary element for the development of the productive system (2009: 20). Following literature (Olazarán and Brunet, 2013, Murua, 2015), it can be argued that vocational training evolved in a different way in the Basque region.

Porter *et al.* (2013) describe the different situation in relation to the economic development that could be observed in the Basque Country. Industrial development was spurred by its rich iron ore deposits, wide forest resources, and availability of hydraulic energy. Starting 1870s Basque entrepreneurs began to create a modern, large-scale iron and steel industry. A variety of organisations (legal, economic, scientific) emerged around industry. By 1930, Basque Country held the highest literacy rate and the highest rate of technical schooling in Spain (Lozano, 2008 cited in Porter *et al.*, 2013). Due to the lack of a real training system, private entrepreneurs took the initiative and established technical schools by themselves. Some of these initiatives were pioneered in Spain: In-firm Apprentice Workshop for large companies, as the Sociedad Española de Construcciones Babcock & Wilcox Española, which was the first private initiative in Spain and established in 1927 in Sestao; Schools of Arts and Trades, as the Escuela de Armeria, created in Eibar in 1912, which was an initiative of a pool of entrepreneurs seeking qualified workers for their small companies, can be mentioned as significant examples of these kind of private initiatives.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War of 1936 brought great economic distress, followed by the beginning of World War II and Spain's international economic and political ostracism because of the Franco Regime's links with Nazi Germany. The regime followed a tightly controlled economic model, based on autarchy (Porter *et al.*, 2013: 5). This policy had a great impact on the Spanish economy and also hindered the Basque region's industrial evolution. The regime had extreme social and political impact. It exerted a fierce political and military repression on the population sympathetic to republicanism, the losers of the Civil War¹. Many leaders, intellectuals, businessmen, and workers had to exile the country. The Basque region, where strong movements for regional autonomy had emerged since the 19th century, suffered additional cultural and political repression and, consequently, radical nationalism gained momentum. The first Basque

¹Based on the report by Leo Brincat, the European Council approved on 17 March 2006 by unanimity the Recommendation 1736 in which expressed the need for the international condemnation of the Franco regime: 'The Parliamentary Assembly strongly condemns the extensive and wide-ranging human rights abuses committed by the Franco regime in Spain from 1939 to 1975'. The Report details the main features of the Franco dictatorship: 'Thousands of former Republicans were summarily shot or sent to prison while countless others suffered various forms of political and economic punishments'.

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17417&lang=en>

government, which had been created in 1936, was also persecuted because it had not supported Franco's military coup and was aligned with the democratically elected republican government. Its members were either exiled or were imprisoned and/or executed.

During the Francoist regime's last years, and under the influence of international organisations, an attempt to modernise Spanish VET was made through the General Act on Education of 1970 (Ley General de Educación, LGE). Following LGE, vocational training functioned to prepare young people leaving educational systems at different levels with a specialised training adapted to the needs of business and, for the first time, it included the concept of permanent education (Moreno, 1992: 109). However, the new design directly clashed with the still influential sectors of the old model of industrial vocational training. The lack of financial support to the law, the resistance to reform, and the political weakness of the regime caused chaotic and highly delayed deployment of the reforms. As Homs explains, 'the lack of liberty, a practically non-existent welfare state, with little investment in social policies, and business and trade union organizations controlled politically by the regime and incapable of playing a structuring role in labour relations could not contribute to the development of vocational training' (2009: 22). In addition, the oils crisis of the 1970 severely struck the Basque industry and, as a consequence, most of the schools for apprentices disappeared over the decade.

The so called *Transición* (transition) from the regime to a democratic system began after the death of Franco in 1975. The Spanish constitution was approved in 1978. It defined Spain as a *plurinacional* state and accorded to the region the opportunity to organise themselves in autonomous communities.

Within that context, the Statue of Autonomy of Basque Country was the first to be approved in 1979 and the Basque government was restored. Due to some of its historical particularities, the so-called *Historical Rights* were specifically included in the constitution, and the Basque region achieved the highest level of autonomy in Spain. Following this, the Basque region also attained full authority to collect taxes and to set most of them, due to the restoration of the Economic Agreement that rules its economic and fiscal relationships with the state. According to Porter *et al.* owing to the

combination of that specific feature with a stronger economic activity, the Basque public spending per capita has remained the highest in Spain and has provided the community relative economic sufficiency to finance their own policies, institutions, and infrastructures (2013: 5). Thus, a new era of self-governance and development was initiated in the region.

Nevertheless, the newly created Basque government faced a tough task. Amid the huge efforts towards institutionally organising the country, it had to deal with a very difficult economic situation. Basque Country's economy was sunk in a deep crisis in 1980, seriously damaged by the previous decades' distortions and by the deceleration of world economy due to the oil crisis. The restructuring of the steel and related industry, the foundation of its economy, needed to be addressed. Trade unions' intense activity created great labour disorder. Moreover, the terrorist activity of the nationalist extremist group ETA, an extremely cruel legacy that emerged in reaction to the Francoist Regime's repression, added social and political turbulence to this period.

In 1980, the state services in the matter of education were transferred to the Basque government, along with a heterogeneous ensemble of VET centres which had been under the management of different Spanish ministries and private entities. It should be recalled that, as already explained, the state service in the matter of labour was not transferred to the BAC. That lack of ruling capacity did not just limit the regulation of labour contracts but consequently also hindered the development of VET dual schemes. Furthermore, the training of the unemployed, the occupational training (*formación ocupacional or para el empleo*), was managed from the Spanish Institute for Employment (INEM, until 2003 and, since then on, the SEPE). As a consequence, one of the three subsystems of the whole vocational training stayed out of the Basque government's ruling capacity until 2010². With relation to the continuous training in the region, the most relevant landmark was the signing of an agreement among trade unions, employers' associations, and public administration in 1995, which resulted in the creation in 1996 of the Basque institute for continuous training of workers,

² The Royal Decree 1441/2010, of November the 5th, explains the agreement achieved in the Mixed Commission for the Transfer of Competences about the transfer to the BAC of the functions and services for the implementation of the state level labour legislation, as well as the vocational training for employment, which had been done by the INEM (Instituto Nacional de Empleo – National Institute of Employment) until 2003 and, afterwards, by the SEPE (Servicio Estatal de Promoción de Empleo – State Level Service for the Promotion of Employment).

HOBETUZ. This tripartite institution was in charge of that particular part of vocational training, the one concerning the training of workers.

By the time the Spanish socialist Minister of Industry Solchaga pronounced in 1995 his famous 'the best industrial policy is the one that doesn't exist'³, best defining the Spanish government's approach towards industry, the Basque government had already initiated an active role in rebuilding industry: 'policies to upgrade the competitiveness of industry became the cornerstone of the Basque political agenda, to which the rest of policies became subordinated' (Porter *et al.*, 2013: 7). In this context, the ineffective training infrastructure was already identified by employers as an obstacle to the intended economic and social development.

7.1.2. The period between 1980 and 1995.

a) First step: creating the net of VET centres.

In 1980, the Spanish central government transferred the ownership of all the VET centres to the Basque government. There was an amalgam of public centres that had been under the authority of different ministries (education, employment, industry) in a very diverse structure of centres, together with a mixture of private schools for apprenticeships. The Basque government created a Central VET Service and a cabinet for VET in each of the three provinces (Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia, and Araba), and recruited technicians and managers:

'Then, to form the first management team, they counted on technicians: mainly, headmasters of schools. People who were experts in the field', OFFICIAL_2, 14.

Therefore, a group formed by individuals with broad experience on vocational training was in charge of the reception and management of different centres, facilities, and personnel.

Although the very first steps were counting on public centres, a process called *concertación* (meaning agreement or pact) started to be deployed in relation to private centres. The Basque government built a model following which private schools received

³ http://elpais.com/diario/1995/07/15/economia/805759226_850215.html

public funds for functioning, conditioned to compliance with several requirements. This model was also applied to general education and it experienced a wide development in the region.

'We basically managed VET from the public centres. Private centres had some annual support for their operation. But then, after... I think it was 1986... the "concertación" was introduced. It took quite a big effort from all of us, take into account that we had to deeply know the reality of the private centres, and be able to establish which would be the classrooms, the number of them, how many students', OFFICIAL_1, 21.

'But I cannot recall any great difficulty in the integration of all the centres', OFFICIAL_1, 33.

Consequently, a more homogeneous network of centres was developed, in which both public and private centres were integrated. The network of centres contributed to a more effective management and deployment of programmes.

'To create the network of centres ... yes, I think that was a step probably quite important to coordinate, somehow, the ruling of vocational training, both in public and private centres. (...) Although there had been some kind of relationship with private centres, I think that since then on, that relationship was closer', OFFICIAL_1, 23.

The creation of the network of centres could be considered an instrumental step in the institutionalisation of VET in Basque Country, with no parallels in the rest of Spain at that time.

b) Investment in VET centres' equipment and programme for training teachers.

The heads of the cabinets created in each province were aware of the lack of investment in equipment that most VET centres suffered from, primarily due to the economic crisis. In the case of public centres, the decisions of equipment had been taken by the Board of VET of the Spanish government in Madrid, which was quite oblivious to the specific needs of each centre. An ambitious plan was launched: each cabinet led a process following which centres were consulted on their equipment needs. Thus, cabinets were expected to gather accurate information on the equipment needs of the centres. The

head of one of the cabinets at that time explained the response they received from the centres as follows:

'We were surprised to see that we had to stop the process because most of the equipment that was being requested was already obsolete. (...) That was a sign that, on the one side, some centres had a weak connection with companies. And, on the other side, teachers were not up to new technologies', OFFICIAL_2, 22–24.

Therefore, the training of teachers was prioritised. To do so, members of the cabinets, who were familiar with the industrial structure of the provinces, requested the collaboration of companies, because they were aware that it was the companies where practitioners from VET centres would be able to learn from on the most advanced technologies applied in the industry. A pyramid shaped structure of training was created in order to reach a larger number of teachers. Following this step, centres were provided with new equipment, aligned with the ones used in the industry. Teachers, at the same time, acquired important knowledge on technology and the kind of equipment and processes that were being applied in the industry at that time. However, more than that, at the end of the experience, they had become closer to the companies and initiated a dynamic of continuous learning and innovation. A new dynamic between centres and firms had been built.

'A certain symbiosis between firms and training centres started to be built. I mean, there was this ... kind of ... coming closer', OFFICIAL_2, 28.

'We hit the mark by trying to technologically adapt teachers... this is not something you can do in one or two years, even not in three; that takes a lot of time. But when you ignite the spirit for innovation among teachers, when they get such an advanced technological base knowledge ... you start a dynamic in which ... well, it gets much easier to introduce innovations, either in methodology, or pedagogy ... it gets easier', OFFICIAL_2, 148–50.

Other kinds of initiatives were carried out by the Basque government during that period.

'In order to better understand VET in our region... we can recall the collaboration between public administration and companies to develop VET centres. (...) It was the time of... Recalde, [Ministry of Education in the Basque Government between

1986 and 1991], yes. From the Department of Education a programme was launched that made possible signing agreements with employers' associations in order to create centres that would better respond to their needs', OFFICIAL_1, 89.

In fact, building a closer relationship between companies and firms was of high interest for different institutions. The government of the province of Gipuzkoa (Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa) deserves special mention. The personality of the President of the DFG, Mr. Imanol Murua, who was a person very close to VET (he had been a VET teacher himself), was crucial. Even though the DFG did not possess any educational competence, vocational training was understood as a necessity for the development of a productive system. Therefore, based on the competences it had on economic promotion, a specific structure for supporting VET was created:

'And important investment in equipment was made in many VET centres in Gipuzkoa. And not just that, there was also a kind of a structures, an administrative unity or so... that was relevant for offering training to companies, to workers, and so... (...) I think it was quite significant in the development of VET in Gipuzkoa', OFFICIAL_1, 51–55.

The stance of the Basque institutions towards VET at that time can be considered as a specific feature of the region. The support VET received from the public administration compared to other regions in Spain has been mentioned several times by interviewees along the whole period under analysis.

c) CONFEBASK: The contributions of a key organisation.

In 1988, a relevant initiative was launched by Confebask⁴. The President of Confebask at the time, Mr. José María Vizcaíno, and a member of its board of directors and a prominent manager and executive, Mr. Joaquín Ochoa, were quite worried about the lack of practical experience that graduates from VET displayed when they entered the labour market. Following this concern, they launched a project that was to have a significant influence in the development of VET. On the one hand, they approached

⁴ Confebask was created in 1983. Nevertheless, its origin can be located earlier, during the last years of the Francoist Regime. At that time, several employers started to work on an organisation that would better respond to the emerging new situation that would be created by the social, political, and economic changes glimpsed for after the restoration of democracy. During the regime, all kind of employers or workers associations had been forbidden, and only the so called Vertical Union of the Regime had been permitted.

Professor Santiago García Echevarria, from the University of Alcalá de Henares in Madrid, who possessed significant knowledge on European and, especially, German VET system, to research on the culture of the primary actors related to VET. More than one hundred and fifty VET centres and employers participated in the project. On the other hand, both travelled to Germany and met managers, teachers, and other significant profiles from the German VET, in order to become acquainted with the practical aspects of the model. Although their interest was on the German dual system, they also considered elements of the Austrian and Swiss systems. International experience was thus analysed together with the region's culture on VET in order to reach conclusions on how the Basque VET system should evolve.

One of the conclusions of the study conducted by Professor García Echevarria showed the disposition of VET centres to build a closer collaboration with firms in order to strengthen practical experience of students regarding the kind of processes and technologies required in industrial firms. Both centres and employers considered the German dual System, although adapted to the region's specificities, as an interesting model:

'What we wanted to do was to initiate what we called 'shared training', similar to the German dual training, aware that German training, just like that, could not be transferred to our reality', OFFICIAL_2, 74.

Based on the conclusions of the study and what had been learnt during their visit to Germany, the Confebask⁵ members wrote up a document that included three specific proposals for the Basque government, that were gradually implemented.

- The inclusion of a workplace-based training period in IVET, which would not only improve students' practical knowledge, but also strengthen the relationships between centres and companies. This internship scheme was introduced by the LOGSE, although its implementation had a slower deployment in the Spanish VET. In 1991, Confebask and the Basque government signed a collaboration

⁵ The suggestions to the Basque Government can be found on the Organization's official web site [Accessed in October 2017]: <http://formacion.confebask.es/Corporativa/Default.aspx?Xqp5O3l6Vf162346789b0vYOCu8WBA90785678d90785678d>

agreement to initiate what was called 'Shared Training', following which students would be offered internships in Basque firms. This program became the current FCT (Formación en Centros de Trabajo – Training in the Workplace), under analysis in the second phase of this research.

- The creation of the Basque VET Council, as the forum for analysis, discussion, and participation of the primary stakeholders in VET: Education, Industry, and Employment Departments of the Basque government; other institutions of the region with policy-making capacity on economic development; Confebask and trade unions; and the participation of representatives from both public and private VET centres. It should be noted that the Basque Council, created in 1994, was for many years the only VET council in Spain in which VET centres actively participated as full-fledged members⁶.
- Finally, Confebask also requested the creation of a centre for the transfer of technology and innovation. The institute, in close partnership with companies and VET centres, would support R&D in small and medium companies (SMEs); provide a shared environment for testing new technologies and processes; promote the creation of start-ups around emerging technologies; and become a training centre for teachers. Founded in 2005, TKNIKA also helped intensify the exchange of international learning experiences.

The progressive implementation of these initiatives by the Basque government shows its stance towards the relevance of VET in the economic development of the industrial region.

'The background we had was indeed different from that of the State, and there was a close relationship between public administration and employers' associations', OFFICIAL_1, 141.

⁶ In the Consejo General de Formación Profesional (the state level VET Council) VET centres' representatives do not participate. This way, trade unions, employers' associations, Autonomous Communities' representatives, and members from different departments of the Spanish government are the members of the council. Most of the councils created in the Autonomous Communities of Spain follow a similar scheme and have not considered the direct participation of VET centres.

d) Mechanisms for intergovernmental collaboration.

Regarding the relationship between the Basque and Spanish governments at the time, participants responded that, leaving strictly political relationships aside, the design and deployment of the LOGSE counted on an active collaboration at the technical level. Experts on VET from the regions with educational policy-making capacity were asked to participate in the process by attending conferences and meetings. The collaboration among all these experts (teachers, headmasters, and officials) continued after the law was enacted, and they worked together in the deployment of the new structure of centres and degrees that the law had defined. As one of the interviewees affirmed,

‘Once the LOGSE was published, we continue to develop a close collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The six ... I think we were six, the autonomous communities with educational competences transferred. It was a task, that of collaboration with technicians of the Ministry, [which was] wonderful’, OFFICIAL_1, 91.

In 1990, the LOGSE⁷ introduced outstanding changes which affected not only the structure of educational and training paths, but also the approach to learning and teaching of the educational system. It established mechanisms for linking general education and the labour market and increased compulsory general studies by two years. In relation to VET, it laid the foundation for a modern structure (Homs, 2009). OFFICIAL_1 states that

‘Current VET would not exist if LOGSE had not been enacted’, OFFICIAL_1, 71.

He also describes that a close relationship between VET teachers and companies had promoted a more practical education and training in the educational centres that facilitated the deployment of the new approach introduced by LOGSE:

‘Most of the teachers of... Technology and Practice, which was an important part of the whole programme, had a direct relationship with the companies around,

⁷ LOGSE, Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo, or Law on the General Arrangement of the Education System, enacted by the socialist government of the PSOE, replaced the General Law on Education of 1970, in effect since the dictatorship of Franco. Therefore, it was the first educational law after the restoration of democracy. Aligned with the plurinational model defined by the Constitution of 1978, education was decentralised, not only allowing the Autonomous Communities to manage the centres, but also to define an important percentage of the curriculum. Some years later, the LOGSE was repealed by the Ley Orgánica de Educación of 2006.

and so... they knew which their needs were and...therefore, I think that it led to a transformation of the training, somehow, to teaching 'how to do'. So... although the term competence and all that new view on the VET certificates came with the LOGSE, there was an important background that helped its development...', OFFICIAL_1, 73.

e) About the origins of the LOGSE.

Although DR_IVAC made a reference to a European influence –

'The White Book of Delors⁸, where the relevance of having vocational training very close to the firms was very stressed', DR_IVAC, 12.

It is apparent that the LOGSE was more closely inspired by the Vocational Qualifications model that had been developed in England in the late 80s. In fact, technicians from the Ministry of Education of the Spanish government had visited different institutions in England to see up close that model, based on outcome-based competences and qualifications.

'The LOGSE, in its approach to VET, was based on the model developed in United Kingdom', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 11.

'Then, the Anglo-Saxon model of ... how it was ... the QCA, the authority of qualifications, all the structure was imitated, at least, in the beginning', DR_IVAC, 19.

'During at least one month, I think, a delegation from the Spanish Ministry went to London, to the QCA, I don't know if at that time the qualifications authority had that name', DR_IVAC, 23.

'They stayed for a month; we were there for three days and then, during mid-90s, Basque government also sent us there for a couple of day', DR_IVAC, 25.

⁸ It is assumed that the interviewee is referring to the report published by UNESCO and coordinated by Jacques Delors under the title: *Learning, the treasure within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109590eo.pdf> [Last Accessed on October 2017]

'It was the functional analysis, it was there where the methodology was explained to us ... and I think that the ground for building the LOGSE was Anglo-Saxon', DR_IVAC, 29.

The changes introduced by the LOGSE were quite advanced.

'For the very first time, LOGSE tried to bring the three separated systems [regulated or initial, occupational, and continuing training] closer, although slightly', DR_IVAC, 33.

As Homs states, 'it is possible that the LOGSE was too radical in its approach'(2009: 25). Thus, he affirms that it wasn't until the Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2006⁹) was enacted when its planned paths were made more flexible and feasible. The latter is reaffirmed by interviewees as well:

'It is with the LOE when the certificates had to be linked to qualifications and, each qualification had to have a professionalism certificate', DR_IVAC, 195.

Notwithstanding that valuable attempt made by the LOGSE, the complexity of a reliable integration of the three training systems was high and would take some time.

f) Summarising the first period.

In summary, it can be said that when the state services in the matter of education were transferred to the Basque government, it addressed the management of the VET system relying on the knowledge of experienced practitioners by incorporating technicians to the first structures that were created. The enhancement of the relationships between VET centres and firms was of interest for different institutions in the region. Nevertheless, these efforts did not seem to be fully coordinated. The interviewees agree on the relevance of the background that helped the evolution of the VET system: the relationships between VET teachers and companies and between employers' associations and public administration; and the promotion by all of them of a more practical kind of education.

Two relevant initiatives marked the difference from other regions. On the one side, the

⁹ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2006/BOE-A-2006-7899-consolidado.pdf>

integration of all centres in a network strengthened the relationship between the government and practitioners. It would also be crucial for a more efficient deployment of policies and programmes, as analysed in the next section. On the other side, the teachers' training program helped bring employers and teachers closer in the knowledge of each other's needs. It also contributed to spreading a spirit of innovation among teachers, which proved to be crucial in building the capacity for rapid changes that characterised the VET model.

The initiative launched by the two influential figures of Confebask was highly relevant. The use of international experience combined with a realistic diagnosis of the culture of key actors in VET resulted in new initiatives, which would influence the subsequent development of the model and contributed to building a closer relationship between representatives from VET centres and companies.

Finally, it can be affirmed that the LOGSE introduced a *radical* change in the state educational system, which also included vocational education. Nevertheless, the deployment of the VET reforms included in the law was not homogeneously undertaken in the state. In the Basque region the changes implemented surpassed the content of the LOGSE after 1995. As described in the next section, it was the FBVETP, its design, approval, and deployment, that most defined that differentiated path and pace of VET in the region. One of the underlying reasons could have been the combination of the measured pace in the deployment of the LOGSE at the state level in stark contrast with the urgency of the change perceived in the Basque region:

'In 1986, the United Kingdom changed its model, in 1988, it was France's turn and in 1990 it was Spain with the LOGSE. Then when deployment of LOGSE started, it went on very slowly, as ... well, most of what Spanish Government does goes very slowly. We arrived into office in 1995. We were in the middle of a huge crisis; in particular, 1993 was a catastrophe. Another restructuring... One month after I arrived into office ... well ... when I look backwards ... I was called to a meeting with high level officials',. GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 11.

After that meeting, the Director of VET of the Basque government addressed the definition of a plan that aimed for improving workers' and the population's training in order to enhance competitiveness of the productive system and to reduce

unemployment. Previously undertaken initiatives, as described in the section, had contributed to build a solid ground. The new project initiated a different dynamic in the modernisation of VET, which ultimately would also exert a remarkable influence on the Spanish VET.

7.1.3. The period between 1995 and 2015.

a) A new approach to VET policy: International views in a local context.

Three departments of the Basque government¹⁰ participated in the definition of the plan. The approach followed to design the plan was crucial and was characterised by three main features. In the first place, a deep analysis of the international experiences and models was carried out. The second crucial feature was the contribution of two key collaborators. On the one hand, an official in the VET Directorate of the Basque Government, OFFICIAL_1, was involved. After fifteen years in office, he was very knowledgeable about the legal structure of VET and the sharing of power between state and regional governments. He had also been very close to the dynamics related to VET that had started after 1980 and kept very good relationships with other technicians from regional and state governments. As a matter of fact, he was the one who suggested the convenience of relying on Mr. Antonio Rueda, the second key person. Rueda was an official from the Spanish Ministry of Education, in fact, one of the key leaders in the design of the LOGSE and, as such, he knew well the new qualifications-based approaches to VET developed in the United Kingdom. The third relevant feature that determined the design of the first VET plan was the will to develop a model which would guarantee stability and, at the same time, ability for change.

As stated by GOV_REPRESENTANT, the challenge was to ‘improve the LOGSE’ and to rapidly develop (and even surpass) some of its basis.

‘Armed with patience OFFICIAL_1 used to explain to me, deeply, everything about how things had evolved before’, GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 43.

¹⁰ The three departments involved were: Department of Education, Universities, and Research; Department of Justice, Economy, Labour, and Social Security; and the Department of Industry, Agriculture, and Fishing. The three of them were ruled by politicians from different political parties, as the Basque government at that time was a coalition of PNV, EA, and PSE. The general political agreement on the goals that the VET reforms had to meet was an important element to determine the continuity in the process of their development and deployment.

'Well, I used my intelligence. One, OFFICIAL_1, gave me solid coverage from the legal perspective, so I would not commit any nonsense, although being bold to change things ... being ... disruptive. And, two, we went to the source: Who has been able to write the LOGSE and completely change a model that was not being successful at all? Well, that was the person from the Ministry of Education in charge of VET, who launched the process, Antonio Rueda. I phoned him: 'Antonio, I'm having a problem'. I didn't know him personally. 'Look, I'm the Director of VET. I need to design a plan. I have seen the LOGSE and I would like to develop something from that point on'. He came, liked our approach to the reform and said: 'I will help you in whatever you need. GOV_REPRESENTATIVE', 70–2.

'Antonio explained to me his view on competences ... in the LOGSE. Then, what I did was to analyse the models I thought that were working fairly well in Europe, having Antonio as ... let[s] say ... adviser. I knew the French model, I knew the German model, the Swiss, United Kingdom ... And I said: 'let's improve the LOGSE. Because, for me, it's already old'. This way, I started to study other European models in depth. The models of the south of Europe more carefully: French, Italian, Portuguese ... And, in all of them I could see ... that concept of development. The Dutch model, for instance, really attracted my attention. Because some of our companies had a taught competence from Dutch companies, and it looked like they were giving better answers. I went to visit some of their centres and I saw that the model was one in which VET centres gave a much more global answer. They were as ... kind of a campus, w[h]ere they don't have just initial training, but also continuous training and occupational training, for workers and the unemployed. But they had it quite unstructured, without a general ruling ... as ... without a coherent structure. GOV_REPRESENTATIVE', 90–2.

'And I thought: we are going to start from here, but we will do it with a governmental approach ... in a way that will give coherence. Thinking in what? Well ... it has to be something that goes on for ... maybe 20 years. I mean ... of course, it has to improve permanently, but based on a model with high degree of solvency. GOV_REPRESENTATIVE', 94.

b) Deployment of the First Basque VET Plan.

After the first draft of the plan was written, a process of discussion with practitioners and stakeholders began. The Basque VET Council was the forum for discussion until the plan was finally approved in the plenary session held in March 1997. After its approval, the deployment of the initiatives begun. As Olazarán and Brunet (2013) affirm, the plan meant an important organisational and economical effort that made possible a better location of VET in the context of a changing society. It actually gathered the efforts of practitioners, stakeholders, and administrations in a collaborative project. They counted on a solid support from the Department of Education of the Basque government, that had defined the plan as strategic for the region. At this point, the decision of including VET centres' representatives in the council proved to be crucial because, fully integrated in the process, they actively participated in the deployment and assured the deliverability of the initiatives.

'I understand that the change in the organisation and management of the centres was so radical that ... yes, I have to admit that ... they were carried along. And I think they followed me that way because I was one of them. Because when you discuss issues, you are able to understand their positions. (...) If you analyse, the teams in the department have already been formed with insiders from the VET system, from inside the system. And this is a reason why there was confidence in our initiatives. There has always been, always, very good attitude. Although we have disagreed many times. Sometimes we did things that some did not agree with. But there was that confidence of saying: "ok, well, let's go" ' GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 132.

'Each one contributed with their own point of view, evidently, sometimes didn't agree with some opinions, but the atmosphere was of complete collaboration. OFFICIAL_1', 181.

'And then, we have had support from the department, we were given human resources, that is, teachers' hours ... and we also had economic support. When we talked to centres of other autonomous communities, they always said: 'If we had that support ...we just cannot, we miss this, we miss that', HEADMASTER, 64.

c) The introduction of an NQF scheme: Goals of the VET Plan.

The purpose of the plan was to build a system which would change the way people were being trained. It built on the foundation established by the LOGSE but aimed to go further. The training system to be defined should be able to permanently satisfy the needs of a quickly evolving technological industry, in order to keep the pace of competitiveness. The content of the plan gives a clearer idea of what was the scope of that change: the achievement of what was called the Integrated System of Qualifications and Vocational Training (ISQVT) based on the introduction of a qualifications framework in order to

‘Establish the levels, scope and features of the professional competence¹¹ that needs to be achieved in the diverse fields of the productive activity in a way that, meeting the needs of production of goods and services and of labour, it also motivates people to progress in their professional qualification, and encourages employers and trade unions to recognise and validate achieved qualifications.¹²’, FBVETP, 81.

The aims to be achieved through the planned qualifications framework were explicitly written in the plan and the content of the interviews reveals that the stakeholders involved understood and shared them.

The meaning of ‘integrated’ in the phrase ‘Integrated System’ needs to be understood as both

¹¹ It can be argued that the qualifications framework was inspired on the National Vocational Qualifications model developed in the UK. Which was ‘the first national attempt to base vocational qualifications on the idea of competence’ (Young, 2009: 6). He states that ‘whereas “competence” implies a reference of what someone can “do” rather than they know, and hence tends to be limited to vocational and professional qualifications “outcomes” is a broader and more general term that includes the idea of competence; it emerged to overcome the tendency of traditional qualifications to overemphasize inputs such as syllabuses and the necessary learning time. It follows that whereas the idea of competence is associated with the requirements of workplace, the idea of outcome is used to refer to “what someone knows” and to express the broader goals of general education’.

¹² When encouraging employers and trade unions to recognise and validate achieved qualifications, the approach is seeking to build the crucial trust in qualifications. The shift to learning outcomes (CEDEFOP, 2008), considered one of the most influential phenomena in education (Halász, 2017), has involved a process of shifting users’ trust away from institutions and learning programmes (typical of the traditional or institutional model) (Young, 2009). In the outcome-based model, trust in qualification rely on the assessment procedures that are criterion-based defined. A qualification is always a proxy for what a learner knows and can do, a kind of currency that the holder can take out of the educational institution and, as such, it should enable mediation between educational institutions, and between educational institutions and labour market. Therefore, the trust on qualifications of all users becomes a crucial issue for a qualifications framework to have a real impact.

'Integrate the diverse ways of acquiring competences: it means that the system is able to assess and acknowledge the diverse ways (initial training, occupational, continuous, work experience, other learnings ...) through which people, nowadays, acquires competences and make progress in their professional qualification', *FBVETP*, 44.

and

'Integration of all institutional offers of vocational training', *FBVETP*, 44.

In that sense, the content of the certificates was *chopped* [literally by GOV_REPRESENTATIVE] into smaller units of learning:

'We needed to build smaller units of certificates ... this is why the qualifications came about, and using those references and checking with the employers, we could build smaller units more easily usable by the Occupational system [oriented to the labour market], learning units much closer to specific work positions', DR_IVAC, 49.

'But, further than that, we tried to create a structure in which experienced people could demonstrate that they were able to do such and such, and ... if they were ... why should we teach them that again?', DR_IVAC, 55.

'The Basque Plan created that structure. It says: 'Lets create an IVAC [Basque Institute of Qualifications], where, somehow, that structure of qualifications can be defined'. Of course, that could only be done by counting on the different sectors and employers and ... representatives from human resources in companies, to help us define what was needed for each working position', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 57.

SHOULD I UNDERSTAND THAT, IN THAT SENSE, BASQUE COUNTRY GOT AHEAD OF THE REST OF THE STATE? [Question]

'Yes, IVAC_DIRECTOR, 59.

'(...) from the point of view of the companies, let's say, there was an attempt to define the competences needed in each work position, to face [the acquisition of] those competences. And it gets quite apparent that in order to obtain those competences, formal training is not enough. Rather, it is necessary to include also

non-formal training. Both, formal and non-formal with the same goal, the attainment of the competences', OFFICIAL_2, 135.

He also refers to the influence of the Anglo-Saxon model for developing that structure:

'Then the Anglo-Saxon, had a structure called awarding body and... we went as far as to send a spy there [laughter]', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 67.

Nevertheless, OFFICIAL_2, who by that time was the Director of Training of Confebask, admits a stronger involvement of representatives from the educational system in the definition of all the competence-based systems

WHICH KIND OF COMMISSIONS WERE CREATED? [Question]

'More from the educational system than from the employers' association', OFFICIAL_2, 137.

The Basque government had created the Institute for Curricular Development (*Instituto para el Desarrollo Curricular*) for defining the contents of the new structures defined by the LOGSE for general and vocational education. The need for a specific approach to VET soon appeared evident, and the IVAC was built counting on experts who had been working on VET.

The plan makes a relevant mention of the methodology for defining and deploying the NQF:

'Considering that the definition and implementation of the System of Professional Qualifications will be preceded by a broad debate and supported by consensus about the kind of system that Basque Country needs, its goals will be achieved through voluntary recognition and acceptance of the System by its final users', FBVETP, 194.

At that time, the traditional steel and iron-based sector of industry was going through a complete restructuring. Restructuring of the steel sector and the need for modernising the industry had caused the closure of big emblematic companies and the unemployment rate had risen above 20% in 1992 and continued to increase until 1994¹³. The main concern of the government was to support the creation of a new iron-based

¹³ Gobierno Vasco, *Política Industrial. Marco General de Actuación 1991-1995* (Servicio Central de Publicaciones del Gobierno Vasco, Vitoria: 1991), p. 294.

technologically evolved sector (automotive, aerospace, machine tool, and so) and to ensure a quick adaptation of the professional qualifications of workers in order to make them employable in the new activities. This is what continuous training (for workers) and occupational training (for the unemployed) subsystems of VET should undertake. Initial training subsystem should also evolve to transform youngsters in a way that would better suit the needs of new productive processes and approaches. The integration of all the three subsystems around a sole qualifications scheme was considered the best way to achieve the overall aim. Consequently, it can be affirmed that the development and deployment of the NQF scheme was the pillar of the modernisation of the VET system, as a means to rationalise the system and to increase its coherence. The deployment of the qualifications framework was complemented by other initiatives. The most relevant were a programme for continuous training of teachers, which was supported by companies offering them internships, thus enabling teachers to update their knowledge on organisational processes and technology; and the introduction of a quality assurance scheme similar to the one that had just started to be applied in the industrial firms, based on the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management). The latter became very useful because the structure and the management of centres had to be changed in depth to be adapted to the requirements of the ISQVT defined by the plan. Nevertheless, its deployment followed the same scheme of the overall reform and was performed gradually and supported the centres.

'We were not very sure about how it [Quality scheme] would work, but ... as I said to the Minister, it seems like it will be useful ... let's try', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 285.

'Everything was new and ... some centres started. We were given some homework: 'your centre should do it that way' ... or 'you are doing great just like that, go on'. We started a pilot project, five centres, that went paving the way to others, so ... people lived the process in a positive way. That made the process much easier', HEADMASTER, 58

'A management carried out following a specific model of quality assurance helped us a lot. It improved the management of the centres. For integrating all of the VET offer, which highly increased the complexity', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 301.

The specific projects were first designed and agreed in the VET Council; they were then tested in reference centres, and experiences were shared and discussed among practitioners; finally, the projects were spread out to the whole network of centres. HEADMASTER refers to this methodology as *network working*. He relates that it worked for diverse projects that were launched along the years.

The VET Council worked in different technical commissions that discussed issues before they were raised to the plenary. The broad agreements attained within that body were not argued by other actors, so the deployment of the reforms was characterised by a lack of social and political contestation.

d) Basque VET policy: A non-politicised field that favoured continuity.

It is important to note that, in coherence with that long-term approach that the Basque government wanted to provide to the reform, all practitioners and stakeholders contributed to preserve the VET field aside political and institutional disputes that had reached other policy fields. This was achieved although those years were characterised by quite political complexity, both within the region and between the Basque and Spanish governments. This specific circumstance did not apply to policy making in general education.

'In vocational training, we were like an island', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 222.

This first plan initiated a new dynamic to policy-making in VET in the region. Second, third, and fourth plans were developed following the same approach, introducing the changes that were needed, but building upon what had been developed before.

'We have always been very careful, because when there has been a success, we have never, ever, made use of it in a politicised way. It has always been a shared success ... of social agents, centres ... We have always defended that, 'look, this field cannot be a politicised one'. We have built a common trunk with high degree of agreement ... everybody has felt at ease and ... so, no problem with VET', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 226.

YOU HAVE GONE THROUGH DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS, HAVEN'T YOU? [question]

'Yes, changes in government, yes ... but with respect to VET policy ... no. There has been a continuity in VET', OFFICIAL_1, 149–51.

'Some names in the Council changed, of course, but there was a nice familiarity among members. The plans, which were launched every three or four years ... each one used the foundations of the previous one, although introducing changes. This has been the key, we have been very lucky. There has been continuity', DR_IVAC, 111.

'And then ... with relation to VET, all of the governments, either from left-wing or whatever ... have shown certain ... affection', OFFICIAL_2, 109.

That continuity in the VET policy-making approach followed in the region contrasted with the normative change that characterised the Spanish government's approach to education, which often responded to political shifts in power and pressures from influential actors. With relation to the LOGSE, it was promoted by the socialist party against the opinion of the right-wing party, the Partido Popular (PP). When the latter came into power after the general elections of 1996, questionable changes were made in the Ministry of Education, and the new government decided to exclude from its policy-making many of the experts in VET who had worked in the formulation of the LOGSE. The lack of efficiency in the deployment of VET policies at the state level was also attributed to a general lack of interest in vocational training:

'There were political changes and PP came to power, in 96, and they got rid of all the knowledge in the Ministry ... there was a vacuum in the Ministry. The ones leaving, made a good team, they were the ones who designed the LOGSE and ... yes, it can be said that they had cooperated with us. DR_IVAC', 101.

'Vocational training has never been understood by education [people from the educational field]. And I mean never. Even nowadays it is not understood. Yes ... they catch it is important, somehow, but it's just at discourse level, it's not taken into practice. The only place where it is understood is ... here', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 80.

Following the claims of IVAC_DIRECTOR, there was also an additional obstacle for the full development of the integration of vocational training at the state level:

'You know that moving along Lakua [Basque Government], that administrative monster ... is difficult ... just imagine how difficult was for Madrid [Spanish Government] to move all the Ministry ... And, in addition, it had strong pressure from the INEM', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 95.

'The INEM has been the anchor that did not allow the Ministry to move', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 139.

In that sense, he states that, when the LOE was enacted and deployed after 2006, the SEPE (the successor of the INEM) was finally urged to organise occupational training following the same qualifications framework that had been developed for initial and continuous training, making possible a step forward in the integration of the subsystems:

'And what was required from the SEPE?: 'listen, take your professionalism certificates and, once and for all, stop programming occupational training following your own scheme...', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 2015.

Therefore, it can be stated that a twofold limitation conditioned the complete integration of the three vocational training subsystems in the region. First, the lack of ruling capacity in labour legislation kept occupational training out of the scope of the Basque government for decades. And second, the configuration of the labour and employment issues at the state level, with a powerful and influential public institution that managed the funding for occupational training hindered the integration of the subsystem as defined in the LOGSE. The particular and to some extent, separated management of the occupational training contributed to the configuration of a parallel subsystem within the vocational training, which evolved aside from the overall qualifications system for years.

With relation to the kind of relationships within the different departments of the Basque government, they did not appear so clear. Several mentions about the relationships between the departments of industry, employment, and education emerged in the interviews, but they were inconsistent. It might be due to the fact that these relationships worked differently depending on the level at which they were developed, that is, either political or technical. Officials mentioned both good relationships and

frictions (battles, reticence), whereas the politician considered that, in general, a good collaboration characterised the relationships. Nevertheless, one of the interviewees relates the reticence with relation to the so called '*certificados de profesionalidad*' (professionalism certificates), which had been developed from labour and employment departments to somehow recognise the experience-based knowledge acquired by workers:

'The professionalism certificates ... I don't know, maybe I am not being objective, but from the education system we have always looked at them with some kind of mistrust, because they don't offer any guarantee, because of how they were defined and provided', OFFICIAL_1, 203.

'I don't really know if these certificates were actually developed. And I don't know which their reliability and credibility was...', OFFICIAL_1, 209.

'And there was a parallel system, that of the professionalism certificates, which was not operational, it did not have any recognition, that is, there was nobody with a professionalism certificate', OFFICIAL_1, 239.

He stated that there was a need to link certificates issued by the educational system and the professionalism certificates issued by the labour system (that *parallel system*):

'I think that there was this need to establish a relation, somehow, between those two sets of certificates. And the link was, I think, the professional qualifications', OFFICIAL_1, 241.

IVAC_DIRECTOR explains that the real capability of the Basque labour affairs department was limited by the fact that, following the Spanish shared-power arrangement, it did not have ruling capacity:

'Employment... had staff limitations and, in addition, it could not really support the process without the legal capacity', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 137.

When IVAC_DIRECTOR mentions *employment*, he is referring to the Basque Department in charge of employment and labour relationships. As already explained, although since 1980 the Basque government was able to rule the IVET, the autonomous ruling of the training of workers did not effectively happen until 1996, with the creation of HOBETUZ. The training of the unemployed was out of its scope until 2010, when the state

transferred the services to the Basque government and the Basque Institute for Employment-Lanbide started to manage them. Since then on, although labour legislation continues to be located at the state level, which often conditions regulation of vocational training, the Basque government has a wider capacity to develop the three subsystems (initial, continuous, and occupational). This way, it can be stated that the integration of the three subsystems faced an additional obstacle when the FBVETP initiated its deployment.

As has been stated in the previous sections of this chapter, it wasn't until the LOE was enacted that all of the vocational certificates (including the professionalism certificate by the SEPE) achieved the same qualifications structure, thus making the Spanish vocational qualifications system coherent. The professionalism certificates and the way they operate between education and labour will be addressed in more detail in the second phase of the research, which incorporates the view of the companies on this and other issues.

Despite the above, it can be affirmed that the Basque government managed to maintain an agreed trajectory in the development of its approach to VET and that it differed from a more unstable education and training legal context at the state level. Its relationships with the Spanish government also showed a differentiated dynamic in VET policy-making within the shared-power policy arrangement in comparison to other autonomous communities in Spain.

e) Mechanisms for differentiating from the state model.

The LOGSE had ruled the most general elements of the new Spanish approach to VET, leaving the ruling of specific and even more operational aspects to Royal Decrees that had to be enacted subsequently. The publication of the decrees, however, was taking its time. On the contrary, the deployment of the initiatives included in the plan, quite focused on the Integrated System of Qualifications, was being done with fair promptness. The LOGSE had made possible for autonomous communities (and, specifically, to those with an additional co-official language, like the Basque region) with education ruling capacity to define an important part of the curriculum, which has fluctuated over the successive state level reforms. For the part of the Basque

government, education and training centres were offered a high degree of autonomy to design their own content. That was important for VET provision because it became a way of adapting training contents to the needs of the surrounding companies, as better described in the second phase of the research.

Interviewees highlighted two features in the deployment of the Basque plan that helped overcome the limited scope for ruling discretion that the LOGSE, as a framework law, left to the devolved level, that is, the regional government. On the one side, they pointed out a *going ahead* strategy: whenever functions legally held by the state had not been ruled yet by a decree, the Basque government did so following the requirements of its own model. This is why the qualifications framework and its institutionalisation evolved faster in the region. Actually, the Basque Institute for Qualifications (IVAC) was created in 1998, one year before the Spanish INCUAL.

'We were always going ahead of the state, in order to take advantage of that "this is not ruled yet". If it is not ruled, I'll do it. I'm not committing illegality ... unlawfulness, at the most ... [laughter]. Because if the state had entered many spaces ... it would have been impossible. So that strategy of always going ahead ... was crucial. And... we worked with an advantage, because managing all the state is very slow. Very slow. On the contrary, we were very agile', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 204.

'We were always on the razor's edge. Because ... silence is consent. If there's nothing on that... I will do it. I think Spanish government had to bite nails very often, because: How could they take Basque government to court? A judge would say, 'look, if you haven't developed it, let others do it', DR_IVAC, 7.

'We invented our specific VET certificates in ... I do not remember ... [laughter] if somebody had looked closely, I don't know what could have happened, but... they worked, and they worked very well for the industry indeed, so ... they [Spanish Government] gave them their recognition', OFFICIAL_1, 337.

On the other side, a deep analysis of the regulation helped find useful loopholes. A good example was provided by the Director of VET in the Basque government at the time, when he explained the way they started to change the structure of some of the VET

public centres in order to integrate all the institutional vocational training offers (initial, continuous, and occupational), and make them more similar to the Dutch idea of the *VET campus*. That structure of the centres was in clear contradiction with the LOGSE, which aimed to improve initial vocational training, its reputation, and status, by integrating this type of training into secondary schools under a comprehensive conception of all secondary education. Actually, this approach was considered 'one of the positive points of the LOGSE' (Homs, 2009: 25). Conversely, the Basque government started to organise some of the public centres under the typology of *singular centre* that had been included in the LOGSE to cover the case of exceptional centres. Nevertheless, because the specificities of a centre to be considered singular were not precisely described, the typology became the *open door* that was used by Basque Government: VET campuses were ruled under the singular centre label provided by law. Thus, an exceptional element included in the Spanish law became a quite ordinary one in the region.

'These centres were devoted to VET, just VET. And this approach really helped to improve VET, because the effort of managers and headmasters was 100% on VET, and that helped to grow much closer relationships with the companies in the surrounding', OFFICIAL_1, 331.

DID THAT ALSO HAPPEN IN THE REST OF THE STATE? [Question]

'No, unless things have change since then, that was a particular feature of our approach',. OFFICIAL_1, 335

The EFQM based Quality management model applied in the new centres helped increase their degree of flexibility and adaptability to the economic environment that skills provision and vocational education require. These centres were open from morning to night, offering initial VET, training for employers that followed companies' needs and training programmes for anybody willing to improve their qualification, module by module. As a matter of fact, most qualifications had been structured into modules of training to make progression in qualification easier for adults.

'We chopped the qualifications in units of competences, so people from not just the educational system but also from other systems, the companies for instance, can come and improve their qualification ... without big effort. Not so many hours.

They were thought to be courses of ... like thirty or forty hours ... and they continued progressing in their qualification, little by little, making that training compatible with their jobs, if that was the case', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 108.

That particular structuration of the qualifications became quite useful for designing educational and professional guidance, which was another function that VET centres assumed.

'Here we have two people in the office, all day long. I think that the guidance of people carried out by the VET centres is not sufficiently recognised.', HEADMASTER, 202.

Having all of the VET offered in the same centre, they were able to design a personalised path for people who needed to adapt their qualifications. A close relationship of these centres with the companies of the area was crucial, so teachers, tutors, and headmasters of centres could also know about the profiles that were required.

The relationships between the Basque government and other Basque agents involved in VET, and other regions' and Spanish VET actors was not found troublesome by interviewees.

'Our counterparts in other autonomous communities came to visit us quite often... Their interest was big, because they could tell that we had such a support from the public administration... the VET group had a strong support from institutions, from employers' associations, that they missed. So, they had that sane envy towards us.', OFFICIAL_1, 295.

The Basque approach started to be perceived as a successful model, as one to be followed:

'After the development of the LOGSE, I think that both the Spanish Ministry and other autonomous communities have followed the path marked from the Basque VET. That is apparent', OFFICIAL_1, 123.

In addition, representatives of Confebask had a high influence in the stance on VET taken by the Spanish Confederation of Employers Organizations, CEOE. CEOE's representatives in the Spanish Council of VET supported the initiatives that were being developed in the Basque region and fostered a favourable atmosphere towards the same approach to be

adopted at state level. However, the industrial activity did not have such an important share in the Spanish economy and the relevance of VET was not perceived equally.

The relevance of the relationships between centres and companies were highlighted by interviewees. IVAC_DIRECTOR explained the differentiated nature of the VET provision in the three provinces that make up the BAC:

'Bizkaia was very close to the companies, because it had inherited the in-company technical schools of the big companies ... Then, they started to sign agreements with other schools from the network ... (...) Gipuzkoa, although with not so many big companies, also had a strong tradition. In this case, it was rooted to its valleys [bailara]. In each valley, there was a school and the companies gathered around that school, they had a very good relationship with the centres. (...). In Alava, there was a long tradition, but there was a structure, let's say, more private, because of the Bishop, and the capacity he had kept for years... So, yes, we had a VET that was very favourable to the changes we were introducing', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 113–123.

f) Learning relationships between Basque and Spanish governments.

The publication of the FBVETP and the differentiation it was bringing about did not go unnoticed by the Ministries of Education and Employment in Madrid. They soon contacted the Basque government, and both governments initiated an exchange of information on the steps that were being taken in the region and, specially, on the advantages that were expected. As an immediate consequence of that exchange of information, the Ministry of Education launched a commission within the Spanish VET Council. The aim of the commission was to formulate a plan which would substitute the one defined in 1991, the so-called National Program. The Basque director of VET, who enjoyed prestige in VET, was invited to participate in that commission. Following GOV_REPRESENTATIVE's view, the role played by this collaboration became a strategic mechanism for intergovernmental policy-making that would allow the Basque model to evolve.

In the following years, the Spanish government enacted successive laws to develop an *integrated* system, also influenced by the approaches to VET promoted by the EU. Simultaneously, based on the same broad involvements and agreement, the second

(2004), third (2011), and fourth (2013) Basque VET Plans were launched and new institutions created to evolve the system.

g) Learning relationships with the international community.

Regarding the relationships of the Basque government with international institutions, it should be noted that direct participation in the European and other international official organisations has been reserved to the state. The Spanish government has very seldom permitted regional representatives to participate in these kinds of forums. Nevertheless, international experiences continued to be relevant. Two initiatives contributed to the increase of contacts and the exchange of experiences. The first one was the creation of the Vice Ministry of VET within the Department of Education in 2001. Raising the institutional level of VET, representatives in the Basque government opened new communication channels. The creation of the Vice Ministry was also perceived by practitioners and stakeholders as an increase in the political consideration of VET by Basque institutions and policy-makers.

'There was a landmark, very important, that kind of explains Basque region's degree of progress compared to others: the creation of a Vice Ministry of VET. There has been an outstanding leadership since it was created', CENTRE_HM, 48.

'We started to develop a relevant relationship with European institutions and with other countries after 2001, when the Vice Ministry of VET was created. The reason is simple: an increase in the status, from Director to Vice Minister', GOV_REPRESENTATIVE, 234.

The second initiative was encouraged by the former. It consisted of organising international congresses biennially. A wide participation by international actors from all over the world, including members of the European institutions, increased the exchange of experiences and knowledge from and towards other countries. The building of a net of international contacts also resulted in the participation of Basque experts in internationally promoted benchmarking and peer-learning initiatives.

Summarising, it can be affirmed that a new way of policy-making started around the design and deployment of the FBVETP, which was encouraged in 1995 by the Basque government's highest political authorities to support the industrial and economic

development of the region. It should be noted, though, that a ground for such a process was laid down by previous initiatives and the historically developed culture in the region, both of which had contributed to the forging of close relationships between stakeholders (government, employers, and VET centres) and to guarantee their full participation.

With relation to the achievement of the initially established goals for the Integrated System of Qualifications and Training, the two interviewees who developed their whole career in the public administration were not so positive:

'Well. I think that reality has not achieved expectations, I think that more was achievable. I think that more people should have followed training courses and have their qualification recognised, as it was expected. In my opinion, it seems that, although the VET system has improved a lot, the recognition of professional competences and qualifications... has fallen short', OFFICIAL_1, 351.

'We can say that it is still a shadowed field [the integration of subsystems], because, don't think that we have been able to make it. I don't think that there is a real integration between initial and continuing VET, on the one side, and the occupational sphere, on the other', IVAC_DIRECTOR, 89.

Moreover, when referring to the professionalism certificates, IVAC_DIRECTOR affirms that he has only encountered them in the public sphere of employment and, even in there, very seldom. Furthermore, the recognition of these competences acquired through experience is still far from the initial expectations.

OFFICIAL_2, who was Director of Training in Confebask since the 1990s, opines on the general improvement of VET centres as follows:

'I think that the VET centres today have little to do with those centres transferred [from the Spanish Government]. They even create companies ... they are innovative... I do think that we are very ahead in the European level. The relationship companies-centres has evolved and improved ... Yes, we have improved a lot. Do we have an ideal situation? Possibly no', OFFICIAL_2, 193

He appears more critical towards the training provision.

'And, what happens in the centre? Which are the competences and qualifications that they are offering? All of the centres have a deal. They offer this and this ... That one is not offered, because they don't get enough participants and... I can lose money. But that one, yes, that one gets usually full ...

'I don't think enough effort is being done to fully deploy all of the competences range. Not all the competences are equally offered, and people don't follow the whole path', OFFICIAL_2, 205–11.

It should be noted that the above verbatim refers to the idea conveyed in the 1980s by the term *provider capture*, which summarised the criticism on the institutions-based qualifications (Raggatt and William, 1999), following which educational institutions usually focus more on their own interest than on their role as providers of a public service. Following Young (2009: 9), the need to withdraw power over the provision of vocational training from the educational institutions in favour of employers was at the core of the new outcome-based approach. OFFICIAL_2 states that the former was one of the reasons why employers defended the inclusion of VET centres in the Basque VET Council, against the initial opposition of the Basque government.

'Basque Government didn't want, in no way whatsoever, the inclusion of VET centres. They argued that government represented public centres and that Confebask would represent the private ones. But we argued that private VET centres' interests and ours were opposed. For the centres, provision of training was a business whereas, for us, training was an element of competitiveness. Therefore, the centres would try to make business and offer the training they wanted, instead of the one we needed ... Our interests were parallel and so ... it was important that they were part of the agreements', OFFICIAL_2, 91.

The situation described by OFFICIAL_2 supports the idea of the complexity of the competence provision systems, where opposed interests of the stakeholders coexist. This is why a broad dialogue and collaboration among the diverse parts involved is considered crucial by scholars.

7.2. Second part: characterising the policy-making approach

In the previous chapter, the process of modernisation of the Basque VET model was described following the views of the participants, considering the content of the official documents, and referencing literature. The six themes identified during the thematic analysis were applied for linking views and content to the theoretical framework defined to answer the posed research questions. More than that, I affirm that the themes themselves implicitly captured the core elements that, based on literature, I employed to characterise a policy-learning approach to policy-making in Section 3.3.

I can affirm that there was a strategic use of information in the process (Dollowitz, 2009) which, containing an element of purposefulness (Radaelli, 1995), took place embedded in a complex political and institutional context; that the motivation of the involved stakeholders, the broad agreements attained and the support from the Basque government contributed to create a conducive learning environment (Grootings, 2004); finally, I also argue that all the learning that occurred based on experience and knowledge was an important source of policy change in the region (Borrás, 2011).

Notwithstanding the relevance of these core elements found in the findings, I should also draw attention to the difficulties to identify policy learning approaches: the blurred relationship between policy and change, which makes change hard to quantify (Chakroun, 2008, Radaelli, 2008); the elusiveness of a direct observation of learning (May, 1992); the complexity added by the mechanisms for sharing power, typical in devolved countries (Keating and Cairney, 2012); and the fact that policy learning cannot be considered the sole element conditioning the success of policies (Raffle and Spours, 2007), among others.

All of the above considered, it seemed to me that the answering of the first research question (To what extent did the Basque government develop a policy learning approach to policy-making when introducing VET related reforms in the region?) would be better achieved avoiding a strictly binary kind of answer based on a policy borrowing/learning distinction. Consequently, I decided to apply the restrictive/expansive policy learning continuum described in Hodgson and Spours (2016), whose main elements already form part of the theoretical framework (see Chapter 6, Research Approach) created for this research project. This continuum was

inspired by the one used by Fuller and Unwin (2008) to analyse the different apprenticeship programmes developed in companies. In this case, the continuum is used to better characterise the policy making approach followed in the Basque region in relation to its governance and political environment, where policy transfer episodes, either learning or borrowing-like (as characterised in section 3.3.), occurred alongside the process.

7.2.1. The policy-making approach to VET.

The State services in the matter of education were transferred to the Basque government in 1980, along with an ensemble of other State services, following the new political and administrative arrangement that had been established by the then recently approved Constitution and Statute of Autonomy. This new situation followed a long period of absence of democracy in the country. In that sense, the situation the Basque government was facing could be compared to those cases which, drawing on the experiences of European Training Foundation partner countries, are described by Grootings as 'VET reforms had to combine immediate responses to economic and social crisis resulting from the transformation process, with laying the foundations of sustainable mid- and long-term socio-economic development'(2004: 14). Chakroun (2010: 199) states that the analysis of those cases shows that a global discourse on VET reforms can (and do) have an impact on national policies. Both authors suggest that policy learning is a better way to help identify alternative VET policy strategies that are better embedded in national contexts. More specifically considering the introduction of NQF-like conceptions, Young reflects on the way in which 'the introduction of a qualifications framework has sometimes been seen as marking a key political transition'(2007: 447). He then makes a distinction between those countries in which 'the NQF has had to carry all kinds of political ideals about democracy and redress' and those in which the 'NQF may be seen as no more than a step in an evolving process of reform and be given relatively little overt political significance'. I argue that, given the information analysed, the Basque case under analysis is closer to the latter.

In 1980 the Basque government was immersed in a complex political, administrative, and social process, having to address the institutionalisation of the newly created Basque Autonomous Community. Little international policy transfer could be observed.

With relation to VET, experienced people from the field were recruited in an attempt to build the system counting on the understanding of the region's previous history with vocational training. Although, as one of the interviewees relates, the economic crisis during the 1970s had brought about the closure of many in-company training structures, the long industrial tradition in the region had helped carve a particular feature compared to the state: there was not just a remarkable relationship between companies and the existing VET providers, but also a quite broad understanding of the relevance of education and training for the economic development. The diverse programmes launched by Basque institutions to help build closer relationships between VET centres and companies, either directly or counting on employers' associations evidence that stance. The creation of a more homogeneous network of VET centres by integrating private and public ones should be considered a very relevant initiative because it actually facilitated the overall process of reforms.

The first policy transfer episode occurred on the hand of Confebask and helped lay some foundations that proved to be relevant for the upcoming reforms. Favourable practices from Germany, a country also featuring an industry-based economic model, were identified; a study on the specificities of the Basque VET culture and on the willingness of stakeholders to collaborate was conducted; and, as a consequence of that learning, several suggestions were made to the Basque government. These suggestions were eventually implemented as policies and showed the stance of the government, favourable to the involvement of stakeholders. They also proved to be quite useful for the subsequent reforms: the internships program inspired in Germany's dual VET improved the practical experience of students and strengthened the relationships between centres and companies; representatives of the centres were included in the Basque VET Council, ensuring their involvement as well as the deliverability of the designed policies; finally, the creation in 2005 of an institution for the transfer of technology and innovation (TKNIKA) helped intensify the exchange of international learning experiences.

When the LOGSE was enacted in 1990, the Basque government and technicians were involved in the deployment of the important changes it brought along with, and even institutions were created to support that process. The training approach endorsed by

the new law was the result of a policy transfer episode, as it was clearly inspired in the National Vocational Qualification developed in England at that time. The strong collaboration among technicians of the different governments (Spanish and regional ones) and their visits to the country and its awarding bodies to learn of the competence-based approach to VET were highlighted by interviewees. Notwithstanding the relevance of the changes introduced at the state level by the LOGSE, it can be affirmed that a crucial landmark in the differentiated approach to VET in the Basque region was indeed achieved in 1995, when the design of what would be the FBVETP commenced.

The complexity of mechanisms for dividing and sharing power in federal or devolved systems (Keating and Cairney, 2012) has been addressed in Section 3.3. In fact, the way sub-sections of a state initiate policy innovation processes as a means to find their own solutions to problems was specifically pointed out, as well as the need for a degree of political and economic autonomy for making such processes possible. I argue that in 1995 the Basque government, fully aware of the relevance that vocational training had in addressing the serious economic crisis the country was going through, began an exercise of innovation. That exercise led to a clear differentiation from the state regarding the approach to VET.

Keating and Cairney (2012) also mention that, in the case of devolved countries, central governments are more likely to apply policy innovation and that, consequently, usually vertical policy transfer occurs from the centre to the periphery. In the light of these findings, I affirm that in the case of VET reforms in Basque Country and Spain, the policy innovation exercise developed in the devolved region became successful enough to be spread out to the rest of the state, causing a vertical transfer from the periphery to the centre. In fact, many of the initiatives launched in the region were imitated by the Spanish government. I also argue that this happened even though the Basque government faced important limitations as for a full capacity to legislate relevant issues directly related to vocational training (labour legislation). It can be affirmed that, taking the LOGSE as a foundation, the Basque government led a collective exercise for developing the particular VET model that would better respond to the region's needs. It should be noted, though, that the decentralised educational model advocated by the

LOGSE (concerning both curriculum content and management of centres) helped in developing the differentiated approach.

The policy innovation that started with the design and deployment of the FBVETP was characterised by a broad international analysis of other VET approaches; the involvement of experts who were well-informed of the competence-based approach in England that inspired the LOGSE and the legal and administrative specificities of the BAC in relation to education and training; the broad involvement of stakeholders, who actively participated in the deployment of the plan; and, most of all, the innovation was based on the region's traditional industrial culture that, although having different hints in the three provinces, had carved for years the relationships between companies and VET centres, as well as the general stance towards vocational training.

The difficulties of benefitting from the experience of others by mutual learning have been noted In Section 3.3. The often involved 'accidents of meetings and personal acquaintances' (Parry and McDougal, 2005: 8); and the need, in the policy receiving jurisdiction, of 'someone willing and able to undertake the necessary research and adaptation' (Keating and Cairney, 2012: 242) were considered, among others, requirements for rich policy learning processes. In view of the findings, I argue that these requirements were met in the case of Basque VET reforms: the active role of the representatives of Confebask and, at that time, Director of VET, and the involvement of key people in the beginning of the process was crucial. The stance of openness of the *VET community*¹⁴ towards the international experiences also favoured further personal relationships that were relevant in the subsequent initiatives, as the process that started in 1995 still continues today.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that the challenge of involving policy-makers in a collective learning process, necessary for a policy learning approach to policy-making (Grootings, 2004), was resolved in quite a successful manner in the Basque region.

¹⁴ I named *VET community* to the group of people that, directly related to VET and the reforms pursued, was created along the process started in 1995. This group belonged to the educational field and gathered people from the training centres and key people from the Basque Government (usually officials and politicians that had been working in VET provision and management). A certain sense and pride of belonging was observed in the interviews, as well as a collective perception of strong support from institutions and employers' associations.

Finally, I suggest that the historically developed strong sense of self-governance of the Basque Country (Porter *et al.*, 2013: 2) and the collective will for institutionalising the country after a long period of lack of democracy played an important role in the process. The particular institutionalisation of the country that the Statute of Gernika made possible enhanced the organisational capacity of the region. As Borrás states ‘those countries with the strongest forms of organizational capacity would be those who tend to learn and change most’(2011: 731).

In the light of these findings, I argue that the policy-making exercise developed in the Basque Autonomous Community of Spain after 1980 and, primarily, after 1995 should be located much closer to an expansive policy learning approach than to a restrictive one. Far from focusing on the exercise of power to obtain a political gain by involving only a small number of national politicians; and instead of just borrowing the most successful best practices, being oblivious to the particular needs and features of the own system and without carrying out the required adaptation; the Basque government used international experiences to improve the VET system by following a collaborative exercise and sharing of knowledge. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, not concerned by political pressures but, rather, engaged with the attainment of a stable VET that would be responsive to the needs of the companies, fostered a quite expansive policy learning approach to policy-making.

7.2.2. The NQF-like scheme developed in the region.

As part of a quite expansive policy learning process, it could be deduced that the introduction of the NQF-like conception by the Basque government was used as an opportunity for a collaborative model for VET reform. When looking more specifically to the elements that, following the information acquired, characterised the design and deployment of the qualifications framework, several elements observed reinforce that assertion.

Considering literature (Young, 2005, 2007; Allais, 2009; Raffe, 2009, 2011; Chakroun, 2010), the main objectives of the ISQVT agreed with those benefits claimed by the early starters, the first countries to introduce NQFs (ILO, 2009a). Thus, the plan aimed to increase the coherence of the education system by ‘*integrating all institutional offer of vocational training*’ and enable the ‘*recognition of the different ways through which*

people acquire competences and make progress in their professional qualification'. This would help promote people's qualification. The framework's responsiveness to the needs of the labour market was repeatedly mentioned in the plan. Therefore, more than being a tool for just developing educational reforms and for structuring a new way of training, ISQVT's implementations sought to be accepted and of use in the labour market:

'These professional qualifications will make possible an appropriate transparency of the labour market; count on professional classifications based on the needs of productive and labour processes; guide labour mobility (...), accurately describe job-seekers', (ISQFP, 9)

'The VET model designed by this Plan wants to guarantee to the employers in the Basque Country the professional competences needed in each moment', (ISQFP, 11)

In order to attain these objectives, the Plan established a broad involvement of stakeholders (*'...preceded by a broad debate and supported by consensus'*) and a voluntary character of the framework (*'its goals will be achieved through voluntary recognition and acceptance of the System by its final users'*). It also stressed the need to be prepared for future challenges (long-term purposes) and to avoid a succession of partial reforms by developing a stable system that would be able to evolve and adapt to the changes in the productive system. Therefore, a broad involvement of stakeholders and, particularly, employers' associations, as well as the achievement of wide agreements were crucial. Considering all the above features of the ISQFP and the process developed for its deployment, I argue that the framework can be located quite close to the type of NQF defined as communication framework in Raffe (2009: 26), while distinct from the *transformational* typology (see Section 4.3.2).

Literature on the introduction of NQFs supports the idea that broadly engaging stakeholders (Castejón, 2007; Grootings, 2007; Raffe and Spours, 2007) and, more particularly, assigning employers' and workers' associations a more important role (Tuck, 2007) are crucial requirements for the successful deployment of NQF-like conceptions. Additionally, Young (2009) notes that the new approach to qualifications (from the institutional model to the outcome or competence-based model) relies on the

assessment of occupational standards and requires a strong involvement of employers and the creation of specific institutions.

In the Basque case, the VET Council (which had been created in 1994, before the Plan was designed) gathered all of the stakeholders involved in the provision of qualifications, including employers' and workers' associations, diverse public institutions and representatives from the VET centres. The *Agencia para la Calidad y la Evaluación* (Agency for the Quality and the Assessment), the *Instituto Vasco de Cualificaciones* (Basque institute for Qualifications), among others, were created. Technicians from these institutions worked very close to employers and human resources managers to develop qualifications and assessment procedures. The successive VET Plans maintained the same approach, assuring a smooth and continuous adaptation of the VET model to the changing needs of the labour and production system.

Notwithstanding the relevance of the elements mentioned so far, a qualifications framework can only play a limited role as a policy instrument (Young, 2007) and, therefore, the introduction of NQFs needs to be complemented by other policy measures, initiatives, and activities in order to drive real reform. The modernisation of VET in the Basque region also included diverse initiatives: continuous training of teachers counting on the collaboration of companies, the deployment of EFQM schemes that qualify for the management of centres, the enhancement of innovative procedures for teaching and changes in the structure of some centres, turned into *campus* fully devoted to vocational training.

Consequently, drawing on the information provided by interviewees, considering the methodology followed, and the institutions that took part, and observing the diverse initiatives that complemented the deployment of the Plan, I argue that the ISQVT was at the core of a wider process of reforming the VET system and that that NQF-like scheme was used as an opportunity to develop a collaborative approach to VET reform.

Beyond the degree of collaboration in the development of the qualifications framework introduced, scholars' interest is also concentrated on exploring the reasons behind some frameworks seeming to be more successful than others. The purpose of evaluating the degree of effectiveness attained by the ISQVT included in the second phase of this research is aligned with that interest.

In the first phase some verbatims from interviewees have already made references to the issue of the effectiveness of the qualifications framework deployed. They have pointed that, first, there was a stronger involvement of representatives from the educational system in the definition of the competence-based system than from the employers' association (OFFICIAL_2, 137). That statement to some extent corroborates the idea that the assessment of standards, a key element of the outcomes-based approach, was too time-consuming and bureaucratic for gathering a strong involvement of employers (Young, 2009: 12). Second, that the integration of the three sub-systems had not been fully achieved (IVAC_DIRECTOR, 89). And, third, that the recognition of professional competences and qualifications through a sole framework 'has fallen short' (OFFICIAL_1, 351). These assertions can be aligned with some of the critiques made by scholars about too many claims being made on the effectiveness of the NQFs.

Nevertheless, whenever addressing the issue of effectiveness of NQFs, Raffe states that NQFs are dynamic entities because their introduction involves complex interactions among diverse stakeholders and their socio-economic and political environment and, therefore

'(...) the insight that NQFs are dynamic entities, whose introduction is a lengthy process and whose impacts will only emerge over time, carries a further implication: that it will take a long time to assemble an adequate evidence base on their implementation and impact' (2009: 23).

Based on that assertion, the second phase of this research was carried out in 2015, that is, almost twenty years after the deployment of the ISQVT commenced in the region together with the approval of the FBVETP in 1997. In addition, and in clear contrast with the first phase of the project, the second part has specially focused on the views of informants from industrial companies.

Capítulo 8. segunda fase: las relaciones entre centros de FP y empresas

La presentación de los resultados de esta segunda fase de la investigación sigue un enfoque diferente al de la primera fase. En efecto, no se trata de la descripción cronológica de un proceso sino de analizar las relaciones entre los representantes de los centros de FP y de las empresas del sector industrial en un momento puntual, para entender cómo estas relaciones interactúan en los procesos de provisión de competencias. Para ello, se preguntó por la forma en que se definen los contenidos educativos y formativos que se imparten en los centros; por el desarrollo de la etapa obligatoria de Formación en Centros de Trabajo (FCT); por la oferta de la formación continua y, finalmente, por el uso de los instrumentos desarrollados a lo largo de las reformas de FP (fundamentalmente, el sistema de cualificaciones).

En esta segunda fase de la investigación, el foco se puso en la gestión de la FCT, que puede considerarse como el primer contacto de los alumnos con las empresas y, por lo tanto, inicio de la transición del ámbito educativo al mercado laboral. Es por ello que se consideró oportuno entrevistar tres perfiles diferentes de informantes: los tutores de los centros de FP que se encargan de buscar las empresas en las que la FCT se desarrolla, y de gestionar todo el proceso formativo; los instructores de las empresas, que son trabajadores que acompañan y supervisan la formación de los alumnos en los centros de trabajo; y, finalmente, los responsables de Recursos Humanos o, en su caso, responsables de las cuestiones de formación (en algunos casos también máximos responsables de las empresas), para recabar la opinión de quienes cuentan con una visión más amplia de la complejidad de la empresa y su relación con el ámbito educativo.

Como consecuencia de lo anterior, el informe de resultados se estructura de la siguiente manera: primero, se describen los contenidos más significativos de las entrevistas, bloque por bloque: visión de los tutores, de los instructores y de los responsables de Recursos Humanos de manera separada. Una segunda parte corresponde a un análisis transversal de los procesos formativos, que empiezan en el centro y finalizan en la empresa. Se trata de describir la manera en que las relaciones entre centros y empresas influyen en los procesos formativos. En dicha descripción se considera la relevancia de factores como el tamaño de la empresa, el sector, el tipo de actividad, y el papel que juega el sistema de cualificaciones.

Antes de pasar a describir el significado de los temas empleados para el análisis temático de las entrevistas, considero necesaria una aclaración de carácter terminológico. En el desarrollo del marco teórico de este proyecto se ha abordado la formación que tiene lugar en el ámbito de trabajo y/o que se materializa a través del desarrollo de actividades. Así, la sección 4.4. realiza una revisión de la literatura sobre el aprendizaje en el ámbito de trabajo (*workplace learning*). Más adelante, en el análisis de las políticas europeas sobre Formación Profesional, se menciona el aprendizaje basado en el trabajo (*work-based learning*). Este último concepto podría considerarse más amplio que el anterior, ya que incluye aquel aprendizaje que, mediante la simulación de las condiciones de un centro productivo, se desarrolla en el entorno educativo y en el que, como consecuencia, no influyen factores relevantes específicos del ámbito laboral (relaciones de poder, entorno competitivo de producción). Por otro lado, este proyecto analiza el programa formativo denominado Formación en Centros de Trabajo (FCT); y la formación de los trabajadores, la Formación Continua (CVET) que, aunque de manera habitual se desarrolla internamente en la empresa, también incluye cursos impartido por centros de FP u otros proveedores. Como consecuencia de todo lo anterior, a partir de aquí se utiliza el término formación en centro de trabajo para referirse al programa formativo del mismo nombre; y formación en el ámbito de trabajo (o laboral) para esa formación que los trabajadores desarrollan a lo largo de su vida profesional en el lugar de trabajo, como parte de su formación continua.

A continuación se describe el contenido de los temas definidos para realizar el análisis de la información recopilada a través de las entrevistas y de los documentos y referencias consultadas:

1.- IVET en el centro

Recoge las valoraciones sobre la formación inicial que se imparte en el centro educativo (IVET). Se incluyen en este tema la información relativa al perfil de los tutores de centros; la utilización del Diseño Curricular Base (DCB) y la relación con las empresas en el diseño del contenido educativo; y la valoración que realizan los informantes sobre la formación profesional.

2.- IVET – FCT

Recoge los comentarios relativos a la parte de la IVET relacionada con la formación en los centros de trabajo. Se incluyen en este tema las razones de las empresas para acoger estudiantes de FCT; el seguimiento que se realiza del programa formativo en la empresa; y el rol de los instrumentos y de las relaciones entre tutores e instructores en el diseño de los programas formativos en la empresa.

3.- CVET

Recoge las valoraciones relacionadas con la formación continua. Incluye las menciones a la utilización de la CVET para la promoción interna y el desarrollo profesional de los trabajadores; las menciones al grado de utilización y/o utilidad de los instrumentos; y las valoraciones realizadas sobre la formación continua en conjunto.

4.- Factores de diversidad

Recoge las menciones a factores que pudieran explicar la diversidad observada en las relaciones en torno a la IVET/FCT/CVET, y que incluyen el tamaño de la empresa, el sector, el tipo de actividad, la cultura empresarial y su forma jurídica.

5.- Valoración

Recoge las valoraciones que se realiza de la titulación, la experiencia y, especialmente, de la ACTITUD.

6.- Otros

Se han incorporado aquí los comentarios que, aun no encajando en ninguno de los temas anteriores, se han considerado de interés recoger para el posterior análisis de las entrevistas. Se incluyen comentarios relativos a los instructores de empresa, tanto de FCT como de CVET (es decir, los perfiles de quienes desarrollan actividades formativas en las empresas); el grado de conocimiento que, sobre los contenidos y estructura formativos, muestran tener los participantes en las entrevistas; y los comentarios sobre la confianza de las empresas, tanto en tutores y centros, como en los instrumentos (sistema de cualificaciones, certificados de profesionalidad).

Al igual que en la primera fase de la investigación, el razonamiento inductivo ha predominado sobre el deductivo, por lo que la mayoría de los temas que se han definido a lo largo del análisis de las entrevistas guarda relación directa con el marco teórico

desarrollado. Sólo el tema VALORACIÓN y, más concretamente, el concepto de ACTITUD, que no había sido considerado de manera inicial, se ha incorporado como consecuencia de la importancia que los informantes han otorgado a este elemento, respondiendo así a un criterio deductivo.

8.1. Primera parte: Análisis de las entrevistas

8.1.1. La visión de los tutores de centro.

En la investigación han participado dos centros públicos y dos concertados. Los dos centros públicos imparten formación profesional en exclusiva, es decir, son centros integrales. Los dos centros concertados tienen una oferta formativa más amplia, que incluye la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y el Bachiller. La Figura 8.1. recoge la relación de tutores que han sido entrevistados:

Figura 8.1.: Relación de los tutores de centros que han participado en las entrevistas.

TUTOR	CENTRO FP	TIPO	COMARCA	TERRITORIO	FAMILIA PROFESIONAL
TUTOR_1	CENTRO_1	Público	Bajo Deba	Gipuzkoa	Fabricación Mecánica
TUTOR_2					Electricidad y Electrónica
TUTOR_3					Instalación y Mantenimiento
TUTOR_4	CENTRO_2	Concertado	Gasteiz	Alava	Instalación y Mantenimiento
TUTOR_5					Fabricación Mecánica
TUTOR_6	CENTRO_3	Público	Alto Deba	Gipuzkoa	Instalación y Mantenimiento
TUTOR_7					Fabricación Mecánica
TUTOR_8					Fabricación Mecánica
TUTOR_9	CENTRO_4	Concertado	Duranguesado	Bizkaia	Fabricación Mecánica
TUTOR_10					Electricidad y Electrónica
TUTOR_11					Fabricación Mecánica

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

CENTRO_1, CENTRO_3 y CENTRO_4 se encuentran ubicados en bailaras (comarcas) caracterizadas por una concentración importante de empresas. CENTRO_2 cuenta con un encaje diferente: una zona geográfica más amplia y una mayor dispersión y heterogeneidad de empresas.

a) Perfil de los tutores.

Teniendo en cuenta la importancia del papel del tutor de centro como elemento de enlace con las empresas, se ha considerado relevante analizar el perfil de los informantes: formación, experiencia en el ámbito industrial y su grado de conocimiento del ámbito de la empresa.

Todos los tutores entrevistados tenían estudios de Formación Profesional, aunque la mayoría de ellos había cursado el esquema de FP I y FP II previo a la LOGSE¹, que suponía una formación profesional de mayor duración en el tiempo. Tres de ellos habían cursado, además, una ingeniería. Con relación a la experiencia laboral en empresa, tan sólo cinco de los tutores manifestó haber desarrollado una parte importante de su trayectoria profesional trabajando en empresas de sectores relacionados con las asignaturas que impartían. Para el resto de tutores, la experiencia en empresas se limitaría a algunas estancias de prácticas o contratos de corta duración anteriores a su incorporación al centro educativo. TUTOR_1 aprecia una evolución en la experiencia laboral en empresa del profesorado de FP:

‘En la actualidad, es bastante frecuente que un joven termine los estudios y muy pronto se presente a las plazas de profesor, sin haber pasado por la empresa, como sí ocurría antes’, TUTOR_1, 18.

Al margen de contar o no con una experiencia profesional previa, todos los tutores manifiestan tener un cierto conocimiento de su entorno productivo, desde los más críticos hasta quienes se consideran muy conocedores. Varios tutores reconocen la conveniencia de formarse y mencionan su participación en programas específicos para formación de profesores.

‘Bueno, en profundidad no, pero sí que tengo pinceladas de las empresas’, TUTOR_7, 5.

‘Yo tengo un conocimiento... que puedo transmitir a los alumnos. Pero creo que el conocimiento que hay en las empresas es mayor. Los profesores también debemos formarnos.’, TUTOR_6, 21.

‘Yo antes he trabajado en el mundo industrial, entonces ya venía con cierto conocimiento del mundo empresarial y bueno... Yo soy de Eibar y conozco todo el

¹ La Ley General de educación de 1970 planteó una reforma educativa por la que se definieron tres niveles de FP (I, II y III), aunque el tercero no llegó a implantarse. A la FP I se accedía sin necesidad de tener el título de Graduado Escolar (resultado de superar la Educación General Básica, hasta los 14 años), y constaba de dos cursos académicos. Al FP II se accedía a través de la FP I o si se tenían aprobados dos cursos de BUP (Bachillerato Unificado y Polivalente, necesario para acceder a la Universidad). Cabrera (1997: 173) defiende que se trataba de un modelo más ‘escolar’ de la FP y que fue sustituido por uno más ‘de aprendizaje’ con la LOGSE, retomando la idea que reguló la Ley de FP Industrial de 1955.

entorno de Debarrena, el mundo industrial. Y luego pues de aquí, la zona de Durangaldea, hasta Elorrio, todo este mundo de fundiciones, estampación, y hasta el parque tecnológico de Zamudio... Hemos estado bastante, durante muchos años, haciendo visitas y tal...' TUTOR_9, 7.

'Y luego también tenemos nosotros la opción de hacer las prácticas. Por ejemplo, este año en el Departamento de Mecánica hemos estado cinco personas en diferentes empresas, o sea, reciclándonos. Nuevas tecnologías...', TUTOR_7, 157.

'Bueno, las empresas nos han... no igual en todas las áreas pero sí en muchas han avanzado muchísimo más que las escuelas. Antes la industria venía a la escuela a aprender, y hoy en día básicamente la escuela tiene que ir a la industria', TUTOR_3, 41.

Los tutores valoran positivamente la aportación de la gestión de la FCT a un mayor conocimiento de la empresa y sus necesidades:

'Tenemos... a través de las FCTs, pues tenemos un contacto muy intenso con las empresas', TUTOR_5, 5.

Esta afirmación coincide con la que se recoge en (European Commission, 2013: 10) en el sentido de que el aprendizaje en el ámbito de trabajo proporciona oportunidades a los profesores para poder seguir la evolución en los procesos y prácticas productivas, así como en las tecnologías y el equipamiento de las empresas del entorno.

Los tutores mencionan de manera expresa el conocimiento 'de las empresas del entorno' del centro de FP:

'Yo he estado muchos años en la empresa privada. Sé cada empresa qué es lo que hace, conozco bastante bien el tejido industrial de alrededor', TUTOR_3, 33.

'Bueno, yo soy de Gernika, no soy de Durango. Entonces, el ámbito empresarial del entorno no conocía mucho, la verdad. Entonces, a lo largo de los años, yendo, visitando, llamando, pues he podido ir conociendo poco a poco las empresas del entorno, lo que nos piden, qué personas nos van a pedir, qué es lo que necesitan', TUTOR_10, 19.

'Conocemos bastante bien lo que es el entorno', TUTOR_5, 5.

La importancia que se otorga al conocimiento de las empresas *del entorno* tendría que ver con la necesidad que algunos tutores perciben:

'(...) porque tú tienes que responder a lo que te pidan las empresas del entorno', TUTOR_11, 77.

Y, más concretamente:

'Nuestro objetivo es que se coloquen en el mercado laboral o que empiecen a trabajar.', TUTOR_2, 53.

En la misma línea se expresa HEADMASTER (antiguo alumno, trabajador de empresa y posteriormente profesor y director de centro de FP), en la entrevista realizada durante la Primera Fase del proyecto:

'Siempre aparecía que satisfacer las necesidades de las empresas del entorno era uno de los principales objetivos.', HEADMASTER, 74.

Esta importancia también se observa al abordar el diseño de los contenidos formativos de los ciclos y se analiza con mayor detalle en la sección siguiente.

b) La Formación Profesional en el centro educativo.

Un elemento importante relacionado con el diseño de la formación en el centro de FP que se menciona en las entrevistas es el documento denominado Diseño Curricular Base o DCB. Se trata de un documento oficial publicado por el Instituto Vasco del Conocimiento de la Formación Profesional o IVAC² y que recoge los contenidos necesarios que deben incluirse en el diseño de los ciclos formativos. Así, existe un DCB para cada ciclo formativo, sea éste de grado medio o superior. El documento se inicia con la definición del perfil profesional al que conduce el ciclo formativo, y detalla la relación de módulos (equivalente a asignaturas) que lo integran, junto con el número de horas de formación y la especialidad del profesorado para la impartición de cada módulo. Para asegurar la integración del ciclo formativo concreto en el Sistema Nacional

² El IVAC, creado a través del decreto 169/2015, sustituyó al Instituto Vasco de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional que había sido creado mediante Decreto 119/1998 en torno al desarrollo del I Plan Vasco de FP y el Sistema Vasco de Cualificaciones Profesionales.

de Cualificaciones³, el DCB recoge la relación de Cualificaciones Profesionales que deben alcanzarse para la obtención de la titulación del ciclo formativo, junto con las Unidades de Competencia que corresponden a cada una de ellas, y que están incluidas en el Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales. Además, los DCB de las ramas industriales han ido incorporando progresivamente los llamados ‘resultados de aprendizaje’ (*learning outcomes*) y los ‘criterios de evaluación’ (*assessment criteria*) correspondientes a cada módulo. Finalmente, se recogen sugerencias sobre orientaciones metodológicas para la impartición de la formación, así como las correspondencias entre módulos y unidades de competencia para posibilitar procesos de convalidación y/o acreditación.

En las entrevistas se ha constatado la importancia del DCB en el diseño de los programas educativos, aunque su contenido se considera excesivamente amplio:

‘Los que hacen los DCB se cubren las espaldas y en el DCB entra todo. Entonces, no son... muchas veces no son reales. A mí lógicamente, si me mandan hacer DCB, joer, te lo voy a meter todo. Luego, tú te buscas la vida, pero no son reales, hay cosas que uno se... que el profesor se tiene que ajustar’, TUTOR_3, 181.

‘Entonces al final lo que hacemos es adaptar de alguna manera las horas que tenemos asignadas... También tenemos potestad para no dar alguno que igual... o lo das en un par de horitas por nombrarlo, porque sepan que existe, y haces más hincapié en otros aspectos’, TUTOR_5, 79.

Los tutores explican que la adaptación del DCB a las posibilidades reales de formación teniendo en cuenta el número de horas asignado se realiza a partir de las necesidades que observan en las empresas, lo que, en palabras de HEADMASTER se viene haciendo desde que arrancaron los DCBs. Esta situación se aplica de manera más concreta en los

³ El Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones y de Formación Profesional se creó mediante la Ley Orgánica 5/2002, de 19 de junio, de las Cualificaciones y de la Formación Profesional, teniendo como objetivo principal la ordenación del sistema integral de FP, de las cualificaciones y su acreditación. Así, en su Artículo 2, la Ley define el Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional como ‘el conjunto de instrumentos y acciones necesarios para promover y desarrollar la integración de las ofertas de la formación profesional, a través del Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales, así como la evaluación y acreditación de las correspondientes competencias profesionales, de forma que se favorezca el desarrollo profesional y social de las personas y se cubran las necesidades del sistema productivo’.

centros que están ubicados en *'bailaras'* en las que a menudo predominan tecnologías industriales específicas. Uno de los tutores de este último tipo de centro incluso habla de especialización de los centros en función del entorno empresarial:

'El DCB no es muy real porque luego tú te adaptas. Es decir: "Vale, pero yo sé que esto de aquí es más importante porque las empresas de aquí lo que nos están pidiendo es un poquito más de esta parte". Entonces, tú discriminas', TUTOR_4, 127.

'Depende del entorno, pues habrá unidades competenciales a las que les daremos más peso o a las que se les dé menos', TUTOR_2, 91.

'Entonces, esas son a las que tienes que dar más fuerza, porque tú tienes que responder a lo que te pidan las empresas del entorno. En ese caso, nosotros estaríamos hablando fundamentalmente de matricerías y estampaciones', TUTOR_11, 77.

'Cada colegio se especializa más en una cosa u otra, depende del entorno', TUTOR_10, 310.

La tecnología empleada en las empresas también se tiene en cuenta a la hora de abordar la compra de equipamiento:

'Y siempre se mira... en las empresas siempre se mira pues la máquina que hay. Por ejemplo, la última máquina que compramos nosotros pues sí que miramos alrededor, las empresas de alrededor qué máquinas tenían, pues para poder darles un servicio luego, ¿no?' TUTOR_7, 99.

En el momento de la realización del trabajo de campo, varios de los centros que participaron en la investigación estaban inmersos en el segundo año de un proyecto piloto denominado ETHAZI (del euskera, etekin handiko zikloak) o ciclos de alto rendimiento⁴. Este proyecto piloto articula todo el proceso de aprendizaje en el denominado Aprendizaje Colaborativo Basado en Retos. En este enfoque metodológico se busca, entre otros, eliminar los módulos (o asignaturas) para sustituirlos por proyectos que abordan los contenidos formativos de forma transversal, es decir, de una

⁴ <https://www.tknika.eus/cont/proyectos/ethazi/#>

manera similar a como se desarrolla la actividad en las empresas. Uno de los cambios que incorpora tiene que ver con el diseño de los contenidos formativos. Mientras que los ciclos tradicionales basan su definición en las Unidades de Competencia y su adquisición se evalúa a través de exámenes tradicionales, los ciclos ETHAZI se diseñan siguiendo la relación de Resultados de Aprendizaje (RA) y su evaluación se realiza con Criterios de Evaluación de carácter más práctico. De manera que el DCB de cada ciclo formativo incorpora tras la descripción de cada módulo la relación de resultados de aprendizaje y criterios de evaluación correspondientes a cada módulo. Los diferentes proyectos que componen un ciclo formativo ETHAZI deben ir incorporando la totalidad de los resultados de aprendizaje. De esta manera, se establece una especie de correspondencia entre Unidades de Competencia y Cualificaciones Profesionales recogidas en el Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales y el conjunto de Resultados de Aprendizaje, garantizando el encaje del nuevo enfoque metodológico en el marco estatal definido por el Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales

El DCB sigue siendo una guía importante para el diseño de los contenidos en los ciclos formativos incluidos en ETHAZI:

‘El DCB lo machacamos bastante, ¿eh?, porque ahora también con todo el tema de ETHAZI y tal, pues queremos quitar los módulos, evaluar sólo los RAs. Dentro de los RAs hay criterios de evaluación... entonces, a los criterios de evaluación tenemos que hacer una matriz – andamos todo el día con matrices- criterios de evaluación y actividades. Entonces, con esta actividad cubro este criterio de evaluación y con estas actividades estoy cubriendo estas RAs...’ TUTOR_5, 55.

‘Sí, a mí el DCB me resulta útil para la definición del programa, la verdad es que sí’, TUTOR_10, 83.

c) La Formación en Centros de Trabajo.

La Formación en Centros de Trabajo representa una parte obligatoria del período formativo de cualquiera de los ciclos de Formación Profesional, y se recoge como un módulo más en los diferentes DCB. Tal y como se ha descrito en el Capítulo 5, en el ámbito europeo existen diversas modalidades de aprendizaje en el lugar de trabajo para la Formación Profesional inicial (IVET). La recomendación de la Comisión Europea

(Comisión Europea, 2012) recoge la importancia de promover sus diferentes formas: períodos de prácticas, formación de aprendices y modelos de aprendizaje dual de calidad. En línea con la recomendación anterior, en el informe publicado por la Comisión Europea (European Commission, 2013) se recoge una clasificación de los diferentes modelos existentes en Europa:

- Esquemas de alternancia ('alternance schemes' o 'apprenticeships'), también conocidos como sistema dual ('Dual System'), y que en España se conocen como formación dual o formación en alternancia. Están basados en que empresas y centros desarrollan programas de formación conjunta y coordinada, de manera que la persona estudiante alterna períodos de aprendizaje en el centro educativo y en la empresa.
- Un segundo modelo se relaciona con la FP basada en el centro, que incluiría períodos de prácticas en empresas ('on-the-job training periods') que, de manera general, resultan obligatorias para el alumnado. Estas prácticas normalmente representan menos del 50% de la duración total de la formación.
- Finalmente, se identifica el modelo en el que el aprendizaje en el lugar de trabajo está integrado en el programa basado en el centro y se desarrolla en espacios especialmente acondicionados, como laboratorios, en los que se reproducen entornos muy similares a los que se observan en el ámbito empresarial.

Se podría afirmar que el modelo de Formación Profesional objeto de análisis en este proyecto responde a una combinación de dos de las modalidades arriba expuestas. Por un lado, prácticamente todos los centros formativos que imparten ciclos industriales cuentan con instalaciones en las que el alumnado realiza prácticas a lo largo del curso. Estas instalaciones cuentan en muchos casos con maquinaria similar a la que se emplea en las empresas. Adicionalmente, la Formación en Centros de Trabajo representa un período obligado de prácticas en empresa con una duración de 360 o 380 horas (dependiendo del ciclo formativo), es decir, cerca del 20% del total de las horas del programa formativo.

Posteriormente, la recomendación de 2014 del Consejo Europeo⁵ sobre la calidad de los períodos de prácticas emplea un concepto más genérico, al referirse a los ‘períodos de prácticas’ y definirlos como ‘períodos limitados de práctica profesional, remunerado o no, que cuentan con un componente educativo o formativo, emprendidos con objeto de adquirir experiencia práctica y profesional con vistas a mejorar su capacidad de inserción laboral y facilitar la transición hacia un empleo normal’.

Sin embargo, a los efectos de este proyecto de investigación, resulta más adecuado la distinción recogida en el informe (European Commission, 2013). Ello es debido a que, en el momento en que se realizó el trabajo de campo se habían desarrollado algunos programas de Formación Dual con la colaboración de empresas y centros de FP⁶. Aunque este tipo de aprendizaje en el lugar de trabajo resultaba todavía poco frecuente, algunas de las personas entrevistadas, tanto tutores como instructores, lo mencionaron en diversas ocasiones. Se ha observado que, en el caso de la Formación Dual, la planificación de la formación y su seguimiento se realiza de una manera diferente.

Para evitar confusiones, en lo que respecta a este trabajo, el concepto ‘período de prácticas’ se referirá exclusivamente a la Formación en Centros de Trabajo, una práctica obligatoria en empresa que se desarrolla al final de cada ciclo con un claro objetivo formativo y en la que la persona en prácticas no obtiene ningún tipo de remuneración.

En el análisis de las recomendaciones de la Unión Europea en materia del aprendizaje en el lugar de trabajo pone de manifiesto que son los programas de una mayor duración (los denominados apprenticeships) los que más frecuentemente se reflejan en las diferentes guías y marcos de referencia diseñados para caracterizar y desarrollar dichos programas. No obstante, un número importante de elementos considerados en el informe (European Commission, 2013), en el marco analítico recogido en (Cedefop, 2015b) y las recomendaciones propuestas en la Recomendación del Consejo de 2014 se

⁵ Recomendación 2014/C. 88/01 de 10 de marzo de 2014 sobre un marco de calidad para los períodos de prácticas. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327\(01\)&from=ES](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327(01)&from=ES)

⁶ A pesar de que el Decreto 83/2015 de 2 de junio que establece la Formación profesional Dual en Régimen de Alternancia en la CAV no había tenido desarrollo en el momento de realizarse el trabajo de campo, la inquietud del ámbito empresarial y la colaboración con el Departamento de Educación del Gobierno Vasco había dado lugar a dos programas de formación dual, pioneros en el estado: ‘Ikasi eta Lan’ (entre 2008 y 2011) y ‘HEZIBI’ (entre 2012 y 2015). Ambos programas se habían desarrollado utilizando los instrumentos legales disponibles en cada momento, y tuvieron que hacer frente a dificultades derivadas de una deficiente regulación estatal del contrato para la formación y el aprendizaje. La regulación de dicho tipo de contrato se realizó a través de la Ley 3/2012 de 6 de julio, y el Real Decreto 1529/2012, de 8 de noviembre, que establecían las bases de la formación profesional dual.

han observado en las entrevistas realizadas con los tutores de FCT de los centros de FP y, como consecuencia, utilizado para estructurar el contenido de la información recogida. Dicha información se ha estructurado en tres grandes apartados que se desarrollan a continuación.

1 Motivación de las empresas para participar en los programas de FCT.

Del contenido de las entrevistas se podrían destacar dos razones principales para que las empresas se involucren en estos programas de prácticas. Una, como una aportación extra de mano de obra para la empresa. Y, dos, como mecanismos de selección para posteriores contrataciones.

‘La FCT yo lo que veo es que se utiliza eso, para sacar trabajo, no tanto para intentar formar al alumno’, TUTOR_2, 207.

Hay empresas que cogen gente para que le ayuden puntualmente, es decir, no van a volver... esa gente no va a ser contratada, ¿vale? Te pongo un ejemplo X que está aquí, pues me dicen: “Mira, a mí me viene muy bien siempre tener gente que me haga chapucillas y tal”, alumnos; luego, si alguna vez cae alguno excepcional... pero como regla general no’, TUTOR_4, 105.

¿ENTONCES LO VEN COMO ALGUIEN QUE VA A TRABAJAR MÁS QUE COMO A ALGUIEN QUE VA A PRENDER?

‘Sí, es un poco... pero... hay empresas que van muy a lo suyo’, TUTOR_8, 218.

‘Muchas veces, cuando les mandamos de prácticas los tres meses que tienen que hacer todos los chavales, es una forma de probar ellos. Entonces, ya te dicen: “Me voy a quedar con éste y con éste, no”’, TUTOR_6, 67.

Las personas que cursan la FCT se encuentran en una situación intermedia entre estudio y empleo. Aunque estén aprendiendo, toman parte en los procesos productivos de las empresas y, como consecuencia de ello y tal y como lo reconocen los tutores (y más adelante, los instructores de empresa) las empresas se benefician de su trabajo. En (European Commission, 2013: 11-12) se plantea la necesidad de desarrollar marcos regulatorios claros para el aprendizaje en el ámbito de trabajo con el objetivo, entre otros, de clarificar las obligaciones de empleadores, centros/tutores y alumnos y evitar,

mediante acuerdos escritos entre las partes, la existencia de abuso por parte de las empresas. En particular, se trata de evitar que en las empresas se utilicen personas en prácticas para sustituir trabajadores.

Uno de los tutores entrevistados mencionó la preocupación que existe en las empresas ante un importante relevo generacional que prevén, ante el que podría no haber suficientes perfiles, motivo por el que observaban un creciente interés por participar en la FCT por parte de algunas empresas:

‘Las empresas están dándose cuenta de que van a tener un problema de relevo generacional, pero un problema muy gordo. (...) Entonces, en el ámbito industrial en concreto, áreas como Mecatrónica o Mantenimiento Mecanizado, las empresas es que nos están llamando continuamente diciendo: “Oye ¿tienes algún chaval que haya hecho Mecanizado, que haya hecho Programación de la Producción, Medio o Superior?”. Entonces, tenemos problemas incluso para mandar chavales de prácticas. Que hay empresas que te llaman y dicen: “Oye, este año mándame un par de chavales de prácticas”, y decimos pues que no podemos.’, TUTOR_4, 17-19.

2 Diseño del programa formativo.

La calidad del contenido didáctico de los períodos de prácticas se considera como uno de los elementos clave para facilitar la entrada en el mundo laboral (Recomendación Consejo 2014). También se reconoce la importancia de que una institución de enseñanza o formación se responsabilice directamente del contenido didáctico para evitar problemas de calidad a lo largo del programa formativo en la empresa. Según la European Commission se observa que en los programas de prácticas de menor duración (entre los que se incluiría la FCT) los períodos formativos no siempre están diseñados como tales, con claros objetivos y tareas planificadas (2013: 16). También pone de manifiesto el hecho de que un curriculum diseñado en base a resultados de aprendizaje facilita la identificación de los objetivos a alcanzar a lo largo del período formativo.

Los marcos regulatorios de los programas de formación en el ámbito de trabajo deberían también contribuir a clarificar las responsabilidades administrativas relativas a dichos programas (CEDEFOP, 2015d). En el caso de las FCT, en la medida en que estas prácticas

en empresa corresponden a un módulo obligatorio dentro del programa de cada ciclo, es el centro de FP el encargado de encontrar empresas y de desarrollar la gestión administrativa correspondiente. Los tutores del centro de FP son los responsables de supervisar el correcto desarrollo del programa formativo. En este sentido, destacan la necesidad de tener un importante conocimiento del entorno industrial del centro para poder desarrollar mejor la tarea correspondiente a un tutor de FCT.

‘La adecuación de la formación depende del binomio alumno-empresa. Es necesario conocer bien al alumno y encontrar la empresa en la que sus capacidades específicas se puedan desarrollar mejor.’

‘El profesor tiene que salir del centro a conocer las empresas del entorno y a hacer campaña de la FP. Porque conocer las empresas le ayudará a definir mejor la formación y a encontrar después los entornos más adecuados para el desarrollo del alumno.’, TUTOR_1, 6, 15.

‘Bueno, yo sé que a mí me paga el Gobierno Vasco, yo sé de dónde... Pero también creo que nos debemos a las empresas y yo procuro... al fin y al cabo, tengo que jugar con empresas-alumnos, tengo que hacer una especie de encaje, y lo mejor que pueda. Yo suelo hacer encaje de bolillos, yo y todos los que estamos.’, TUTOR_3, 29-31.

De hecho, la Comisión Europea observa que los centros formativos que han sido capaces de desarrollar buenas relaciones y de mantener contactos permanentes con empleadores y empresas del entorno tienen mayores posibilidades de contar con una red de empresas dispuestas a colaborar en los programas de prácticas. Más aún, considera que el establecimiento y mantenimiento de dichas relaciones constituye un elemento determinante en la calidad de la formación en el espacio de trabajo (2013: 18).

En cuanto al diseño del contenido formativo, los tutores observan que, a pesar de contar con los instrumentos teóricos para ello, y a pesar de que la articulación adecuada entre los contenidos formativos en el centro y en la empresa constituye un elemento fundamental para la calidad de los procesos formativos (European Commission, 2013, CEDEFOP, 2015b, 2015d), en muchas ocasiones se encuentran con dificultades para

encajar el contenido formativo recogido en la descripción de los ciclos con las actividades que los alumnos desarrollan en las empresas:

‘Yo creo que... nosotros tenemos los contenidos, tenemos el currículo de la escuela, ¿no? Y en el currículo pues ya tenemos... lo que tenemos que dar en cada módulo. Entonces, lo que intentamos es ver en qué va a trabajar en la empresa, y los trabajos que va a realizar qué relación tienen con los módulos que van a dar en la escuela. Entonces... siempre se busca esa conexión.’, TUTOR_7, 43.

‘El plan formativo hay que adaptarlo, pues al trabajo que hacen ellos [las empresas], claramente.’,

‘El instructor puede no tener ni idea de lo que son las competencias, unidades competenciales.’, TUTOR_2, 195, 200

‘Que, a día de hoy, es muy difícil que un alumno en la propia empresa toque todas las unidades, todas las competencias, es muy difícil.’, TUTOR_3, 21.

‘Por ejemplo, yo suelo llevar mucho a mantenimiento, que... Entonces le dices al de mantenimiento y te dice: “Déjate de leches, qué va”. Y con el de mantenimiento es difícil acordar lo que tienen que hacer, porque depende del día a día. Entonces, a mí me cuesta una barbaridad...’, TUTOR_10, 53.

‘Tenemos un proceso de FCT. En ese proceso de FCT tenemos diferentes documentos, y uno de ellos es la propuesta de prácticas. Entonces esa propuesta de prácticas la sacamos del DCB. Claro, esa propuesta está en idioma DCB, vamos a decir. Entonces, yo les suelo pasar a ellos [instructores]. Pero, claro, tienen 8 horas, están hasta aquí de trabajo, ¿se ponen a leer?’, TUTOR_10, 55.

La cuestión del *idioma* arriba mencionado aparece en varias ocasiones en las entrevistas. Es decir, la documentación que se emplea por parte del centro de FP en la definición de los contenidos formativos recoge una nomenclatura con la que las empresas, especialmente las pequeñas, no están familiarizadas:

‘Las empresas grandes lo suelen tener más trabajado, no suele haber problemas, saben qué competencias tienen que trabajar, con qué actividades... Pero en otros casos, especialmente en las empresas pequeñas, pues... no. No lo conocen. Vas tú

y les dices, “esta unidad competencial y tal”, y se te quedan... “ostras, ¿de qué me estás hablando?”, TUTOR_6, 41-43.

‘Cuando hablamos con la persona de la empresa... sí, traducimos, traducimos y ya está, y luego hacemos nosotros lo que haga falta... tema burocrático para rellenar y tal, luego lo hacemos nosotros.’, TUTOR_9, 42.

‘La terminología de la empresa o aquí, es muy diferente. Tú en la empresa, si les vas con un DCB, resultado de aprendizaje, competencias, se lo tienes que traducir. ¿Y EN LAS GRANDES TAMBIÉN? PORQUE HAY EMPRESAS QUE TRABAJAN CON COMPETENCIAS.

Pero son cuatro casos contados, las más grandes.’, TUTOR_4, 189-191.

‘Complicado, bastante complicado. Entonces hay algunas cosas que no sé. Que el idioma DCB debería de cambiar’, TUTOR_10, 19.

La mención a la ‘traducción que deben realizar los tutores de los centros formativos con relación a los representantes de las empresas está relacionada con la dimensión social (cultural e institucional) de la introducción de los marcos de cualificaciones. Tal y como describe Raffe, los marcos nacionales de cualificaciones proporcionan un nuevo ‘lenguaje nacional’ del aprendizaje con el objetivo de que sea ampliamente hablado y entendido (2009: 32). Sin embargo, como todo proceso social, éste también requiere tiempo para la construcción de la necesaria confianza y para su asimilación por las diferentes partes implicadas.

Los tutores también ponen de manifiesto la influencia que el tipo de empresa en la que se realice la FCT tiene en el resultado final:

‘Tengo que elegir dónde meter al alumno. Y eso repercute mucho en los resultados.’, TUTOR_3, 23.

‘Las principales competencias las adquiere en el centro, y otras las adquirirán en la empresa. Pero las empresas... son diferentes. Por ejemplo, montaje o mecatrónica. El alumno puede ir hacia la mecánica. Puede ir hacia electricidad. Podría estar... no sé, programando PLCs o cambiando lámparas en un gran almacén. Entonces, dependiendo de dónde haga las prácticas...’, TUTOR_6, 51.

'Bueno, yo creo que cada alumno es un caso y cada empresa... sobre todo cada empresa es un caso, más que cada alumno. Porque los alumnos vienen de un entorno, todos del mismo, de la escuela. Entonces, en cada empresa que van, difiere. Hay empresas donde por la forma de lo que produce o del... o en el área donde va a trabajar el alumno pues se... el alumno se forma en un entorno que toca unas competencias y en otras empresas otras', TUTOR_3, 9.

'Algún otro [alumno] me ha dicho que la FCT no se ha ajustado mucho a lo que ha estudiado él. Que un nivel igual más bajo...', TUTOR_2, 51.

'[Acordar los contenidos] Más o menos, pero cada empresa es un mundo. (...) En una empresa van a utilizar esto, van a conseguir estos resultados [de aprendizaje], en otra esto y en otra igual el chaval ya los tiene y los está afianzando, ¿no?', TUTOR_4, 167.

En este sentido, la Comisión Europea plantea la importancia de contar con personal específicamente dedicado a las tareas de ubicar adecuadamente a los alumnos en las empresas, de manera que éstos puedan desarrollar su programa formativo en los puestos que más se adecúan a sus características personales, con el objetivo de evitar experiencias formativas negativas (2013: 30).

3 Desarrollo del programa formativo: la figura del instructor de empresa.

En cuanto al desarrollo y despliegue del programa formativo, la figura del instructor de empresa aparece como un elemento muy importante en el proceso de aprendizaje. Se constata la existencia de algunas dificultades para contar con personas con perfil y dedicación adecuados para la realización de esta tarea, especialmente en las empresas de menor tamaño:

'La FCT, al final, los chavales, cuando van de prácticas, dependen de lo que el instructor de allí les enseñe, tampoco están tan controlados', TUTOR_4, 165.

'La relación con la empresa ha evolucionado. Ahora, el instructor de la empresa en muchos casos ha sido un alumno de la escuela, con lo que ya sabe que el alumno viene a aprender trabajando y no sólo a trabajar.', TUTOR_1, 3.

‘Una empresa pequeña, una PYME, no puede, y una mediana empresa lo tiene complicado también. Porque, al final, es dedicar... Saca a esas personas, a esos instructores que son trabajadores, fómales, explícales, tienes que estar pendiente de... Es complicado.’, TUTOR_4, 195.

El seguimiento del programa formativo está basado en la interlocución entre los tutores de centro y los instructores de la empresa:

‘Con el instructor se hace un seguimiento...’

‘más o menos, pero cada empresa es un mundo’, TUTOR_4, 167, 169.

‘¿Qué ocurre? Que muchas veces, joer... todo va sobre ruedas: “Esta va pa aquí, éste va pa allá, éste lo han puesto aquí...”, todo va perfecto; y otras veces donde viene, y la queja: “Oye, que me tienen aquí haciendo... no me han movido, se han olvidado de mí”. Por eso también es muy importante que el tutor haga un seguimiento y sobre todo al principio y... bueno, continuamente, vaya. Entonces, diga: “Ostras, oye, un poco de por favor, ¿eh?”, “Ah, vale, vale, tal”, normalmente no suele haber ningún problema’, TUTOR_3, 141.

Uno de los tutores menciona que, a pesar de la relevancia de una interlocución permanente y directa con el instructor de la empresa para lograr un adecuado desarrollo del proceso de aprendizaje, el interés que la empresa tiene en acoger a un alumno de FCT no siempre implica que ésta otorgue importancia y cuide especialmente la interlocución con el centro:

‘Hay empresas que tienen interés por acoger alumnos por una inversión de futuro. Entonces, primero partamos de que tienen interés. Otra cosa es la importancia que le dan a la interlocución con el centro. Hay empresas también que ya, una vez que les has mandado ya, como si no existieras: “Ya tenemos al mochuelo” [ríe].’, TUTOR_8, 217.

‘Para mí, si tú tienes una empresa y si es verdad que para trabajar en esa empresa la persona que vaya tiene que ser un trabajador cualificado y hace falta un periodo de aprendizaje, que es lo que exige, y es verdad que hace falta, pues tienes que ponerle a alguien como instructor suyo que sea de confianza y que sea buen instructor. Pero con el centro o con nosotros, de interlocutor, tendría que estar esa

persona para saber nosotros si va bien, qué es lo que echa de menos en su formación, y muchas veces eso no existe. De interlocutor te ponen, por lo que sea, por no meterle en otro sarao al instructor, te ponen a una persona que no es... instructor.’, TUTOR_8, 219.

‘Entonces, yo creo que hay mucho campo para hacer tanto de formar instructores, que es algo que se lleva muchos años intentando hacer, y también formar en esa interlocución, que sí que tomen parte esos instructores. El día que se forme a los instructores, ya se les dará como esa titulación, ya serán los interlocutores con el centro, que es muy importante.’, TUTOR_8, 221.

En este apartado concreto del desarrollo de la FCT aparecen algunas diferencias relacionadas con el tamaño de la empresa.

‘La formación en la empresa es muy difícil de adaptar al día a día, especialmente en las empresas más pequeñas. El instructor no está 100% a enseñar.’, TUTOR_1, 5.

‘Pero, por ejemplo, con Mercedes, que van de muchas especialidades, claro, está centralizado en una persona ¿no? Que es el que llama, recoge un poquito todas las necesidades de la empresa de...

Entonces, digamos, no vamos uno por uno a presentar a los chavales sino que quedan todos en bloque, les cogen a todos el mismo día a la misma hora y luego los distribuyen. Entonces tú sí que haces la visita intermedia y la visita final. Incluso la valoración también de esas grandes empresas te la dan ya hecha. Sin embargo, en un taller pequeñito, pues eso, haces la visita intermedia: “Oye, ¿qué tal va el chaval?”, “Pues bien, tal”, “¿Algún problema?”, “No”. Y al final vas tú también y te rellenan la hoja de valoración del chaval y bueno, pues te despides ya de este. Entonces es distinto la empresa grande o la empresa...’, TUTOR_5, 153-155.

Uno de los tutores se remite a su experiencia anterior en la empresa, cuando desarrollaba la tarea de instructor:

‘Al final estás todo el día en la empresa... el día a día... un alumno muchas veces es como... todas estas historias... “ya viene el tutor”, [resopla]. Si yo estaba en el otro lado, y bueno: “A ver qué me cuenta éste [tutor] y tal”. Y bueno, te viene uno un

poco muy puntilloso, ahí con: “Oh, las unidades competenciales”, buah, por favor... Pero hay otra gente [instructor] en las empresas, que, joe, que todas esas historias las lleva y le gusta y tal... y “hemos tocado esto” y “¿qué te parece si...? Porque está aquí corto de esto y vamos a meter en esta otra área y tal”. Casos de estos también se dan. En las empresas grandes.’, TUTOR_3, 133-139.

Finalmente, cabe destacar que, al margen de las ya mencionadas dificultades que se observan para su correcto desarrollo, la valoración que se realiza de la FCT por parte de los tutores aparece siempre en clave positiva, especialmente por la contribución a una adecuada transición de los alumnos al ámbito laboral y la aportación a un mayor conocimiento de la empresa por parte de los tutores.

‘Hay casos en el que, digamos, igual la formación en el centro de trabajo puede llegar a ser justita pero la mayoría de los casos es súper positiva.’, TUTOR_3, 9.

También se menciona la aportación que se realiza desde la empresa como consecuencia de la relación que se establece entre tutor, instructor y estudiante a lo largo del desarrollo del programa de FCT:

‘En los feedback que tenemos de las FCTs también nos suelen decir las empresas: “Jo, ¿y no os convendría igual que estudie un poquito más de esto?”, no sé qué.’, TUTOR_10, 19.

d) La Formación Profesional Continua.

En España, la formación profesional no inicial (CVET) se divide entre la que está dirigida a personas desempleadas (formación ocupacional) y la dirigida a personas trabajadoras (formación continua). Aunque presentan elementos en común, el tratamiento de ambos tipos de formación ha estado históricamente diferenciada desde el punto de vista administrativo (ámbito educativo y de empleo).

En la Comunidad Autónoma Vasca la fundación Hobetuz⁷ es la Entidad Tripartita, que promueve y gestiona la formación profesional continua en la CAPV, dirigida tanto a empresas como a personas trabajadoras de manera individual. La denominada Oferta Abierta proporciona cursos diseñados por los propios centros de formación para poder

⁷ <http://www.hobetuz.com/default.asp>

adaptarse a las necesidades generales o sectoriales de los trabajadores. Las áreas formativas subvencionables se corresponden con las 26 áreas de formación o familias profesionales recogidas en el Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales⁸. Hobetuz también organiza convocatorias de ayudas para el desarrollo de acciones de formación (acciones estratégicas de formación), programadas por la empresa para mejorar las competencias y cualificaciones de sus trabajadores/as.

Por su parte, el Servicio Vasco de Empleo-Lanbide, gestiona la oferta formativa para el empleo, destinada a mejorar la empleabilidad y promover la inserción laboral. Ésta se estructura según el Catálogo Modular y está orientada a la obtención de los denominados Certificados de Profesionalidad⁹ incluidos en alguna de las familias profesionales. Estos certificados también pueden obtenerse mediante la acreditación de la experiencia laboral, a través del Dispositivo de Reconocimiento de la Experiencia Laboral y los aprendizajes no formales¹⁰.

De la misma manera que en la FP inicial (IVET) la obtención del título de un ciclo formativo está supeditada a la obtención de determinadas Unidades de Competencia, asociadas a los diferentes módulos que se imparten a lo largo de la duración de la formación, la obtención de un Certificado de Profesionalidad requiere la acreditación de las Unidades de Competencia a través de la superación de cursos ofrecidos por entidades autorizadas por Lanbide, o bien del reconocimiento de las competencias adquiridas a través de la experiencia laboral (Figura 8.2. y 8.3.).

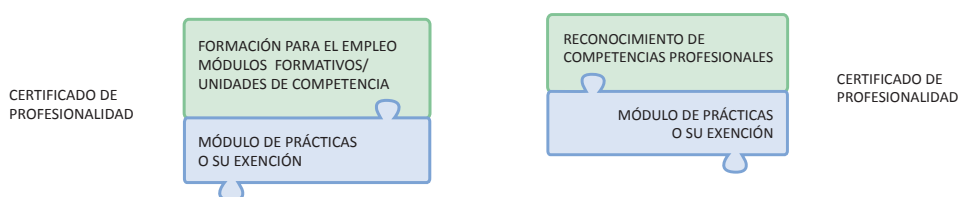
⁸ <http://incual.meecd.es/sistema-nacional-de-cualificaciones-y-formacion-profesional>

⁹ Según el Servicio Vasco de Empleo, Lanbide, 'los certificados de profesionalidad son el instrumento de acreditación oficial de las cualificaciones profesionales en el ámbito de la administración laboral. Estos certificados, que tienen carácter oficial y validez en todo el Estado, acreditan el conjunto de competencias profesionales que capacitan para el desarrollo de una actividad laboral.'

<http://www.lanbide.euskadi.eus/formacion-lanbide/-/informacion/que-son-los-certificados-de-profesionalidad/>

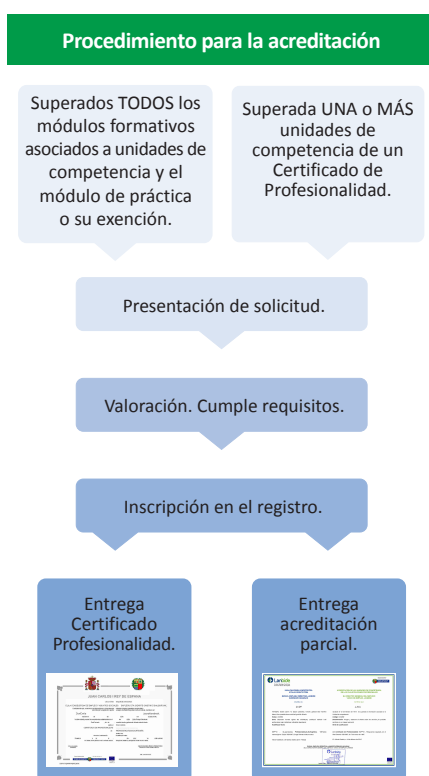
¹⁰ El proceso de acreditación se organiza a través de convocatorias públicas periódicas, y consta de tres fases, asesoramiento, evaluación y acreditación, que se realiza por personas expertas y de una manera personalizada. La Administración laboral expide una acreditación por cada unidad competencial demostrada, siendo las acreditaciones parciales acumulables de cara a la obtención de un certificado de profesionalidad o de un título de formación profesional. El procedimiento de evaluación y acreditación de las competencias profesionales está regulado en el Real Decreto 1224/2009, de 17 de julio, (BOE, 25 agosto 2009) y el Decreto 211/2015 de 10 de noviembre, (BOPV 18 noviembre 2015).

Figura 8.2.: Mecanismos para la obtención de los Certificados de Profesionalidad.



Fuente: Lanbide.

Figura 8.3.: Procedimiento para la acreditación total o parcial del Certificados de Profesionalidad.



Fuente: Lanbide.

Los centros de FP constituyen entidades autorizadas para ofrecer la formación incluida tanto en la Oferta Abierta como en el Catálogo Modular y, de esta manera, es posible integrar todo el conjunto de la oferta de formación profesional (Figura 8.4.), siguiendo el objetivo inicial planteado en el I Plan Vasco de FP y su Sistema Integral de FP (ver informe de resultado de la primera fase de este proyecto de investigación).

Figura 8.4.: Esquema de la integración de la formación profesional obtenida a través de los subsistemas educativo y para el empleo.



Fuente: Lanbide.

En las entrevistas realizadas a los tutores de centro, se recogen diversas valoraciones sobre la demanda de formación continua por parte de trabajadores/as y empresas, destacando la impresión de que existe, en general, cierta falta de sensibilidad hacia la importancia de la formación continua. También mencionan el desconocimiento de las diferentes opciones como una de las razones para que la demanda no sea mayor.

‘O sea, se puede hacer un montón de cosas pero no sé si la empresa sabe que se pueden hacer estas cosas...

La velocidad no deja muchas veces parar cinco minutos a pensar el ritmo que llevamos y a veces la sensación... que ellos tampoco saben todas las oportunidades que hay para hacer cursos, para hacer formaciones, para diferentes cosas.’, TUTOR_9, 205.

‘A mí también me parece que no se está aprovechando tanto, es la formación continua, el lifelong learning, que parece ser eso, que tanto los alumnos o las alumnas, y muchas veces las empresas también, no hay un hábito de seguir formándome cuando termine.’, TUTOR_8, 177.

‘Yo diría que cierta falta de sensibilidad hacia la formación continua es bastante general. Las empresas grandes también yo creo que es más por interés, por el interés de... Donde hay necesidad, cuando se hace una planificación, que se han

hecho y están bien. Se ha hecho una planificación y se ha hecho un diagnóstico, y se ha visto que alguien tenía que formarse en esta tecnología pero...

¿RESPONDIENDO A LA ESTRATEGIA DE LA EMPRESA?

Sí, pero no me parece que se tome muy en serio. Aquí, normalmente, los cursos subvencionados al 100%, hay que andar llamando por teléfono a la gente para que venga para llenar el curso. Y se supone que el catálogo también lo sacamos pensando en lo que más tirón tiene, que no sacamos cursos raros.’, TUTOR_8, 185-195.

‘Los cursos de Hobetuz requieren un mínimo de trabajadores en el curso, los cuales nos cuesta mucho encontrar, es decir, mogollón son parados que se apuntan porque las ayudas requieren que estudien y tal ahí...’, TUTOR_3, 261.

¿TIENES LA IMPRESIÓN DE QUE EN LA EMPRESA SE PIDE A LOS TRABAJADORES QUE SIGAN FORMÁNDOSE?

Pues de momento, con los alumnos no percibo eso... Yo es que he visto... sí he tenido gente en cursos de... o sea, de tarde, de los de formación no reglada, de Hobetuz y demás, que me han venido de: “Jo, yo en Electricidad estoy muy verde”. Y gente de... Yo recuerdo uno, sobre todo, de: “Jo, ¿por qué no estudiaría esto cuando lo tuve que hacer?”. Eso, de estar en el trabajo y no saber. O alguno que quería saber más. Lo que estaba tocando, él tocaba una parte mínima de mantenimiento de las máquinas y eso: “Yo quiero saber de la parte eléctrica también, cómo funciona”, y te venían al curso de formación.’, TUTOR_2, 149-151.

‘Muchas veces hay gente que viene a formarse un poco a escondidas de la empresa, en la empresa parece que está como mal visto que la gente se forme pensando en que se está formando para... para irse a otro lado o para promocionar...’, TUTOR_8, 181-183.

‘Hay veces que, de acuerdo con la empresa, yo he conocido casos de alumnos, me dicen: “No, yo he quedado con la empresa, hemos acondicionado mi horario para que yo pueda salir y venir a las tardes de tal hora a tal hora”. Sí, pero ya eso es un aspecto más personal, de inquietud, de decir: “Joe, mi empresa va por este mundo. Jo, me interesa este cursillo, me interesa también este ciclo”. Entonces pues

vuelven otra vez a... Lo que pasa que las empresas, depende. Generalmente, ese tipo de cosas ocurren en empresas grandes., TUTOR_5, 31-35.

Al abordar la estructura de la formación continua que se imparte en los centros y las posibilidades que ésta ofrece para aumentar el nivel de cualificación, los tutores mencionan los denominados Certificados de Profesionalidad y el Dispositivo de Reconocimiento de las Competencias y su estructura, y realizan valoraciones sobre el uso y la utilidad de éstos para que las personas interesadas puedan obtener la titulación equivalente a un ciclo formativo:

'Son muy liosos [los certificados de profesionalidad], unos títulos... A mí me gustaba lo que había antes: fresadora, esto, y esto. Lo que pasa que sí tiene -como todo en esta vida- su lado bueno, que es que si yo voy haciendo voy haciendo voy haciendo, pues me sirve... Vas homologando... Hasta lograr un título.

Entonces, a nosotros también nos dan el dinero, las subvenciones, por sacar este tipo de curso... No por si monto un curso de algo específico, por eso no me dan la pasta. Entonces, nosotros también... pues eso, se fomenta una cosa, y la otra... hombre, pagando, nosotros damos a la carta, podemos formar a unos cuantos de una empresa si paga la empresa. Pero eso ya, claro, tiene que pagar la empresa y...', TUTOR_3, 271-277.

Este último verbatim refleja el apoyo del Gobierno Vasco a la oferta de aquellos cursos de formación directamente relacionados con la obtención de los Certificados de Profesionalidad, incluidos en el Catálogo Modular. Los cursos más específicos que pudieran necesitar las empresas, o bien se incluyen en la Oferta Abierta de Hobetuz, o son financiados por las propias empresas. Con relación al dispositivo de reconocimiento de competencias:

'El dispositivo de reconocimiento de las competencias funciona también. Gente que en su día no pudo estudiar, que lleva x años y una experiencia ya consolidada.

(...) Nosotros aquí tenemos dos figuras, una es el asesor y otra es el evaluador, son dos figuras diferentes. Entonces se abre un plazo de inscripción, es público. Entonces, la gente que esté interesada en eso: "Pues yo llevo 15 años como tornero fresador pero no tengo ninguna titulación. Me quiero sacar el título". Tienes dos

formas, o te sacas el ciclo entero o te puedes ir quitando partes o incluso todo. Se abre el periodo de inscripción, se apuntan y a cada centro se le asignan por especialidades o por lo que sea. Entonces, el primer paso es el asesor. La persona interesada tiene unas entrevistas con el asesor y el asesor lo que hace es un informe donde se evalúa: "Pues mira, esta persona, de todo esto que tiene que ver en el ciclo, pues esto lo ha trabajado con vida laboral, con certificado de empresa. De esto, de esto y de esto, también. Vale, pues esta parte, por ejemplo, la tienes. Te falta esta otra parte", entonces, ahí podría entrar la segunda figura que es el evaluador, que le pondría unos exámenes teórico-prácticos en función de qué módulo es y con eso, si lo aprueba, podría llegar a tener todo. Esto se compagina también con la formación para el empleo, con cursos de Hobetuz. Hay cursos de Hobetuz que están homologados ya. Es decir, los ciclos tienen asignaturas, que las asignaturas se llaman módulos en la FP. Vale, pues un módulo, por ejemplo, se divide en tres partes y esas tres partes las pueden cursar en formación para el empleo.', TUTOR_4, 201-205.

'Para convalidar la experiencia...Eso lo están haciendo dos compañeros míos, lo están haciendo. Uno es asesor y el otro evaluador, si no me equivoco mucho. Entonces están haciendo unos cursillos para que ellos... el asesor haga unas entrevistas y demás, y el evaluador tenga que valorar con un examen o con algo... o no sé, para conseguir una serie de títulos. Se están poniendo en marcha, ¿eh?', TUTOR_10, 357.

'Que para reconocer el esto de una persona hace falta otra persona, es como un proceso muy caro. Si hubiera que estudiar caso por caso, que es.... lo que hay que hacer... Imagínate, por cada caso te hace falta un especialista que evalúe... Hay especialistas, ¿eh? En cada centro hay evaluadores...', TUTOR_8, 143.

Las posibilidades que los marcos de cualificaciones ofrecen para la acreditación del aprendizaje basado en la experiencia previa (o APEL, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) no se aplicaron inicialmente con la aparición de las cualificaciones profesionales en Inglaterra (los NVQs). Pero, posteriormente, esta posibilidad se ha venido aplicando en los diferentes modelos desarrollados tanto para promover el acceso a la educación formal (y la obtención de títulos oficiales) como para reemplazar

la educación formal y así facilitar el acceso directo a la cualificación. Tal y como explica Young es la evaluación de los estándares ocupacionales, expresados en términos de resultados de aprendizaje, el elemento central para hacer operativo el modelo basado en competencias (2007: 12). Se trata de una actividad no exenta de complejidad, y que debe basarse en el juicio de expertos y en el cumplimiento de procedimientos específicamente diseñados para ello.

Algunos tutores sugieren la existencia de cierto desconocimiento sobre las posibilidades que los certificados de profesionalidad ofrecen:

‘Los certificados de profesionalidad...Pero eso lo conoce muy poca gente todavía. Yo creo que todavía no se ha vendido mucho.’, TUTOR:7, 67.

‘Que de una empresa diga, no sé, necesito un soldador, y éste podría acreditarlo con unos cursos... Eso no lo he visto. Yo lo he visto siempre es que venga un alumno y te diga: “para aprobar lo que me falta de un módulo, ¿qué puedo acreditar?”, eso sí. Por parte de la empresa no lo he visto.

¿PODRÍA SER ALGO QUE QUEDA MÁS EN EL ÁMBITO EDUCATIVO?

Sí, pero es por desconocimiento.’, TUTOR_6, 73-75.

También se mencionan algunas dificultades que la obtención de los Certificados ofrece en la práctica:

‘Lo que pasa con los certificados de profesionalidad es, en mi opinión, que es una buena vía para reconocer los conocimientos que han adquirido por la experiencia, pero luego, a la hora de la verdad, lo que pasa es que normalmente la experiencia, los conocimientos que da, son como muy... Hay mucho desfase entre los conocimientos que da la experiencia y los conocimientos que se exigen a la hora de titularse en un título.

Entonces, la experiencia laboral te da al final la posibilidad de que te reconozcan un 15 o un 20 por ciento de lo que es un título. Pero ¿por qué? Pues porque la experiencia, normalmente, en esos niveles de trabajo es muy justa, entonces, hacen... un poco ‘sota, caballo y rey’. Entonces luego, eso, cuando quieres pasarlo a un título oficial, el título oficial es justo al revés, abarca un montón de cosas y

entonces, para poder juntar las dos... Pero se hace, ¿eh? Aunque no es muy práctico porque las titulaciones abarcan mucho’, TUTOR_8, 27-35.

‘Para conseguir una titulación... Hay que estar eso, tres años, si es por mediación de cursos de Hobetuz, que son cursos de eso, de 40 o 60 horas, pero en tres años todas las tardes haciendo cursos. O sea que... Casi, les dices, que sale mejor matricularse en un ciclo y hacer el ciclo que... además, si tienen experiencia laboral, no tienen que hacer la FCT. Todos sabemos que dura año y medio.’, TUTOR_8, 46-49.

‘Pero la gente que normalmente necesita el título viene, y en año y medio se saca el título. Porque con las certificaciones siempre se te va a alargar.’, TUTOR_7, 69.

‘El dispositivo sí que funciona, pero a nosotros muchos nos vienen directamente a los ciclos’, TUTOR_11, 114.

e) Conocimiento en las empresas sobre estructura y oferta formativa.

A lo largo de las entrevistas con los tutores ha sido posible constatar que la relación con las empresas del entorno es, en general, y salvo un comentario crítico, fluido y de colaboración:

‘La colaboración... Muchas veces nos ven como proveedores, solamente... pero proveedores de eso, en momentos puntuales y no colaboradores. Que hay una relación, digamos, y bueno... cada equis años se puede coger un alumno o tal o... no, a veces es: “Oye...”, pum, llamada y pum, “Que hay una baja...” o: “Se ha ido uno de la empresa o tal y me hace falta uno”.’, TUTOR_9, 225.

‘Y nosotros, por ejemplo, de años colaborando con las grandes empresas, pues haciendo un poquito más fácil la transferencia de conocimiento. Y al revés también, porque la empresa también nos aporta a nosotros muchas cosas.’, TUTOR_5, 35.

Sin embargo, se han recogido numerosos comentarios sobre el bajo nivel de conocimiento que existe en las empresas con relación al contenido y la estructura de la formación que se da en el centro. Este bajo conocimiento, que ya se ha puesto de manifiesto al describir el diseño y desarrollo de la FCT y la demanda y oferta de la

formación continua, también aparece reflejada en la búsqueda de perfiles para la contratación. Por ello, muchas empresas recurren a los tutores de los centros y a su conocimiento sobre las cualificaciones y los alumnos cuando necesitan contratar un nuevo perfil. Varios verbatim reflejan esta confianza que las empresas, especialmente las pequeñas, ponen en la opinión de los tutores de centro:

‘Lo que llama la atención es el desconocimiento que tienen las empresas con respecto a lo que los chavales aprenden en el centro, a las especialidades, por así decirlo, a qué tipo de ciclos formativos...’, TUTOR_4, 27.

‘Y eso de los resultados de aprendizaje, la gente no lo tiene todavía muy asimilado. En la empresa, ninguno, y en el centro, cuesta. Cuesta que los profesores que llevan muchos años, por ejemplo...’, TUTOR_4, 105.

‘Normalmente las empresas pequeñas te describen el puesto. “Necesito una persona para que trabaje en esta máquina y en esta máquina, o que haga este trabajo o este trabajo”. Las empresas grandes ya conocen más, tienen pues su Departamento de Recursos Humanos, entonces ya sabe qué titulación necesita, porque saben más qué competencias ha conseguido el alumno en cada titulación.

‘La empresa busca asesoramiento: “Oye, ¿qué te parece...?, y tal.’, TUTOR_3, 115.

‘Entonces, yo ya sé que a mí, cuando las empresas me empiezan a explicar, les digo: “Tranquilos, si ya sé lo que quieres”.’, TUTOR_8, 143.

‘Me describen el puesto: “Necesito un matricero, tal...”. La empresa, muchas veces... O sea, ya nos conocen’, TUTOR_9, 79.

‘Entonces, hoy en día la mayoría de los empresarios nos piden: “Oye, un chaval, ¿cómo lo has visto tú estos dos años, es una buena persona, se deja llevar?”’, TUTOR-5, 7.

Este último testimonio refleja tanto la confianza que los empresarios ponen en el punto de vista del tutor de centro como el hecho de que el elemento que más valoran a la hora de contratar, siempre siguiendo las opiniones de los tutores, son la actitud y competencias personales. Así, el elemento de confianza parece seguir más centrado en el conocimiento de los centros de formación (basado en las instituciones) y los tutores

que en un conocimiento y confianza exclusivos en las propias cualificaciones (basado bien en los resultados de aprendizaje, bien en las cualificaciones), aunque este último fuera el objetivo del desarrollo de los marcos nacionales (Young, 2009: 453-454).

‘Dicen: “Yo lo que necesito, es que tengan actitud. Formar, ya le formaremos”.’, TUTOR_2, 71.

‘Que sea una persona flexible, que no sea conflictiva, que sepa trabajar en equipo...O sea, las competencias personales, que se trabajan en este tipo de módulo se valora pero mucho ahora. Una empresa te va a decir: “Mira, no quiero al mejor, sino una persona que se adapte bien”.’, TUTOR_4, 63.

‘Piden más actitud que aptitud.’, TUTOR_8, 156.

Finalmente, merece la pena mencionar el hecho de que entre los alumnos de la FP inicial suele haber personas que no encuentran trabajo, bien porque su titulación universitaria no les ha abierto muchas puertas, o bien porque se han quedado en el desempleo. Este tipo de alumno suele tener expectativas de que un ciclo formativo y, especialmente, el período de formación en empresa o FCT le permita encontrar un puesto de trabajo.

‘Hay alumnos que vienen del mercado laboral rebotados y... con la crisis y demás han salido de la empresa y: “Buenos, voy a titularme, y a ver si con la FCT engancho y entro a trabajar en la empresa donde hago la FCT y demás”, tienen la esperanza.’, TUTOR_4, 41.

‘Como el caso del topógrafo, que no encontraba nada, ha venido a hacer un grado superior en delineación, lo ha hecho muy a gusto porque sigue estando dentro del mundillo del diseño, no es la construcción, pero bueno, es creatividad, ¿no?, le da vueltas a la cabeza, diseña una cosa... Le hemos llevado a unas prácticas en una empresa y se ha quedado a trabajar allí.’, TUTOR_5, 11.

De hecho, uno de los tutores destaca que:

‘Nuestro objetivo es que se coloquen en el mercado laboral, que empiecen a trabajar.’, TUTOR_2, 53.

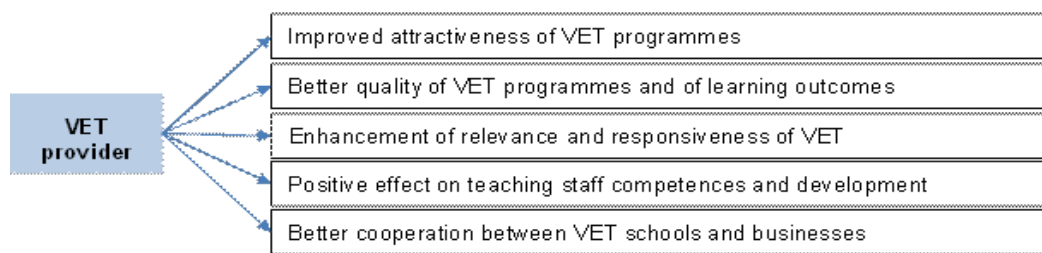
Lo que muestra cierta presión en los centros de FP por lograr tasas de colocación elevadas, que son los indicadores que más contribuyen a incrementar el atractivo de los

programas formativos y el prestigio de los centros de FP. Y, en este sentido, valoran positivamente la FCT, como un instrumento adecuado de transición al mundo laboral.

‘Es una transición. Sí, porque los chavales están menos presionados, o sea, no es como cuando están ya en el mundo laboral. Ahí no, ahí están aprendiendo. O sea, hay gente que está haciendo trabajos... reales, ¿no? Pero no tienen la presión de un chaval cuando empieza en una dual, por ejemplo.’, TUTOR_4, 75.

Para finalizar esta primera parte, se puede concluir que las ventajas que los tutores de los centros de formación han observado en los programas de FCT coinciden con las observadas por la European Commission (2013) (Figura 8.5.), tal y como se ha recogido en el Capítulo 5 (Mejor adaptación de los contenidos formativos a las necesidades del ámbito productivo, y una importante contribución a la colaboración entre centros y empresas y a la formación de los docentes y tutores):

Figura 8.5.: Beneficios que aporta el aprendizaje en el ámbito de trabajo a los centros de FP



Fuente: European Commission, 2013.

8.1.2. La visión de los instructores de empresa.

La figura del instructor de empresa resulta fundamental en el desarrollo de los procesos formativos en el ámbito del trabajo, y su importancia no se limita a los programas relacionados con la Formación Profesional inicial (en este caso, la FCT), sino que se extiende al desarrollo de la formación continua en las empresas. Por ello, esta figura ha sido objeto de diferentes estudios y publicaciones por parte de la Unión Europea. Las cuestiones más relevantes que se recogen en los análisis realizados (CEDEFOP, 2015d, 2016) se refieren, primero, a las dificultades a las que se enfrentan las pequeñas y medianas empresas para poder dedicar una persona (o una parte de su jornada, al menos) de la plantilla a este tipo de tarea. Y, segundo, a la falta de formación específica de los instructores para el desarrollo de tareas docentes. La formación de los instructores de empresa para desempeñar tareas formativas (competencias pedagógicas y/o didácticas) se recoge como una de las áreas de análisis para la valoración de los diferentes programas de formación en el ámbito de trabajo en el marco analítico desarrollado en CEDEFOP (2015b).

En los estudios desarrollados se pone de manifiesto que la contribución a la adaptación de los nuevos trabajadores ocupa la mayor parte de la tarea de formación de instructores. También se recoge que la mayoría de los trabajadores que desarrollan este tipo de tarea lo hacen debido a que cuentan con una extensa experiencia en un campo concreto y que la formación que ofrecen es eminentemente técnica y práctica, sin que, en general, impartan contenidos teóricos.

a) Perfil de los instructores.

Las personas que se entrevistaron por su papel de instructor de la FCT, y que fueron sugeridas desde los centros formativos, resultaron ser, en algunos casos, los interlocutores de los centros en la empresa más que las personas directamente implicadas en el proceso formativo de la FCT en la empresa. Este hecho confirma una de las afirmaciones planteadas por TUTOR_8 en el sentido de que las personas que mantienen la relación con los tutores del centro (interlocutores) no son siempre quienes realmente pueden informar sobre los avances y/o problemas que haya podido tener el

alumno a lo largo del proceso formativo (instructores). Esta situación no parece responder a un perfil de empresa concreto, puesto que se ha observado en las dos empresas grandes, en las dos empresas medianas e incluso en una de las pequeñas. A pesar de esta situación, se seguirá empleando la terminología de instructor para designar a las personas que han participado en el proyecto como responsables de la FCT en la empresa.

‘VAMOS A HABLAR UN POCO DE TU TAREA COMO INSTRUCTOR. HAS TENIDO ALUMNOS DE FCT.

FCT, ¿qué es? Ah, la formación... las prácticas que hacen los alumnos en las empresas. Sí, suelen venir todos los años dos meses o así. Pero yo no suelo estar encima de ellos.’, INSTRUCTOR_2, 117-120.

‘Y yo básicamente lo que hago con todos estos chavales, incluso con los de formación Dual, es ponerles con los oficiales de Mantenimiento, con los técnicos de Mantenimiento. Ellos se pasan el día persiguiendo a los técnicos de Mantenimiento y los técnicos de Mantenimiento les obligan a hacer cositas...’, INSTRUCTOR_3, 40.

Les pones uno que le ayude y los vas formando poco a poco. Hombre, aparte ya te digo, nosotros sí que vemos... Hay gente que se deja enseñar, otros que no. Entonces al que le pongo de responsable ahí lo ve rápido y ese me lo chiva: “Este... nada, cero. Este, apunta maneras”, y con eso se vuelcan un poco más.’, INSTRUCTOR_4_G_G, 241.

‘Lo que pasa es que esos chavales, esos chicos que vienen a hacer prácticas, si vienen -por decir un número- 8, se reparten en diferentes unidades productivas, y la relación con el tutor del centro lo tiene cada jefe de esa unidad productiva directamente.’, INSTRUCTOR_6, 45.

Todos los instructores de empresa entrevistados tenían estudios de FP. Adicionalmente, dos de ellos habían cursado estudios de Ingeniería Técnica (en las empresas grande y mediana). En todos los casos, los instructores tenían una larga experiencia en empresa, algunos en la misma empresa en la que estaban trabajando, y otros en diferentes empresas a lo largo de su carrera profesional. La posición en la empresa de los diferentes

instructores era diversa. En las dos empresas grandes, los instructores eran Responsable de Mantenimiento, en un caso, y Director de Producción en el otro. En las dos empresas medianas, los instructores ocupaban los puestos de Director de Oficina Técnica y Responsable de Mantenimiento y Fabricación. Y en las dos pequeñas, ambos instructores eran, a su vez, gerentes de la empresa. Del contenido de las entrevistas puede desprenderse que ninguno de ellos había recibido ningún tipo de formación específica para ejercer tareas formativas, ya que esta cuestión no surge ni al abordar la formación que los instructores habían tenido a lo largo de su vida profesional (CVET) ni la manera en la que organizaban el período formativo de los alumnos en empresa (la FCT). En la figura 8.6. se recoge la relación de instructores participantes, junto con los departamentos y empresas en que trabajan:

Figura 8.6.: Relación de instructores de empresa que han participado en las entrevistas.

INSTRUCTOR	DPTO. INSTRUCTOR	EMPRESA	COMARCA	TAMAÑO	SECTOR	ACTIVIDAD
INSTRUCTOR_1	Resp. Mantenimiento	EMPRESA_1	Duranguésado	Grande Planta de Grupo	Mecanizado Automoción	Series largas
INSTRUCTOR_2	Director Oficina Técnica	EMPRESA_2	Alto Deba	Mediana Cooperativa	Estampación Automoción	Series cortas
INSTRUCTOR_3	Resp. Mantenimiento y Fabricación	EMPRESA_3	Gasteiz	Mediana	Mecanizado Automoción	Series largas
INSTRUCTOR_4_G	Gerente	EMPRESA_4	Gasteiz	Pequeña	Mecanizado Multisector	Series cortas
INSTRUCTOR_5_G	Gerente	EMPRESA_5	Alto Deba	Micro	Mecanizado Multisector	Series cortas
INSTRUCTOR_6	Director Producción	EMPRESA_6	Alto Deba	Grande Cooperativa	Máquina H.	Soluciones de mecanizado

Fuente: Elaboración propia

A través de la comarca en la que está ubicada la empresa, puede establecerse la relación con el centro de FP de referencia en el ámbito de este proyecto.

b) Relación con tutores y centros de FP.

En todas las entrevistas han surgido diferentes comentarios que reflejan una relación fluida con los centros de FP. Esta relación se pone de manifiesto a través de diversas dinámicas que surgen:

1 En la incorporación de estudiantes de FCT a la empresa.

Uno de los instructores manifiesta que es el tutor del centro de FP del entorno quien se pone en contacto con la empresa para ofrecer perfiles de alumnos para cursar la FCT en la empresa:

'Pues desde el CENTRO_4 te dicen: "Oye, tenemos este chico. Pensamos que puede ser interesante". RRHH_1 me llama a mí: "Oye, tienen este chico. Estaría dispuesto a empezar tal día, ¿cómo lo ves, te encajaría?", "Perfecto, ningún problema".'
INSTRUCTOR_1, 55.

En el caso de la otra empresa grande, el CENTRO_3 es conocedor de su interés de incorporar alumnos de FCT como mecanismo de identificación de los mejores perfiles para su posterior incorporación a la empresa. En este caso, cada año un número de entre 6 y 8 alumnos se incorpora a la FCT.

'Los alumnos son de centros que ya están... que tiene mucha relación con EMPRESA_6, no se improvisa, tenemos una relación muy estrecha con centros cercanos.', INSTRUCTOR_6, 85.

2 En la oferta y demanda de cursos:

'(...) desde el mismo CENTRO_4 o desde IMH o desde el Fondo de Formación de Empleo, o desde cualquier sitio: "Oye, pues ha salido un curso de Neumática de 40 horas que pensamos que podría tener utilidad para alguno".' INSTRUCTOR_1, 117.

RECURRÍS AL CENTRO TAMBIÉN, ¿NO?

'Sí, sí, al CENTRO_3, sí. Cosas así que son puntuales pues se le llama a TUTOR_8 y: "Mírame esto consígueme esto que...".', INSTRUCTOR_5_G_G, 165.

3 En la resolución de problemas específicos que surgen en las empresas más pequeñas:

'O medir una cosa que aquí no puedo medir y: "Mídeme allí".',
INSTRUCTOR_5_G_G, 165.

¿TIENES MUCHA RELACIÓN A PARTE DE LA RELACIÓN PERSONAL CON TUTOR_8 CON LO QUE ES EL CENTRO EDUCATIVO?

Sí, por algunos cursos que hemos hecho, y si no pues algún... alguna cosa rara en 3D o que no sepamos o que no llegamos, pero nos han dado solución.',
INSTRUCTOR_5_G_G, 18-19.

Este verbatim corroboraría la afirmación de que la colaboración entre centros de FP y empresas puede conducir, especialmente en el caso de sectores industriales, a la

provisión de equipamiento por parte de la empresa (European Commission, 2013: 10). Y que, en aquellos entornos y sectores en los que predominan las pequeñas y medianas empresas, el centro de FP puede llegar a actuar como un *hub* que ofrece la tecnología más avanzada, aportando a las empresas soluciones técnicas a las que éstas no podrían acceder por sí solas.

4 En la aportación por parte de las empresas de comentarios o feed-back sobre problemas que hayan podido surgir con el alumno a lo largo del período de FCT, tanto de actitud como de deficiencias en la formación:

‘Y TUTOR_6, eso ya se lo intenté inculcar, porque siempre se lo digo: “Oye, no te lo vas a creer, la primera que me ha liado ...”. Dice: “No me lo digas, ha escalado la pieza...”. Y digo: “Sí, sí”. Es un falló común...’, INSTRUCTOR_4_G_G, 127.

‘Que también lo hemos... Sin ningún problema, se lo he dicho a TUTOR_6:” Oye, mira, nos ha pasado esto con este chaval”. Para que lo tengan en cuenta también porque... Hay gente que, por ejemplo, TUTOR_6, a ese lo hubiese recomendado en cualquier sitio desde la bolsa de trabajo y te la puede liar.’, INSTRUCTOR_4_G, 163.

5 En relación con mejoras que pudieran incorporar los centros en la formación que realizan en el centro (IVET) especialmente:

‘Y incluso a algunos les hacemos sugerencias de qué necesidades tiene EMPRESA_6, o qué debilidades hemos encontrado en los alumnos...’, INSTRUCTOR_6, 133.

“Les vemos muy flojitos en formación de temas de rodamiento o guías lineales”, porque es una cosa muy concreta de máquina-herramienta, y si lo considera el centro pues meten su plan de formación...’, INSTRUCTOR_6, 139.

Y como tenemos la suerte en EMPRESA_6 de estar en un entorno donde hay mucho fabricante de máquinas-herramientas pues nos hacen caso.’, INSTRUCTOR_6, 141.

En esta relación cercana con los centros se ha llegado a plantear la existencia de una homologación de los mismos (EMPRESA_6). En cualquier caso, la confianza de las empresas en los centros aparece en diferentes entrevistas:

'(...) hay una confianza con estos centros que están homologados por EMPRESA_6...', INSTRUCTOR_6, 129.

'En los centros conocen las necesidades nuestras.', INSTRUCTOR_6, 187.

'Tenemos una relación muy estrecha con los centros cercanos.'. INSTRUCTOR_6, 85

'CENTRO_3 es el que dice: "Mira, pues tengo este chico que está en el Grado Superior de Electromecánica. Si os interesa...". Y como tú vas muchas veces a ciegas, porque ya luego no haces un proceso de selección como puede ser la entrevista para alguien que venga a incorporarse a la plantilla de la empresa, vale, pues lo acoges.' INSTRUCTOR_1, 19.

c) La Formación en Centros de Trabajo.

1 Valoración del programa.

La consideración de la FCT como una etapa formativa por parte de los instructores en empresa queda un poco debilitada por las referencias que éstos hacen de ella:

'Son prácticas, por decirlo así, más sencillitas, de menor duración, que es lo que hacemos, son un par de meses [en comparación con Dual]. Pero bueno, que sirvan como una primera toma de contacto del chico con la empresa.', INSTRUCTOR_1, 19.

Sí, aquí los que han venido, de mecanizado... para perder el miedo a la máquina, más que nada.', INSTRUCTOR_5_G, 25.

'Se dan cuenta de las limitaciones... es el primer escalón en el aprendizaje', INSTRUCTOR_5_G, 70-73.

'Sí los que llamamos nosotros "los de prácticas", chavales que vienen de prácticas', INSTRUCTOR_6, 71.

En ese sentido, más que como un período formativo con objetivos y estructura definida, los instructores observan la FCT como una etapa para adaptarse a la diferente realidad que la empresa representa con respecto al centro educativo (*'toma de contacto', 'perder el miedo'*).

Se observa una consideración diferente con respecto al alumnado en Dual, que se pone de manifiesto en la manera distinta en la que se aborda el diseño del proceso formativo (o 'de prácticas') y el seguimiento y evaluación que hace el tutor del mismo, como se verá más adelante.

De las empresas consideradas, sólo una de ellas, grande, considera la FCT como un sistema que les ayuda a seleccionar los mejores perfiles para su contratación posterior. En este caso:

'Se hace una entre-saca de todos ellos, y si necesitamos dos, cogemos dos, y si el tercero es bueno y tenemos una sistemática de evaluación y tal... si el tercero es bueno, aunque no lo necesitemos también le cogemos. Y nos ha pasado que la gerencia de EMPRESA_6 alguna vez ha dicho: "Andamos con pocos pedidos, este año no vamos a contratar a nadie...", (sonriendo) pero si alguien merece entrar, ha entrado.', INSTRUCTOR_6, 77.

En el resto de casos, aunque no se descarta la contratación (de hecho, en una de las empresas pequeñas todas las contrataciones se habían realizado de alumnos de la FCT), no es la principal razón para acoger alumnos:

'Entonces bueno, pensamos que es una fórmula que nos funciona como empresa bastante bien, nos da bastante soporte y bastante apoyo. Y yo pienso que a los chicos también les viene bastante bien. Salen bastante... no vamos a decir como para soltarle solo ahí, venga, delante de los leones, pero por lo menos para que sepan lo que es y lo que hay en un taller.', INSTRUCTOR_1, 9.

'Y bueno, y aparte porque ahora mismo las empresas están bastante ajustadas a las necesidades productivas reales. Todas, no ésta, sino todas las empresas. Entonces todo lo que sea una portea más dentro de tu equipo, dentro de tu plantilla, pues eso, que te permita un plus, oye, bienvenido sea.', INSTRUCTOR_1, 49.

¿QUÉ SACÁIS VOSOTROS COMO EMPRESA DE LAS FCT? ALGUNA VEZ ALGÚN TRABAJADOR, PERO SI NO FUERA EL CASO...

'Sí, sí, alguna vez algún trabajador pero... O sea, simple y llanamente el día a día... pues bueno, te echan un cable, así de claro.'

YA, TE SACA UN POCO DE TRABAJO ¿NO?

'Te sacan, sí. Te sacan trabajo al final, está claro.' INSTRUCTOR_5_G, 206-211.

Finalmente, resulta de interés destacar la aportación que los alumnos de FCT realizan en ocasiones a la plantilla de la empresa, tal y como describió uno de los instructores al preguntarle por las ventajas de tener alumnos en período de formación en empresa: la ventaja de compaginar la experiencia del trabajador maduro con el conocimiento en nuevas tecnologías del alumno de FCT.

'Es el caso de eso, el de 57 años, con el que llega, que tiene 22. Y han hecho una reparación de la leche entre los dos, pero ha llevado todo el peso el de 57 años. Y le dices: "Joer, pues ha quedado bien. Pues vamos a hacer una instrucción de trabajo para que esto quede registrado de alguna manera, y tal y cual. Y hacédle un par de fotos, y lo hacéis en una hojita y lo añadimos en el histórico y tal y cual". Y ya al de 57 años se le empiezan a poner los ojos chiribitas y se le empieza a nublar y una foto, sí, una foto se hace con el móvil, pero... Y le dice el otro: "Espera". Pin, pan, pun, lo pasa allí, tal. "Mira a ver si así vale". Y claro, dices: "¿Ves? Mira, ahí en seguida..."', INSTRUCTOR_1, 267.

2 El proceso formativo en la empresa.

Con una única excepción, en los casos analizados no se ha observado ni metodología ni utilización de instrumentos (como el marco de cualificaciones y relación de unidades de competencia asociadas) en el diseño, seguimiento y evaluación. El enfoque de la empresa consiste en hacer al alumno de FCT partícipe de la actividad ordinaria del día a día, incorporándolo primero a las tareas más sencillas, para ir después complicando las actividades. Es precisamente en este apartado donde se observa una mayor distancia con el tratamiento de la formación en el lugar de trabajo que corresponde a la Formación Dual. La duración del período de aprendizaje (*'Son prácticas, por decirlo así, más sencillitas, de menor duración'*) aparece en algún caso como una de las causas de esta diferencia. En la mayoría de los casos no se observa la existencia de una formación estructurada y planificada, en la que los contenidos teóricos que se enseñan en el centro educativo estén articulados con los contenidos prácticos que luego desarrollarán en las empresas (European Commission, 2013, CEDEFOP, 2015c)

a) Respecto del diseño del contenido formativo:

¿ACORDÁIS UN CONTENIDO FORMATIVO?

'No.'

'Viene el tutor sin el chaval, elaboramos un calendario que, siempre y cuando cumplas las horas previstas...', INSTRUCTOR_1, 44, 55.

'Después, al principio tú le intentas buscar cosas facilitas. Cosas facilitas del día a día que te solucionen a ti también algo. O van acompañando a las averías, para ir viendo cómo es una avería.', INSTRUCTOR_1, 37, 41.

'Y yo básicamente lo que hago con todos estos chavales, incluso con los de formación Dual, es ponerle con los oficiales de Mantenimiento, con los técnicos de Mantenimiento. Ellos se pasan el día persiguiendo a los técnicos de Mantenimiento y los técnicos de Mantenimiento les obligan a hacer cositas..., INSTRUCTOR_3, 40.

'Y cositas que ellos pueden ir haciendo pues les dejamos que las hagan. Esa es la formación, básicamente esa es la formación.'

O SEA, QUE REALMENTE NO EXISTE UNA RELACIÓN ENTRE: "ESTO ES LO QUE TIENE QUE APRENDER PARA OBTENER EL TÍTULO, ESTO ES LO QUE HACEN EN LA EMPRESA", SINO QUE EN LA EMPRESA VAN FORMÁNDOSE EN BASE A LO QUE TENÉIS PARA OFRECERLES ¿NO?

'Se adapta a las necesidades de la empresa. De hecho, depende de qué tipo de formación sea, hay muchas cosas que ni tocarán. Una persona de Fabricación Mecánica puede ir a un taller donde todas las máquinas que hay sean máquinas convencionales o viejas, y ellos han estudiado una tecnología mucho más moderna, y sin embargo les toca trabajar con aquello.', INSTRUCTOR_3, 42-44.

Es excepción de esta circunstancia la empresa que ha mostrado un enfoque hacia la FCT más dirigido a la selección y contratación del alumno, EMPRESA_6. Se trata de una empresa en la que los procesos formativos de las personas que se incorporan y continúan en la empresa (CVET) están estructurados y, en el caso de observar la necesidad de hacerlo, integran en esos itinerarios formativos a los alumnos de FCT. Esta empresa ha sido la única que ha manifestado diseñar un plan de formación específico para cada alumno de FCT, y que presentan al tutor en cada caso.

'Se presenta un plan de formación de cada alumno', INSTRUCTOR_6, 85.

¿DURANTE LA FCT DÁIS TEORÍA?

'Sí, sí. Y después también, cuando se hacen socios... tenemos personas que son veteranos, veteranos no quiere decir que sean de sesenta años, tenemos señores de 45, 50 años, tanto en el área mecánica como electrónica que dan formación a los chavales. Y si coincide esa form... y es una formación que intentamos que sea reglada porque metemos clientes, metemos técnicos de las delegaciones y si cuando están en esas fechas de marzo a junio también coinciden estos alumnos, también les metemos.' INSTRUCTOR_6, 159.

b) Respecto del seguimiento del programa:

'Realmente, no está nadie con ellos. Cuando vienen... vienen y se les pone en una máquina y ellos están ahí, viendo lo que hace el operario de allí, y tal y bueno.', INSTRUCTOR_2, 122.

'Pasan dos meses, nosotros continuamos con nuestro día a día, luego se marchan.', INSTRUCTOR_2, 132.

'Ellos tienen un tutor de prácticas que se suele venir a entrevistar conmigo, eso en la Formación Dual; en el otro tipo de formación no hay ese contacto, simplemente mandan una documentación de la persona que va a venir, qué es lo que está estudiando, cuántas horas va a hacer, en qué horario lo tiene que hacer y nada más, ahí termina el contacto con la empresa. Sin embargo, en la Formación Dual, cada equis tiempo nos entrevistamos con el profesor y hay una valoración positiva.', INSTRUCTOR_3, 14.

c) Respecto de la evaluación del programa. Para la evaluación del programa formativo no se ha observado un mecanismo común. En las dos empresas grandes se ha observado la utilización de un instrumento que guarda relación con los desarrollados en los diferentes centros de FP:

¿TENÉIS VUESTRA PROPIA MATRIZ DE POLIVALENCIA PARA EVALUAR?

'Para trabajadores de la empresa. Pero yo, en el caso de los alumnos, me guío por la matriz que tiene CENTRO_3.

VALE. ¿Y ES MUY DIFERENTE?

Sí y no. La nuestra, por decirlo así, la de la empresa es más exigente. Se supone que ya es gente que está... ya no es gente que está en procesos de formación, es gente que está formada y lo que tiene que dar es el callo día a día. Nosotros les medimos por eso. La de CENTRO_3 es un poquito más el desarrollo inicial de la nuestra.' INSTRUCTOR_1, 84-87.

¿OS HABÉIS INSPIRADO EN ALGUNA MANERA EN LA EVALUACIÓN QUE HACE EL CENTRO CON ESOS CONCEPTOS, COMPETENCIA, ACTITUD...?

Inconscientemente diría yo que sí, pero no hemos ido a buscar el documento del centro, sino que a la hora de evaluar... porque ya no hablo solamente de los chavales que vienen nuevos sino de a la hora de crecer, la curva de carrera, ya la gente que está en EMPRESA_6 utilizamos una evaluación similar, tenemos unas matrices de competencias, ponemos en colorines verde, amarillo y rojo, dónde está cada uno, qué domina, se evalúa el nivel de competencia... Estoy pensando que hace años nos basamos en el IMH Sí, la hemos adaptado a nuestras necesidades, y hemos variado incluso... lo que antes... las competencias que tenía que dominar un montador hace 10 años eran las que eran y hoy han variado, han aumentado.

EN EMPRESA_6 SÍ, POR LO QUE DICES. ¿Y EN EL CENTRO, CONOCES...?

De hace 10 años aquí no sé decirte.' INSTRUCTOR_6, 110-117.

Sin embargo, en el resto de las empresas, medianas y pequeñas, no se ha observado la utilización de ningún instrumento de evaluación concreto a lo largo del proceso. Lo que los diferentes instructores plantean es, en todo caso, la utilización de un cuestionario o matriz que trae el tutor al final del proceso:

'Luego sí suele venir de la escuela un responsable que nos hace rellenar un test y tal, suelo estar yo con ellos, y vale.

UN POCO PARA VALORAR LO QUE HAN HECHO, ¿NO? Y AHÍ EN EL TEST, ¿QUÉ SUELEN VALORAR?

Comportamientos... ya no me acuerdo, hay una serie de preguntas establecidas, ahora mismo no me acuerdo.

VOSOTROS EN LA EMPRESA ¿UTILIZÁIS ESE TIPO DE VALORACIONES?

En nuestra empresa, no.' INSTRUCTOR_2, 133-140.

¿CÓMO MIDES ESA EVOLUCIÓN?

Mediante la observación, simplemente., INSTRUCTOR_3,49-50.

Una valoración firmada y escrita no hacemos.’, INSTRUCTOR_3, 128.

‘CUANDO ACABA EL CICLO HACÉIS ALGUNA EVALUACIÓN DE LO QUE HA HECHO EL CHAVAL Y TAL ¿NO?

Sí, a la vez con el...

¿ENTONCES QUÉ SOLÉIS HACER? ¿UNA PLANTILLA...? ¿CÓMO SOLÉIS HACER?

Sí, más o menos sí... traen una plantilla, un cuestionario para rellenar. INSTRUCTOR_5_G, 130-133.

d) La Formación Profesional Continua.

En todas las entrevistas se ha mencionado la formación continua como una actividad más o menos habitual en las empresas. En uno de los casos, se hace mención a la formación recibida por el propio instructor (INSTRUCTOR_3) con el objeto de desarrollar una faceta profesional concreta; en el resto la formación continua aparece como una actividad impulsada por la empresa con el objeto de mejorar la adaptación de las cualificaciones de los/as trabajadores a las necesidades propias de la empresa y de su actividad. De las entrevistas se desprende que la formación continua se desarrolla recurriendo tanto a centros de FP o servicio público de formación, como a fabricantes de maquinaria y equipamiento

‘Luego las empresas, yo creo que todas, dan cursos formativos a los trabajadores pues para orientarlos más hacia las necesidades propias de la empresa. Yo cuando llega alguien nuevo aquí a Mantenimiento para contratarle, en seguida le ves, pues desde el mismo CENTRO_4 o desde IMH [Instituto de Máquina Herramienta] o desde el Fondo de Formación de Empleo, o desde cualquier sitio.’, INSTRUCTOR_1, 117.

‘Eso yo creo que lo hace todo el mundo. Claro, es una formación continua. Yo, todos los años vas a una o dos formaciones pues para centrarte en nuevas tecnologías. Si trabajas mucho con Siemens, como trabajamos nosotros, pues Siemens saca cursos específicos para sus nuevas máquinas, sistemas nuevos, autómatas nuevos.

Pues tendrás que ir a formarte porque si no, te quedas atrás y te comen los de al lado, los vecinos.’, INSTRUCTOR_1 119-121.

‘Yo empecé... cuando empecé a trabajar y terminé las prácticas y me hicieron contrato en Mantenimiento, vi que mi trabajo podía ser Mantenimiento, me gustaba, me gustaba más que lo que había estudiado, y me empecé a formar en las áreas que tenía que tocar dentro de Mantenimiento: Hidráulica, Neumática, Electricidad... a base de cursillos que me proporcionó la empresa y me busqué yo por mi cuenta.’, INSTRUCTOR_3, 180.

‘No, sí que sé que hay algunos que por su cuenta hacen algún curso en Jesús Obrero de CATIA o lo que sea para especificar, para mejorar, vamos.’, INSTRUCTOR_4_G, 37.

¿HACÉIS ALGUNA FORMACIÓN PARA LOS TRABAJADORES QUE ESTÁN AQUÍ?

‘Según vamos... nos va pidiendo. El taller o también los de oficina técnica. Por ejemplo, nosotros tenemos tridimensional, y en la tridimensional tenemos gente de oficina técnica. Entonces el que empieza en la oficina técnica, pues si tiene que ir a tridimensional le tengo que dar algún cursillo. Entonces lo mando al que nos lleva el mantenimiento de la tridimensional, le dan un cursillo, aprende y ya se pone a hacer.’, INSTRUCTOR_4_G_G, 26-30.

Incluso la empresa más pequeña, EMPRESA_5, menciona la formación como una necesidad para poder abordar trabajos de mayor valor añadido:

O SEA, QUE LA FORMACIÓN ESTÁ DIRECTAMENTE RELACIONADA CON LA EVOLUCIÓN DE LA MISMA EMPRESA.

‘Depende de la evolución de la empresa, de a dónde quieres llegar, a dónde vas, o a dónde te empuja el mercado, simplemente.’

YA, ¿LOS TRABAJADORES SUELEN TENER ALGUNA INICIATIVA EN FORMARSE?

‘Sí, también.’, INSTRUCTOR_5_G_G.

Dos de los instructores relatan las actividades de formación que se desarrollan en sus instalaciones de manera estructurada. En el primer caso, INSTRUCTOR_2 explica la necesidad que había de formar a los trabajadores recién incorporados durante un tiempo relativamente largo, debido a que la tecnología específica que se empleaba en

la empresa, estampación en frío, requería una formación que no se abordaba con suficiente profundidad en el centro de FP. Explica el instructor que esto fue así hasta que surgió una experiencia formativa y de colaboración centro-empresas singular que se describe más adelante: lo que se denominó postgrado en estampación y que en la actualidad se oferta como Programa de Especialización – Diseño y Producción de Procesos de Forja. En el caso de INSTRUCTOR_6, se describe la formación estructurada que se tiene definida en la EMPRESA_6 (cooperativa grande) y que aplica a cualquier persona que se incorpora. La superación de este proceso formativo resulta necesaria para adquirir la condición de socio de la empresa:

*‘El período de formación de una persona que entra en EMPRESA_6 tiene un período de... cuando ya está capacitado para ir fuera, necesita aproximadamente 3 años. Y lo tenemos totalmente estructurado, y examen y toda la pesca’,
Y la formación específica en lo que necesita en EMPRESA_6 se le da aquí’,
‘Es una formación que intentamos que sea reglada porque metemos clientes, metemos técnicos de las delegaciones’, INSTRUCTOR_6, 37, 45, 55, 158.*

En las diferentes entrevistas se ha puesto de manifiesto que, más allá de conocer el nombre de las diferentes titulaciones de FP, tanto de Ciclo Medio como de Ciclo Superior, los instructores no conocen sus contenidos en los mismos términos (competencia, cualificaciones, certificado de profesionalidad) con los que se conocen en el ámbito educativo. La palabra competencia aparece como ajena al lenguaje de las empresas, a excepción de la EMPRESA_6, donde la formación se planifica en función de una matriz de competencias propia de la empresa, que se elaboró como desarrollo de un instrumento similar utilizado en uno de los centros de FP de su entorno.

Finalmente, resulta de elevado interés describir uno de los proyectos que mejor ponen de manifiesto la colaboración entre empresas y centro de formación profesional, y el apoyo del Departamento de Educación del Gobierno Vasco, y que ha sido mencionado en varias de las entrevistas. Concretamente, en la entrevista realizada a un antiguo director de centro de FP (HEADMASTER) en la Fase Primera de este proyecto de investigación), y en las entrevistas realizadas a TUTOR_8 e INSTRUCTOR_2.

Se detectó la problemática:

'(...) vemos mucha empresa pequeña que es de estampación, con muchos problemas porque tienen mucha competencia con empresas extranjeras, esa tecnología no está definida, no hay ni un ciclo que hable de esa tecnología; entonces detecta eso y se empieza a preparar.', HEADMASTER, 76.

Y las dificultades que había para contar con personal cualificado en las empresas, especialmente en un momento de relevo generacional:

'Y lo que nos pasaba es que la gente que contratabas tenía conocimiento cero de esta tecnología. Y entonces venían... teníamos, más o menos, dos años prácticamente de formación en interno. Y es una formación que sale muy cara y para cuando empezaban a...', INSTRUCTOR_2, 36.

Las empresas, por su cuenta, tenían dificultades para sistematizar la formación específica que necesitaban estos perfiles:

'Pero en lo que se refiere a la formación, no había, entonces claro, y es difícil que estés en la guerra de cada día, y digas: "¿Y de dónde saco yo tiempo para hacer una cosa de estas?", ¿no? Pues yo también me apoyé mucho en los seminarios que vimos en Estados Unidos...', INSTRUCTOR_2, 36.

Se obtuvo el apoyo del Gobierno Vasco y de las propias empresas de la zona:

'Bueno, para todo eso se solicita también a la Viceconsejería, que todo hay que decirlo, ayuda, y nos da las horas de tres profesores a dedicación completa durante dos años, al principio dos, luego fueron más, pero dos años para que se dediquen, venga, a investigar eso. Estos profesores van a Alemania, van a Holanda, van a Italia, van a Ohio, Estados Unidos.', HEADMASTER, 76.

'Para impartir esos cursos, fíjate cuál es el grado de implicación de las empresas, (...) 500.000 euros ponen las empresas para la compra de la máquina, y otros 300.000 euros pone el Gobierno Vasco, para la compra de material de laboratorio y algunas otras cosas.', HEADMASTER, 80.

Se definió el programa formativo de manera conjunta, contando con los representantes de las empresas del entorno, los profesores del centro y también con la participación de universidades y otras empresas extranjeras líderes en la tecnología. Se desarrolló un

posgrado específico combinando conocimiento técnico y metodología para definir el contenido formativo:

Y el resultado:

‘El Posgrado de Estampación, eso para mí es ejemplar para todo el mundo, lo que se hace aquí, que es a alumnos titulados en formación profesional, en un año formarles en una tecnología concreta que es la estampación en frío. Creo que salen, o las empresas nos han dicho durante años, que salen bastante bien preparados y que el gap ese que decíamos antes, entre que salen del centro a que sean trabajadores autónomos, se reduce en un 50% o lo que fuera...’, TUTOR_8, 91.

Además,

‘Pero no es sólo la formación eso, sino que luego las empresas vienen y hacen pruebas en nuestra máquina aquí, con lo cual ellos no paran las máquinas en su empresa,’, HEADMASTER, 80.

Posteriormente, se trabaja de manera conjunta entre centro y empresa para planificar la formación de los futuros trabajadores, con antelación a que se incorporen definitivamente a la empresa, lo que representa una forma específica de formación dual *ad hoc*:

‘Y cuando había que contratar a alguien, se hablaba con el centro, y llegábamos a un... hacíamos un contrato en el que ellos iban a la escuela, iban haciendo el curso, y venían, por ejemplo, a las tardes dos horas aquí a hacerlo ya in situ ¿no? Entonces iban a haciendo el curso... y con el compromiso de que al terminar el curso de estampación entraban ya aquí con un contrato de seis meses normal. De esa manera, cuando venían ya de la escuela después de ese año, habían hecho practicas también aquí y ya iban muy rodados.’, INSTRUCTOR_2, 86-88.

Según la información publicada en la web del centro de FP¹¹ este posgrado ha ido incorporando de manera permanente los avances en tecnología que se han producido

¹¹ <http://www.imaltuna.hezkuntza.net/web/guest/aurkezpena>

entorno a la estampación en frío. Además, se han desarrollado otras ofertas formativas relacionadas.

Se ha observado una opinión diferente entre tutores e instructores en relación con la formación continua. Mientras que la mayoría de los tutores de centro manifiestan no observar una cultura de formación continua en las empresas, sin embargo, los instructores consideran ésta como una actividad muy habitual. Según la información recogida, una parte muy importante de la formación continua no se imparte en los centros de FP, sino que se desarrolla de manera interna en la empresa o recurriendo a otros proveedores de formación (suministradores de equipamiento y/o servicios a la empresa), lo que podría explicar la diferente visión.

8.1.3. La visión de los responsables de empresa.

a) Perfil de los responsables de empresa.

Los perfiles de los responsables de empresa cubren un abanico amplio, habiendo participado desde responsables de departamento hasta gerentes de empresa. En los siguientes párrafos se desarrolla la descripción tanto de responsables que han participado como informantes como de las empresas en las que éstos trabajan.

El primero de los perfiles, RRHH_1, es responsable de recursos humanos de tres de las plantas de un importante grupo del sector de la automoción (empresa grande). La planta en concreto se dedica a la estampación de series largas de piezas.

El segundo perfil RRHH_2 corresponde a una persona que se encarga de gestionar el Plan de Formación y de realizar las entrevistas a las personas en los procesos de selección y contratación, ante la ausencia del perfil de Responsable de Recursos Humanos en la empresa. Esta empresa se caracteriza por ser de tamaño mediano y por haber iniciado un proceso de conversión en cooperativa. La empresa se dedica a la producción por estampación de series cortas de piezas para el sector de la automoción.

‘Al principio yo solo hacía trabajos de administración, pero luego ya empecé a hacer cosas de personal también. En el organigrama no hay un responsable de Recursos Humanos, pero... Ahora además ha habido un cambio interno y tal, y antes me tocaban cositas como el plan de formación que llevo años ya haciéndolo

yo, y ahora ya pues las nóminas, contratos y seguridad social, y un poco de todo.’, RRHH_2, 3.

RRHH_3 es el gerente de una empresa pequeña de subcontratación que produce series cortas de piezas medianas-grandes para diferentes tipos de cliente. El gerente tiene titulación de Ingeniería, aunque cursó primero estudios de formación profesional.

RRHH_4 es el director de personal de una empresa mediana que se dedica a la inyección de goma para el sector de la automoción. Produce series largas de piezas. Según RRHH_4, el hecho de producir para el sector de la automoción caracteriza, en gran medida, la gestión de personal de la empresa:

‘Tienes que tener en cuenta que estamos en Automoción y Automoción es aleatoria por definición. Hoy te piden cinco y mañana te piden cero. Y al día siguiente te piden quince y te tienes que adaptar. Y además tienes que adaptarte en tiempos, tienes que adaptarte en cantidad, en calidad por supuesto, y eso te obliga a manejar una temporalidad un poquito importante.’ RRHH_4, 31.

El perfil de RRHH_5 corresponde al de Responsable de Personal de una cooperativa de tamaño grande que se dedica a la máquina herramienta.

‘Somos una cooperativa que se fundó en el año [19]52, con lo que ya pues tenemos 63 años de historia. Y siempre vinculada a la máquina-herramienta. Hemos hecho diferentes tipos de máquinas a lo largo de la historia. Y bueno, nuestro es todo el proceso, desde el diseño, fabricación, montaje, venta, servicio de asistencia técnica, todo el proceso asociado a la máquina en este caso. Estamos en este momento en torno a 230 personas, de las que en torno a 220 somos socios. Los 10 que no son socios es porque están en un proceso de superación del proceso de prueba, por llamarlo de alguna manera, ¿no? Pero es vocación de la empresa que todas las personas terminen siendo socias.’, RRHH_5, 3.

RRHH_6 es el presidente de un grupo empresarial cuya principal actividad es el mecanizado de alta precisión para sectores tecnológicos:

‘Nosotros somos mecánicos, eso es nuestro core competencial, de ahí partimos, y lo que hemos hecho es tratar de identificar dónde podemos aplicar lo que sabemos, ¿no? Buscando, por otra parte, producto propio.’, RRHH_6, 42.

‘Entonces, dentro de lo que es la Mecánica, siempre además hemos estado orientados hacia lo difícil, no hacia lo fácil. Así, por ejemplo, en el mundo aeronáutico donde actuamos, desde un principio hemos sido selectivos y no hemos ido a lo más fácil, lo que abunda en el estado, por ejemplo, que es la estructura aeronáutica o lo que podemos llamar calderería, fuselaje y estructura. Eh, mucha actividad, demanda mucha mano de obra, pero no tiene proceso complejo, no tiene mayor valor.’, RRHH_6, 42.

‘Entonces ahora mismo pues trabajamos en los ámbitos aeronáutico donde las piezas tienen valor y tienen complejidad.’, RRHH_6, 44.

Finalmente, RRHH_7 es el responsable del Departamento de Diseño Mecánico (*‘el departamento más técnico’*) de una empresa mediana dedicada al diseño y construcción de máquina herramienta:

‘Somos una empresa de máquina-herramienta, muy orientada a la máquina especial, muy orientada a la máquina de alta producción para el sector de Automoción principalmente. No sólo, pero sí es uno de los puntos principales de la empresa.’, RRHH_7, 3.

En la Figura 8.7. se recoge la relación de los informantes de este colectivo que han participado en el proyecto:

Figura 8.7. Relación de responsables de recursos humanos que han participado en las entrevistas.

RRHH	CARGO	EMPRESA	COMARCA	TAMAÑO	SECTOR	ACTIVIDAD
RRHH_1	Resp. Recursos Humanos	EMPRESA_1	Duranguesado	Grande (Planta de Grupo)	Mecanizado Automoción	Series largas
RRHH_2	Responsable Formación	EMPRESA_2	Alto Deba	Mediana Cooperativa	Estampación Automoción	Series cortas
RRHH_3	Gerente	EMPRESA_7	Duranguesado	Pequeña	Mecanizado Multisector	Series corta Pieza grande
RRHH_4	Responsable de Personal	EMPRESA_3	Gasteiz	Mediana	Mecanizado Automoción	Series largas
RRHH_5	Responsable de Personal	EMPRESA_6	Alto Deba	Grande Cooperativa	Máquina H.	Soluciones de mecanizado
RRHH_6	Presidente	EMPRESA_8	Bajo Deba	Grande	Mecanizado Multisector	Piezas Alto Valor Añadido
RRHH_7	Resp. Dpto. Diseño Mecánico	EMPRESA_9	Bajo Deba	Mediana	Máquina H.	Máquinas especiales

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

b) La visión de la Formación en Centros de Trabajo.

Las personas entrevistadas muestran conocimiento de la dinámica en la que se gestiona la entrada de alumnos de FCT en las empresas. Sin embargo, parece representativo que las dos personas que no fueron sugeridas por un centro de FP, aunque de perfiles muy diferentes (presidente de grupo y responsable de departamento técnico) aparezcan un poco más lejanas de la gestión de este módulo formativo.

Ninguna de las personas entrevistadas ha manifestado que la razón por la que se acojan estudiantes de FCT sea la de reforzar los equipos de trabajo de las empresas de manera puntual. Las razones apuntadas tienen que ver más con dinámicas de selección de personal para la incorporación de nuevos perfiles en las empresas. Incluso el gerente de la empresa pequeña se refiere al proceso formativo de la persona de FCT como una ‘inversión’:

‘Y al de CENTRO_3 le digo: “TUTOR_8, si no tienes bueno, dime que no tienes bueno y no hago esto, no quiero invertir. Pero si tienes bueno...”’, RRHH_3, 115.

El proceso más estructurado para la gestión de la entrada de estudiantes de FCT a la empresa corresponde a la EMPRESA_6, cooperativa grande. En esta empresa es el propio gerente quien inicia el proceso:

‘Eso es, cuando empiezan la FCT yo lo que hago es estar con CENTRO_1, con CENTRO_3, y con el OTRO_CENTRO, y les digo: “Este año necesito 15 chicos de prácticas”. Que vienen de marzo a junio, yo hago una evaluación de estas personas, y me quedo con los que considero más adecuados.’, RRHH_5, 87.

Menciona que la vocación de la empresa es el largo plazo y la conveniencia de incorporar personas sin experiencia:

‘Nosotros estamos mirando a largo plazo, entonces nos cuadra muy bien que venga gente junior, sin experiencia, que vaya viviendo nuestra cultura desde el principio y se quede ahí durante mucho tiempo con nosotros.’, RRHH_5, 183.

‘(...) si vamos a la mano de obra directa, pues bueno, aquí ya es donde... este es el... aquí es donde aterrizan la mayoría de los chavales que empiezan en prácticas y que terminan quedándose.’, RRHH_5, 23.

Para RRHH_1, la FCT también es una manera de incorporación progresiva de personal, y lamenta que, en muchas ocasiones, no puede ofrecer al alumno la opción de quedarse en la empresa. Para esta persona, uno de los aspectos positivos de incorporar estudiante de FCT es:

‘¿Y positivo, lo que aporta? Yo creo que es bueno que entre savia nueva. Al margen de que se queden o no, que si no corremos el riesgo de cerrarnos mucho en nosotros mismos. Y te lo digo en serio, o sea, no es un tópico ni nada. Luego ves ahí los típicos esperando otro quinquenio y tal, que se organizan así la vida, mirando el calendario, a ver cuándo cumplen otro quinquenio.’, RRHH_1, 195.

‘Pues sí necesitamos también estar en contacto con el entorno e incorporar chavales.’

QUE TE TRAEN FORMAS NUEVAS DE HACER LAS COSAS O...

Sí, savia nueva. Que vengan ya pues con su cierto dominio de ofimática, que sean los que hacen los indicadores o que le ayuden al de 57...Y: “Ya te hago yo, ya te ayudo yo a hacer el Excel o...”. O sea, un poco que venga gente empujando un poco y con ganas.’, RRHH_1, 195-199.

En el caso de RRHH_3, contar con la FCT como mecanismo de selección de perfiles a incorporar a la empresa supone una ventaja con respecto a una contratación directa con origen en otra empresa:

‘A mí, joe, aquí lo que no quiero para nada es a un tío que trabaja en otra empresa, cogerle y contratarle y luego, ostras, no me gusta y yo no tengo... no... la conciencia me dice que yo a ese tío no lo puedo poner en la calle. Porque un mecanizador bueno no está en el paro hoy en día... Eso es cierto, es así. Entonces, ¿qué remedio me queda? Pues coger gente joven. Y digo: “Bueno, cojo gente joven que está en esto, y mira, ningún compromiso por ninguna de las partes”. Le cojo. Que a mí no me gusta el perfil, le digo: “Pues mira, no veo que encajes en el perfil que nosotros necesitamos”.’, RRHH_3, 109.

c) La Formación Profesional Continua.

La formación continua de adultos ha sido objeto de una creciente atención por parte de los gobiernos, y progresivamente se han ido implementando marcos de financiación

para fomentar que las empresas incorporen la formación continua como una práctica habitual. Sin embargo, la CVET sigue estando menos regulada que la IVET, y se encuentra mucho más condicionada por el marco profesional, sectorial y/o institucional (CEDEFOP, 2015b). Según este mismo documento, la mayoría de los programas de apoyo están destinados a financiar la formación ofrecida por distintos proveedores y se desarrolla fuera de las empresas. Sin embargo, en las entrevistas se ha observado que, aunque las empresas sí recurren a proveedores externos, entre los que se encuentran los centros de FP, la mayoría de la formación es interna, actuando como formadores otros trabajadores de la empresa.

En la mayoría de las empresas consideradas, la formación continua aparece poco estructurada y, fundamentalmente, orientada a cubrir las necesidades técnicas que van surgiendo. En las empresas que trabajan con series cortas o con producto propio y/o unitario, los procesos formativos hasta lograr la productividad buscada son más largos. En estos casos, la formación continua ('período de aprendizaje') se realiza de manera interna en la empresa:

'Pero bueno, una persona de taller tiene un período de aprendizaje. Nosotros no tenemos muchos puestos en los que rápidamente una persona empiece a funcionar.', RRHH_6, 112.

'Depende del perfil, de la curva de aprendizaje de la que hablábamos. Pero te puede costar entre un año y medio y tres años el empezar a sacar trabajo de verdad', RRHH_7, 53.

RRHH_1 mencionó una iniciativa desarrollada en la EMPRESA_1 en la que, en colaboración con un centro de FP, se intentó ligar la formación continua a un proceso para la obtención progresiva de certificados de profesionalidad. Sin embargo, destaca la dificultad práctica de los certificados y la escasa motivación que éstos ofrecían como principales razones para limitar la aplicación general de la iniciativa:

'Yo en su día sí estuve hablando... bueno, el año pasado, de hecho, con el Instituto de Máquina Herramienta, con mi idea de quizá lanzar un programa aquí interno para esos trabajadores que tenemos, bueno, con experiencia acreditada pero que carecen de un título formal, pues poder por ahí construir algo. Al final, entre dimes

y directes, la dedicación horaria que era necesaria, y que en algunos casos pues se veía que igual no iba a ser un gran revulsivo o un incentivo, pues hombre, no es que lo hayamos aplazado, lo hemos focalizado más en los perfiles de mantenimiento industrial. Ahí sí estamos haciendo algo.’, RRHH_1, 26-29.

En las empresas en las que la producción está orientada a series largas, no parece haber mucho margen para ofrecer recorridos profesionales a las personas, al menos a las directamente relacionadas con la producción, que es el caso de los titulados en formación profesional. Esta situación hace que haya pocas expectativas de promoción interna.

‘En producción somos muy... bueno, en general en la empresa somos muy planos. Tenemos muy pocos niveles.’, RRHH_4, 109.

Esto se cumple incluso en el caso de la empresa que pertenece a un grupo grande:

Entonces hay determinados puestos donde... tampoco nos engañemos, somos grupo multinacional y con gran crecimiento y tal. Pero luego tenemos una gestión muy descentralizada. A mí no me es fácil hacer planes de carrera a la gente.’, RRHH_1, 95.

Otra de las dificultades a las que se alude para el diseño de planes formativos a largo plazo es la presión que ejerce el ritmo de la actividad:

‘Lo hemos intentado muchas veces, pero al final el día a día te come.’, RRHH_7, 93.

‘En que es tan cambiante la realidad de la empresa que, muchas veces, acompañarla con las expectativas de la persona es muy difícil. E igual en otro tipo de grupos es más fácil. Eso aquí es complicadísimo. Pues bueno, porque hay muchos cambios, porque... quizá por el crecimiento tan rápido que hemos tenido, que no nos ha dejado asimilarlo muchas veces, o planificarlo excesivamente.’, RRHH_1, 103-105.

Se observa que, en la mayoría de los casos, la formación continua se ofrece al personal en base a las necesidades que los responsables de producción van observando, y que se imparte de forma interna, en muchos casos haciendo rotar a los trabajadores en diferentes puestos de trabajo, de manera que aprendan con la práctica, con escaso o ningún contenido teórico.

'Nosotros tenemos una serie de tipos de trabajo y yo estoy muy encima de la capacitación de la gente y de la formación de la gente, muy encima. Pero al que le ves que domina los trabajos sencillos, le vas dando...', RRHH_3, 121-125.

'Tienes una serie de trabajos, pero te condicionan los plazos, te condicionan los clientes, la experiencia de determinadas personas con determinados clientes, que también pesa. Entonces vas repartiendo cartas, se intenta repartir las cartas con inteligencia. Intentas que la gente vaya progresando, que no esté haciendo siempre lo mismo, que vaya creciendo...

No tienes todas las cartas en la mano, ojalá las tuvieras, porque entonces sí que diseñarías un plan a medida de cada uno. Pero bueno, intentas...', RRHH_7, 93.

A veces reconocen que, aunque ven la necesidad de otro tipo de formación menos práctica, se termina haciendo formación técnica interna:

'Donde...sí, hay carencias, nosotros tampoco somos expertos, y quizá ahí como autocrítica, ¿no?, cuando hacemos formación interna y tal, pues siempre es mucho más fácil acabar en lo clásico, ¿no? En la formación técnica...', RRHH_1, 89.

En el caso de la EMPRESA_2, RRHH_2 explica la manera en la que se va redactando un Plan de Formación anual en base a las necesidades que los responsables de la formación van detectando, y que tiene como objetivo desarrollar cierta polivalencia entre las personas que trabajan en la producción. Esta formación, eminentemente técnica, se imparte no exclusiva, aunque sí mayoritariamente, de manera interna. También se recurre a cursos que ofrecen diferentes proveedores, lo que incluye a los centros de formación profesional, que envían de manera periódica su oferta a la persona responsable de la FCT (interlocutora con los centros, INSTRUCTOR_2). Como elemento diferencial, esta formación se contempla también como un proceso de promoción interna:

Luego, los conocimientos que ha adquirido, pues luego hay una sección... por secciones tenemos divididas las polivalencias y luego se van marcando los conocimientos que vas adquiriendo. Porque al final, dependiendo de las máquinas y de los conocimientos que tengas, pues luego las categorías suelen... dependen de la cantidad de formación...' RRHH_2, 95.

EMPRESA_6, ofrece una gestión de la formación continua muy diferenciada en relación con el resto de las empresas participantes en la investigación. Su gerente, RRHH_5, indica las características culturales (*'Nosotros estamos mirando a largo plazo'*, 183) y societarias de la empresa, en la que la formación continua está, en el inicio de la carrera profesional de los recién incorporados a la empresa, unida al proceso de hacerse socio de la cooperativa; y, más adelante, a lograr la homologación interna de los procesos productivos, entre otras cuestiones.

'Partiendo de que, en EMPRESA_6, uno de los principios básicos es el de la promoción interna, siempre que podemos... o sea, yo no dejo escapar ninguna ocasión de que alguien del montaje dé el salto a cualquier departamento directo. Porque eso socialmente se valora muy mucho, y a ellos pues les da, bueno, pues una esperanza de poder salir del taller alguna vez. Hay gente que no quiere y que está muy a gusto, ¿no? Pero yo creo que es algo motivador para aquel que realmente tiene inquietudes, el saber que puede dar el salto.', RRHH_5, 29.

'Normalmente fijamos un periodo inicial de un año en el régimen general, con un contrato eventual, luego pasan a ser socios pero de duración determinada durante dos años, y luego transcurrido ya ese tercer año, al comienzo del cuarto, en principio pasan a ser socios indefinidos.', RRHH_5, 5.

'Entonces empezamos un proceso por el que todos los que ya estaban en casa tenían que ir pasando por ese reciclaje homogeneizador, por decirlo de alguna manera. Y luego a las nuevas incorporaciones no te diré que de forma automática el primer día, pero en estos tres años irán pasando por ese proceso, ¿no? De forma que todos aprenden siguiendo el mismo guión, el mismo proceso de montaje.', RRH_5, 125.

En la EMPRESA_6, y a lo largo de los procesos formativos estructurados, se recurre tanto a formación interna (mayoritariamente, y de forma especial para cuestiones técnicas) como a proveedores externos, entre los que se incluyen los centros de formación profesional.

'(...) Un proveedor que tenga conocimientos para eso.', RRHH_5, 174.

En algunos casos, especialmente en las empresas de mayor tamaño, se ha mencionado la existencia de tablas o matrices de capacitación, basado en competencias u otros indicadores, como guiones iniciales para orientar la formación continua. Sin embargo, no parecen guardar correlación con los marcos de cualificaciones y unidades de competencia que estructuran la formación profesional inicial, tal y como se describe en la siguiente sección.

d) Relación con los centros y conocimiento de la estructura formativa.

A pesar de que una de las personas entrevistadas considera que los centros formativos deberían trabajar más la relación con las empresas, especialmente con las que ofrecen una mayor capacidad de contratación de alumnos...

‘Pero yo creo que las escuelas de formación profesional tienen que actualizarse, y tiene que trabajarse más la relación empresa-escuelas. Sobre todo, pues para empresas... que nosotros ya vamos teniendo una cierta dimensión y tenemos una cierta capacidad de contratación.’, RRHH_6, 176.

... se ha observado que la valoración general es que los centros de FP se encuentran bastante cercanos a las empresas, y que esa cercanía también es el resultado de una cierta evolución.

‘Y ahí, con las escuelas de formación profesional hemos trabajado un poquito.’, RRHH_4, 257.

¿TIENES MUCHA RELACIÓN CON EL CENTRO DE FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL?

‘Bueno, sí, cuando tenemos el... siempre nos suelen mandar los catálogos, tal, cualquier... Más que yo, suele tener INSTRUCTOR_2, para estas cosas siempre preguntan por INSTRUCTOR_2.’, RRHH_2, 24-27.

‘Yo creo que las escuelas de formación profesional se han ido acercando mucho más a las empresas que en el pasado. Están mucho más en contacto con nosotros, nos piden, nos pedimos mutuamente más cosas. Hay más contacto, yo creo, que antiguamente.’, RRHH_4, 257.

‘Sí percibo que los centros se están orientando más a la empresa, yo sí empiezo a ver esas cosas. Son flashes o detallitos, pero...’, RRHH_1, 69.

No obstante, y a pesar de la buena relación, uno de los entrevistados observa la diferente relación de los interlocutores de los centros con las empresas (grandes y pequeñas):

‘Al final, las escuelas son nuestros proveedores. Y no siempre nos dan lo mejor que tienen, lógicamente. Porque tienen... tienen que repartir. Si voy yo y digo que necesito un montador, y va EMPRESA_6 y dice que necesita un montador, lógicamente el montador bueno va a EMPRESA_6. Eso ya sabemos cómo es, es así.’, RRHH_3, 115.

También se observa que, como resultado de la relación entre ambos, existe en los centros el conocimiento necesario para valorar la idoneidad de los diferentes perfiles para su incorporación a las empresas:

‘Me dijeron que no tenían bueno, y no tenían, y luego pues me dijeron: “Bueno, pues ya tengo un perfil que creo que puede encajar y tal”.’, RRHH_3, 115.

‘Pero para operarios de máquina, por ejemplo, nos da mejor resultado personas que provengan de la escuela, de escuelas con las que ya tenemos acuerdos de colaboración, y que normalmente seleccionan... nos seleccionan, ya hacen una preselección.’, RRHH_6, 114.

Los verbatims anteriores vuelven a poner de manifiesto que las empresas siguen confiando más en los centros de FP cuando se trata de seleccionar perfiles, que en las cualificaciones que acredita el alumno.

En cuanto al conocimiento que los responsables de empresa han mostrado sobre la estructura formativa y los diferentes instrumentos desarrollados en torno a la cualificación de personas, se observa que la titulación sigue siendo el principal indicador de la formación de los alumnos. Preguntados específicamente sobre su grado de familiaridad con los conceptos unidad de competencia y competencia, la mayoría de las respuestas han sido negativas.

¿CONOCES CÓMO SE ESTRUCTURA LA FORMACIÓN DE LA FP? ES DECIR, QUÉ HAY DETRÁS DE LA TITULACIÓN.

‘No. Yo, por ejemplo, no.’, RRHH_2, 28.

¿ESTÁS FAMILIARIZADO CON EL CONCEPTO DE UNIDAD COMPETENCIAL, COMPETENCIA, Y TERMINOLOGÍA DE ESTE TIPO?

'No.', RRHH_7, 128.

También se han dado casos en los que el concepto de competencia es conocido y utilizado en el ámbito de la empresa para el desarrollo de sus propios instrumentos de capacitación o valoración de trabajadores, sin que parezca existir correlación con los mismos conceptos empleados en el ámbito educativo:

NO SÉ SI CONOCES LO QUE SE HACE EN EL ÁMBITO EDUCATIVO, EN LA FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL, QUE SE TRABAJA TAMBIÉN EN BASE A COMPETENCIAS.

'De oída un poco.'

SABES SI EN ESTA MATRIZ DE COMPETENCIAS QUE UTILIZÁIS, SI ESTAS COMPETENCIAS TIENEN QUE VER CON LAS DE LOS CENTROS O MÁS BIEN SON PROPIAS VUESTRAS, ¿NO?

'Nuestras, sí, totalmente.', RRHH_4, 198-201.

¿ESTAS COMPETENCIAS TIENEN ALGO QUE VER CON LAS COMPETENCIAS QUE SE DEFINEN EN EL ÁMBITO EDUCATIVO DE FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL?

'Eh... no sé.'

ENTONCES, AQUÍ NO SE BUSCA ESA RELACIÓN, SI HAY SERÁ PORQUE HA COINCIDIDO...

'Eso es.', RRHH_5, 76-79.

Se observa una situación diferente en el caso de los Certificados de Profesionalidad, ya que estos instrumentos son conocidos en la mayoría de los casos. Su significado en el ámbito laboral se describe, en uno de los casos, como:

'Sería titulación, sí, una titulación. En lugar de tener una titulación tipo técnico superior y técnico medio, tiene un Certificado de Profesionalidad en Mecanizado por Arranque de Viruta. Bueno, eso quiere decir que tiene una formación técnica. Tiene formación técnica.' RRHH_4, 61.

Sin embargo, excluyendo el caso específico de RRHH_1, que manifestó haber querido ligar la formación continua y la obtención de certificados en un plan que la empresa desarrollaría con el apoyo de un centro de FP, en el resto de los casos reconocen haberse

encontrado en la práctica con pocos o ningún certificado: *'no son frecuentes', 'no me he encontrado', 'ninguno me ha presentado eso', 'yo he visto muy poquitos'*.

e) Otras cuestiones relevantes.

1 Algunos elementos de diferenciación entre las empresas.

A lo largo de las entrevistas se han ido describiendo las diferentes situaciones a las que sus responsables de personal o de departamento se enfrentan, y que han ido poniendo de manifiesto las diferencias entre empresas en función de su tamaño, tipo de la actividad e incluso cultura interna.

Una de las cuestiones que se observa es que, en función del tipo de actividad (o del departamento concreto), la incorporación de nuevos perfiles depende de la titulación (exigiendo un perfil mínimo en algunos casos) o se basa más bien en una experiencia contrastada en trabajos similares. Así, los perfiles directamente relacionados con la producción de series largas valoran más la experiencia y, como consecuencia, la posibilidad de ser productivos a la mayor brevedad de tiempo, sin período de aprendizaje. En estos casos, no se requiere ningún perfil concreto, es más, la variedad de titulación o su ausencia resulta significativa. Esta situación coincide con la existencia de índices de temporalidad significativos, provocados por un sector, el de la automoción, que se considera *'aleatorio por definición'*.

'Fijos de Producción tenemos graduados sociales, yo creo que por lo menos un par de ellos. Yo creo que hasta tenemos un economista.', RRHH_4, 81.

'Nosotros siempre hemos trabajado con un nivel de temporales significativo. Tienes que tener en cuenta que estamos en Automoción y Automoción es aleatoria por definición (...), y eso te obliga a manejar una temporalidad un poquito importante.', RRHH_4, 31.

'Sí, [valoramos] más la experiencia. Ten en cuenta que nosotros como lo que buscamos es hacer piezas desde el primer día... Porque si contratas a alguien temporal es porque tienes una necesidad, y la necesidad es imperiosa. O sea, no es una necesidad a medio plazo, no es una necesidad a 15 días, no, es ya.', RRHH_4, 45.

Sin embargo, en la misma empresa, en departamentos vinculados con Producción, Mantenimiento, Taller Mecánico y Oficina Técnica, se observan necesidades diferentes. Estos departamentos requieren perfiles de un determinado nivel formativo. Cada vez más frecuentemente se exige un Grado Superior, e incluso varios grados, para garantizar una mayor polivalencia, y se da por hecho que la persona recién incorporada tendrá que pasar por un cierto período formativo hasta ser completamente autónoma en su trabajo. Una situación similar se observa en las empresas que se caracterizan por desarrollar trabajos unitarios o por tener productos tecnológicamente avanzados.

‘Nosotros, ten en cuenta que hacemos trabajos unitarios, nada repetitivos, son piezas medianas-grandes, para cli... no siempre para el mismo cliente, para distintos clientes, no siempre el mismo tipo de pieza. Nosotros somos un taller de subcontratación. Entonces, en un taller de subcontratación, el trabajo que te viene es cualquier tipo de trabajo. Entonces aprendes mucho, pero hace falta gente con mucha experiencia, buenos profesionales para poder sacar el trabajo y de forma correcta.’, RRHH_3, 59.

‘En una empresa de subcontratación, donde los trabajos no son siempre los mismos, y de repente puedes tener el taller lleno de trabajos fáciles, y de repente tienes el taller lleno de trabajos difíciles.’ RRHH_3, 65.

‘Entonces es mejor poco y bueno que mucho y mediano. El truco de ser competitivo en una empresa de subcontratación es tener poca estructura.’, RRHH_3, 73.

‘Hay negocios donde tú pones a un señor en una cadena y en tres meses sabe hacer esa labor perfectamente. Pero nosotros tenemos un producto tecnológicamente avanzado, muchos modelos diferentes, y pasan años para cuando una persona se desenvuelve al 100% en este ámbito. Entonces, ¿qué es lo que estamos buscando? Por ejemplo, en la mano de obra directa, bueno, es una condición absolutamente indispensable que sean... que tengan un ciclo formativo superior...’, RRHH_5, 39.

‘Entonces, entre año y medio y tres años te puede costar el que en un trabajo técnico como el nuestro, alguien te empiece a sacar trabajo de verdad.’, RRHH_7, 55.

'Aquí ¿sabes qué pasa? Pues que se encuentran con un escenario donde les va a costar más empezar a aportar valor porque tienen que pasar por un proceso de aprendizaje más largo que a lo mejor en otra empresa.', RRHH_6, 102.

Finalmente, en EMPRESA_6 se ha observado un elemento significativo:

'En EMPRESA_6 tenemos definidos cinco valores que se concretan en unos comportamientos concretos que son de aplicación a todos. En el año 2010 se definieron por un equipo amplio de socios de EMPRESA_6, y luego se presentó a todo el colectivo y todos lo aceptamos. Y todos aceptamos que para ser socio en EMPRESA_6 teníamos que tener una serie de valores que son la confianza, trabajo en equipo, espíritu de superación, agilidad y rapidez y principios básicos cooperativos. Esto cada uno luego se desarrolla en una serie de comportamientos concretos.', RRHH_5, 59.

'Y luego, además de esto, tenemos una serie de competencias asociadas a cada puesto.', RRHH_5, 67.

RRHH_6 considera que esta situación, muy propia de la empresa, está relacionada más con la 'cultura de la empresa' y un determinado estilo de dirección a lo largo de los años, que con el hecho de ser una cooperativa:

'Yo he trabajado en otras dos cooperativas diferentes y las formas de gestionar son diferentes.', RRHH_5, 247-251.

'En mi inocencia, digo: "Bueno, lo que me funciona aquí me va a funcionar allí. Entonces es más o menos aplicar lo mismo". Pero no funciona así. No funciona así porque hay cultura diferente, porque el estilo del liderazgo es diferente, porque el negocio es diferente. Aunque todos estemos dentro, más o menos, de la máquina-herramienta, jo, me he encontrado que procesos que aquí han ido rodados porque la gente ya tiene una sensibilidad, una cultura, una forma de entender las cosas, en otras cooperativas no ha habido forma de hacerlas rodar, o me está costando Dios y ayuda, o el resultado es diferente, ¿no?', RRHH_5, 256.

'Yo creo que es porque la cultura de EMPRESA_6 es ésta, sobre todo.', RRHH_5, 247.

‘Pues al final la empresa es un ser vivo. Y en función, sobre todo, de la gerencia y del equipo directivo –para mí eso es super claro–, según el estilo del gerente y el estilo del consejo de dirección, eso se va como permeando en toda la organización y eso es super importante.’, RRHH_5, 263.

Finalmente, en varias de las entrevistas se ha mencionado el convenio colectivo y la estructura de categorías profesionales como un elemento que condiciona el desarrollo de los nuevos perfiles en la empresa. Por un lado, RRHH_1 opina que la no actualización de los convenios colectivos lleva asociadas dificultades para poder pasar de categorías profesionales, que llevan ligadas de manera rígida las retribuciones (en función de la antigua terminología de oficial de primera, de segunda y de tercera), a los denominados grupos profesionales, cuando considera que es precisamente en éstos donde podrían incorporarse los nuevos enfoques de cualificación, en un rango más amplio. Por otro lado, en EMPRESA_2, el plan de formación está ligado a la estructura de categorías profesionales, para evitar diferencias retributivas significativas entre perfiles que, teniendo similar titulación, vayan diferenciándose como resultado de la formación y las nuevas actividades a las que ésta pudiera conducir, y que daría lugar a problemas en la empresa.

O SEA, QUE ESA FORMACIÓN QUE ADQUIEREN SIRVE PARA UN PROCESO DE PROMOCIÓN INTERNA, ¿NO?

‘Eso es. Al final tiene... las categorías hacen que sea algo objetivo, un resultado objetivo. También tiene su subjetividad, al final cada encargado tiene su... al que tiene el ojo derecho, y a mí me parece que este sabe más, y a este le voy a subir porque se merece... No sé, la verdad, si no tuviéramos categorías cómo...Es que entre los trabajadores hay ese pique de: “Tú cobras esto, y tú tienes esta categoría. ¿Y tú qué sabes más que yo? ¿Dónde está ahí esa diferencia?”.’, RRHH_2, 117-119.

2 La cuestión de la actitud.

Hay un elemento que ha sido mencionado en los tres bloques de entrevistas, siempre entendido en los mismos términos: la actitud de alumnos (y trabajadores) como la característica más valorada por las empresas en los procesos de selección y/o incorporación de alumnos de FCT y, como consecuencia, también los tutores de empresa destacan su importancia.

En la literatura consultada sobre la formación en el ámbito del trabajo se observa una coincidencia general en apuntar a dos elementos como principales condicionantes de los procesos formativos (y que han sido analizados más en profundidad en la sección 4.4. Learning at workplace: theoretical approaches and practical issues). Por un lado, los aspectos organizativos, así como la cultura y el contexto del entorno de trabajo: modelos de toma de decisiones, naturaleza de las interacciones sociales que, en base a relaciones de poder, se desarrollan en el ámbito laboral y la complejidad de la actividad en un entorno cada vez más competitivo. Y, por otro lado, se pone de manifiesto la relevancia de la actitud de las personas individuales. Este último elemento se refiere a que, ante las mismas oportunidades de aprendizaje ofrecidas en el entorno de trabajo, las personas eligen su manera particular de comprometerse con las oportunidades que se le presentan, optimizando o no su aprendizaje y, como consecuencia, su desarrollo profesional. Teniendo en cuenta el contexto de los comentarios que se han realizado a lo largo de las entrevistas, el valor que se le atribuye al término actitud debe entenderse en ese sentido.

‘En el mismo aula se nota, en la actitud que tienen unos y que tienen otros.’, TUTOR_7, 39.

‘Muchas veces, las competencias técnicas, el saber o el tener conocimientos técnicos se da por hecho, pero se ha visto una carencia más de actitudes, trabajo en equipo, ganas de emprender, ganas de aprender cosas nuevas, esas inquietudes.’, TUTOR_9, 15.

‘(...) Y lo que siempre dicen [los empresarios] es: más que las [competencias] técnicas, las actitudinales: “Joé, con ganas de aprender, me da igual el ciclo, si tiene ganas de aprender enseguida... que venga motivado que venga...” TUTOR_9, 79.

‘Pues yo valoro la actitud, porque la inteligencia se supone, ¿no? Pero la actitud, que sea un chaval disciplinado, que sea... majo, que sea abierto, no sé, este tipo de cosas, ¿no?’, INSTRUCTOR_2, 202.

‘Es que nosotros como empresa lo que nos interesa es eso, esa práctica y esa actitud. Puedes tener un chaval que sea muy bueno, pero si no tiene actitud... está sacando sobresalientes en el colegio y tienen unos conocimientos del copón, pero

si no tiene actitud, yo para qué le... para qué le queremos aquí.’, INSTRUCTOR_3, 150.

‘Yo lo técnico... más o menos todos estudian lo mismo y seguro que de los que han estudiado en ese curso, hay alguno que ha sacado mejores notas. Pero sí que me manda [el tutor del centro] gente que trabaja bien y que se le ve ganas. Yo sobre todo valoro mucho la actitud en el trabajo. Es lo que más valoro. Luego aprender te puede costar más o menos, o si le tengo que echar una mano yo o como si le tengo que poner a dos a que le echen una mano. Pero la actitud es muy importante.’, INSTRUCTOR_4, 3.

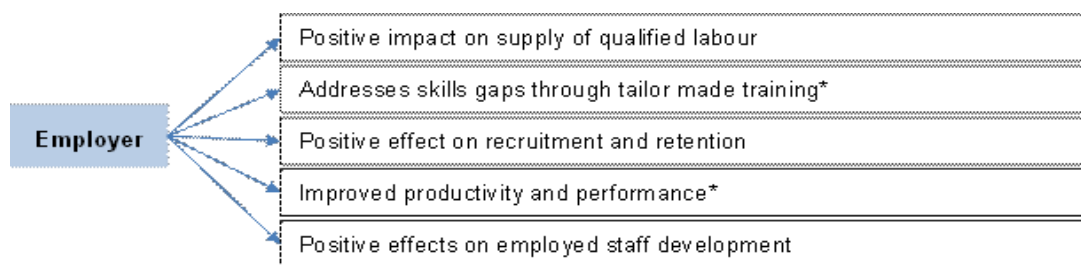
‘Sí, su plantilla o su documento... pero nos hacen [los tutores] preguntas: “¿Cómo le ves en cuanto a actitud?”’, INSTRUCTOR_6, 125.

‘Sobre todo si es una persona seria en su trabajo. Seria e implicada. A mi más que la titulación, me importa la actitud de la persona en el trabajo. Si tiene buena actitud.’, RRHH_2, 49.

‘Entonces primero, si no hay actitud no vale.’, RRHH_3, 117.

Se podría concluir esta parte diciendo que los beneficios que tanto los instructores como los representantes de las empresas observan en la FCT (Figura 8.8.) coinciden con los apuntados por European Commission (2013), tal y como también se ha observado en el caso de los tutores de los centros educativos:

Figura 8.8.: Beneficios observados por parte de las empresas (empleadores) en el aprendizaje en empresa.



** These benefits are in particular attributed to work-based learning approaches where the period of time spent on the workplace is substantial, such as apprenticeships.*

Fuente: European Commission, 2013.

A esta relación de beneficios habría que añadir uno adicional que ha sido apuntado por varios instructores: se refiere a la importante aportación que los alumnos realizan a las actividades de la empresa, especialmente en los momentos de crisis, en los que las plantillas están más *'ajustadas'*. Esta *'aportación'* es, sin embargo, apuntada como riesgo por European Commission (2013: 12), que de manera expresa se refiere a la necesidad de fijar marcos regulatorios que eviten que en las empresas se recurra a la incorporación de alumnos en período formativo para sustituir trabajadores habituales.

8.2. Segunda parte: implicaciones de la relación centro-empresa en los procesos de provisión de competencias

El objetivo de esta segunda parte es analizar cómo los centros de FP y las empresas interactúan a lo largo de los procesos formativos, que se inician en el centro de FP y finalizan en el ámbito de la empresa donde, además de cursarse el módulo denominado Formación en Centros de Trabajo, las personas que se incorporan al mercado laboral desarrollan después actividades de formación continua. Es decir, **se analizarán las relaciones entre centros y empresas en la provisión de la formación reglada inicial (IVET) y la formación continua (CVET).**

Aunque algunos de los representantes de empresa entrevistados han mostrado cierto conocimiento de los Certificados de Profesionalidad, se ha podido constatar que su uso es escaso en la empresa. Tan sólo una de las empresas (grande) ha descrito un proyecto que pretendía ligar la formación continua de sus trabajadores a la obtención de certificados de profesionalidad, aunque finalmente no se llevó a cabo. Por su parte, los representantes de los centros de FP no han realizado una valoración positiva de la aplicación prácticas de dichos certificados (*'poco prácticos'*, o *'liosos'*). Se han mostrado concedores también de la formación para el empleo financiada fundamentalmente desde la administración laboral. Sin embargo, del análisis de las entrevistas y de la documentación consultada se puede concluir que **las relaciones entre centros y empresas para la provisión de competencias centran su interacción especialmente en la formación inicial**, regulada desde la administración educativa, **así como en la formación continua**. Esta última ha sido gestionada por la Fundación para la Formación Profesional Continua Vasca-Hobetuz desde su creación en 1996 como consecuencia de un amplio acuerdo entre administración pública y agentes sociales para el impulso de la

formación de trabajadores. Teniendo en cuenta que, en el momento de la creación de Hobetuz, la CAV no tenía competencias en la formación para el empleo, ubicadas en el INEM, podría concluirse que en el impulso inicial a la formación continua en la CAV ha tenido un papel relevante el ámbito educativo y formativo, en el contexto de la implementación del Primer Plan Vasco de Formación Profesional. El subsistema de formación para el empleo, gestionado desde la administración laboral de los diferentes niveles instituciones (estatal y autonómico) se observa con cierta distancia por parte de los informantes, especialmente por parte de las empresas. Por ello, son los subsistemas de formación inicial y continua los que se consideran en el análisis de este proyecto.

En las siguientes secciones se describen los elementos que determinan un proceso ideal de provisión de cualificaciones profesionales para el sistema productivo industrial. La consideración de los elementos del proceso se basa en la literatura (académica y publicaciones oficiales de la UE), que abordan el desarrollo de programas de formación en los entornos de trabajo, si bien la mayoría de los mismos se refieren a períodos más largos que el de la FCT: El continuum expansivo-restrictivo para el desarrollo de los trabajadores (Fuller and Unwin, 2003); los elementos de gobernanza, calidad y colaboración entre agentes que deberían caracterizar los programas de formación en empresas (European Commission, 2013); y las medidas que se proponen en CEDEFOP(2015b) para impulsar los programas formativos en PYMEs que ofrece, además, un marco analítico para la comparación de diferentes sistemas de formación en empresa. Una buena parte de los elementos descritos en la literatura se han podido identificar en los procesos descritos por los informantes. Sin embargo, no todos los elementos aparecen de manera sistemática, por lo que no puede decirse que formen parte inherente del modelo de provisión de competencias en la CAV (IVET y CVET).

8.2.1. Perfil de los tutores.

El proyecto se ha centrado de manera especial en el momento de la transición del sistema educativo de formación profesional al ámbito laboral. Por ello, el período formativo que con más detalle se ha analizado es el que corresponde a la Formación en Centros de Trabajo. Por esa misma razón, los perfiles que se han analizado en los centros corresponden todos ellos a tutores de la FCT, aunque éstos desarrollan además actividad docente.

El perfil de tutor idóneo correspondería a aquella persona que, teniendo una formación técnica relevante (formación profesional o ingeniería) ha desarrollado, además, cierta experiencia en el ámbito productivo. El conocimiento de la realidad de las empresas, de sus necesidades y de las situaciones en las que desarrollan su actividad beneficia tanto la formación que se imparte en el centro como la gestión de la propia FCT. En cualquier caso, para desarrollar con garantía su labor, **los tutores de empresa necesitan tener un elevado y actualizado conocimiento de las empresas de su entorno más cercano**, que representan su ámbito de actuación más previsible. La gestión de la FCT y las visitas periódicas que los tutores dicen realizar a las empresas contribuyen a alimentar dicho conocimiento y a estrechar las relaciones para el desarrollo de una efectiva colaboración. En este sentido, la **formación continua de los profesores** (lo que han denominado ‘reciclarse’) mediante estancias en empresas se ve beneficiada: cuanto mayor sea la relación de colaboración, más probable será la disposición de las empresas a ofrecer estancias de aprendizaje al profesorado.

8.2.2. Formación en el centro de FP.

La relación entre centros y empresas tiene una importante incidencia en la formación que se imparte en el centro y abarca diferentes aspectos del programa formativo. El sistema de cualificaciones basado en competencias juega un papel importante en esta fase porque, aunque no parece ser muy conocida en el ámbito de la empresa, sí se ha observado la relevancia de su uso y aplicación para el diseño de programas por parte de los centros de FP.

Los **contenidos** que forman parte del programa formativo se definen siguiendo el denominado Diseño Curricular Base, específico para cada ciclo formativo. El DCB es compartido por todos los centros, que deben cumplir su contenido general. Se trata, sin embargo, de un contenido muy amplio (‘demasiado amplio’, según varios informantes), por lo que **el detalle de su concreción se determina en cada centro**. Esto es posible gracias a que los centros gozan de una amplia autonomía de gestión. En base a lo anterior, **cada centro adapta el contenido específico de los módulos obligatorios a las necesidades formativas que observan en las empresas de su entorno**. Parece razonable afirmar que, a mayor relación centro-empresas, mejor adecuación de contenidos formativos. La aplicación de esta capacidad de adaptación al entorno productivo junto

con una estructura de 'red de centros' que fomente su complementariedad, permite la existencia de centros especializados en determinados ciclos formativos en los casos en los que una actividad productiva concreta predomine en una zona geográfica.

Por último, resulta conveniente que la decisión relativa a la compra de **equipamiento y maquinaria** para el laboratorio de los centros esté informada por las necesidades que se observan en el entorno, presentes o futuras. De hecho, una relación de colaboración conduce en muchos casos a la participación de las empresas en la adquisición de equipamiento. De esta manera, la formación práctica que se imparta en el centro será más próxima a la actividad real que se desarrolla en su entorno productivo. Como consecuencia de ello, la transición al mercado laboral se facilita. Además, si los centros cuentan con equipamiento avanzado pueden actuar como *hubs* de tecnología y servicios a las empresas, especialmente las más pequeñas, que habitualmente no tienen capacidad para equiparse al mismo ritmo que las empresas de mayor tamaño.

8.2.3. La formación en el centro de trabajo.

La gestión del Módulo FCT se realiza íntegramente desde los centros de FP debido a que forma parte de la formación profesional inicial reglada. Resulta conveniente la **creación en los centros de la figura de Responsable de Relación con Empresas**, para que éstas cuenten con una interlocución única con el centro, que no se debe limitar exclusivamente a la gestión de la FCT.

Desde el conocimiento de las características del alumno (sus preferencias, sus características y expectativas), un actualizado conocimiento de las empresas permite a los tutores encontrarles las mejores ubicaciones. Tal y como indica uno de los tutores 'la adecuación de la formación depende del binomio alumno-empresa' y, como consecuencia, requiere un buen conocimiento de ambos. La **adecuada combinación alumno-centro de trabajo** contribuye a evitar experiencias formativas negativas por parte del alumno y/o situaciones en las que los responsables de la empresa se sientan incapaces de satisfacer las necesidades formativas del alumno.

Una vez realizada la asignación de los alumnos por empresas, la planificación del contenido formativo exigirá la coordinación entre el tutor y el instructor de empresa. Desde la constatación de que ninguna de las empresas por separado, especialmente las

PYMEs, puede ofrecer el conjunto de los resultados de aprendizaje recogidos para el Módulo FCT, **se deben planificar las actividades a desarrollar por el alumno con el objetivo de maximizar su aprendizaje**, asegurando no sólo una adecuada articulación entre lo aprendido en el centro y lo aprendido en la empresa, así como la mayor cobertura posible de las unidades de competencia recogidas en el marco de cualificaciones para el ciclo formativo concreto. Un **programa formativo basado en resultados de aprendizaje facilita** que responsables de centro y de empresa identifiquen adecuadamente las competencias y los conocimientos que se deben alcanzar a lo largo del proceso formativo en la empresa, contribuyendo también a su seguimiento y evaluación final.

En aquellos casos en los que, bien por características del entorno productivo particular, o por circunstancias que se hayan podido originar a lo largo de la FCT, en el período formativo no se completaran todos los objetivos planteados, deberían de **articularse acciones complementarias**. Además, **un seguimiento periódico contribuiría a garantizar que su contenido fuera más acorde con los objetivos reales del módulo**, además de asegurar que el alumno cuenta con el apoyo adecuado durante su estancia en la empresa.

Por otro lado, **el alumno de FCT debería integrarse en un entorno que ofrezca diversas experiencias formativas y una amplia interacción con personal de la empresa** y no sólo con aquellas personas designadas como instructoras, de manera que su formación profesional sea más holística. Una formación de muy escasa amplitud y demasiado específica a la empresa limita las oportunidades de transferencia de lo aprendido, así como la posterior progresión profesional del alumno.

Finalmente, es necesario indicar que, a pesar de que el módulo FCT representa en sí mismo una parte del ciclo formativo, en torno a su gestión se intensifican las relaciones entre los representantes de centros y de empresas, y ofrece a los tutores la posibilidad de seguir la evolución de los puestos de trabajo, los procesos, el equipamiento y la tecnología. Como consecuencia, **la gestión de la FCT contribuye a mejorar el conocimiento de la actividad productiva por parte de los tutores**.

A la luz de los resultados, se puede afirmar que es precisamente en la planificación y seguimiento de la formación donde la diferencia entre los dos ámbitos, educativo y

productivo, aparece de manera más patente. La corta duración del programa parece influir en que no sea considerado como un verdadero proceso formativo que deba planificarse según unos objetivos concretos a lograr en términos de resultados de aprendizaje, a pesar de que las recomendaciones europeas (European Commission, 2013, Cedefop, 2015) subrayan la **importancia del compromiso firme de la empresa aún en los programas formativos más cortos**. Sin embargo, la FCT se considera, en la mayoría de los casos, un período de prácticas en las que el alumno, que se encuentra aún al margen de la complejidad de las relaciones laborales y de la presión propia de la actividad laboral, ‘pierde el miedo’ al entorno productivo al realizar tareas específicas de cada empresa. Esta consideración contrasta con la visión que en las empresas se ha observado con relación a los alumnos de la Formación Dual. La planificación y seguimiento de ésta se encuentra más regulada y así se percibe también en las empresas.

Se ha observado que, especialmente en las empresas de menor tamaño, las actividades que realiza el alumno de FCT se improvisan y adaptan al día a día de la actividad productiva y que desde la empresa no se utilizan los instrumentos diseñados para la estructuración del proceso de provisión de competencias. Por otro lado, la planificación del período formativo es más frecuente en aquellas empresas grandes que acogen grupos de alumnos de FCT anualmente, y que suelen contar con programas formativos estructurados para el conjunto de sus plantillas (encuadrados en la CVET). Puede concluirse, por tanto, que el alcance del programa formativo dependerá de la empresa en la que se desarrolle el módulo y/o el departamento concreto en el que se ubique el alumno (la actividad del Departamento de Mantenimiento, por ejemplo, está más sujeta a las eventualidades del día a día que la Oficina Técnica).

En cuanto al seguimiento del programa, en general no parece existir un procedimiento claro y parece más bien que depende de la iniciativa de cada tutor y del grado de relación que mantenga con la empresa/instructor. Es más, en algún caso se ha mencionado cierta fricción entre tutor e instructor por el enfoque que desde la empresa se estaba dando al programa (‘hay empresas que van muy a lo suyo’). La evaluación final de la formación se realiza también de forma muy heterogénea.

Aunque los perfiles más directamente relacionados con la gestión de la FCT (tutores e instructores) han apuntado tres diferentes motivaciones para la incorporación de alumnos en las empresas (FCT como parte del proceso de selección de nuevos trabajadores; la aportación de nuevas visiones a las plantillas de las empresas, especialmente en aquellas compuestas por personal de edad más avanzada; y las 'prácticas' como un valioso apoyo puntual a plantillas ajustadas), **el enfoque que más enriquece el módulo de FCT es el de una empresa que acoge alumnos con vocación de contratación.** En estos casos, el período de estancia en la empresa permite a ésta escoger los perfiles que mejor se adaptan a los objetivos de la empresa y a los que se pudiera ofrecer cierto desarrollo profesional. De esta manera, a pesar de la brevedad del programa, la integración del estudiante en las actividades de la empresa se promovería desde el comienzo, convirtiéndose en una verdadera transición entre el ámbito educativo y el productivo. Esta situación se da, sin embargo, en menos ocasiones, y se corresponde generalmente con empresas grandes que cuentan con procesos formativos estructurados y con posibilidad de ofrecer carrera profesional dentro de la misma empresa. Y es que, aún en los casos en los que la empresa busque contratar nuevos perfiles, no siempre es posible ofrecer trayectorias profesionales claras.

La **figura del instructor** de empresa resulta fundamental en el adecuado desarrollo del programa formativo. La situación más favorable consistiría en la **designación de una persona que sea, a la vez, interlocutora con el centro de FP y quien directamente supervise al alumno,** para optimizar el seguimiento y la supervisión del programa formativo por parte del tutor del centro. Además, esta persona debería **contar con cierta cualificación para desarrollar su labor de instrucción, así como tener reconocida una dedicación horaria específica a dicha labor.** En este sentido, las empresas pequeñas y medianas se enfrentan a mayores dificultades debido a que tienen plantillas más reducidas, menores recursos y, en muchas ocasiones, un mayor desconocimiento de los programas (Cedefop, 2015).

Finalmente, se puede afirmar que, a pesar de que el conocimiento de la estructura formativa y los resultados de aprendizaje objetivo del programa facilita la planificación, seguimiento y evaluación del módulo de FCT, sin embargo el sistema de cualificaciones

y las unidades competenciales que conforman los módulos no son, en general, conocidos por el instructor de la empresa. Por ello, lejos de representar un verdadero *'national language of learning'* (Raffe, 2009: 32), el tutor debe 'traducir' un lenguaje y una terminología que se manifiestan como más propios del ámbito formativo.

8.2.4. La formación continua.

La formación continua se encuentra menos regulada que la inicial, y se observa que cuenta con un abanico más amplio de proveedores. Desde el punto de vista del sistema de formación profesional (inicial, continua y para el empleo) **la efectiva integración de los subsistemas permitiría optimizar las instalaciones, el personal cualificado y la oferta formativa.** La existencia de centros dedicados únicamente a la formación profesional y la introducción del sistema de cualificaciones, entre otras medidas, son ejemplos de la voluntad de racionalización de la oferta formativa.

Sin embargo, se ha observado que, aunque la relación entre centros y empresas trasciende la gestión de la FCT, la formación continua que se imparte en los centros de FP representa sólo una parte de la que desarrolla la empresa para sus trabajadores. En efecto, la parte más importante de la formación continua se imparte *'in-company'* por personal propio de la empresa que cuenta con elevado conocimiento técnico proporcionado por la experiencia (CEDEFOP, 2015c). Se trata, habitualmente, de una formación eminentemente práctica (*'work-based'*) y con escaso contenido teórico, para cuya impartición habitualmente no se tiene cualificación específica. Además, las empresas también recurren a sus propios proveedores de equipamiento, tecnología y servicios, para la formación de los trabajadores, así como a otros agentes formativos (academias, asociaciones sectoriales, agencias de desarrollo comarcal).

El modelo ideal de formación continua estaría representado por una empresa que, desde una visión de largo plazo, fuera capaz de ofrecer una formación estructurada y planificada coherente con trayectorias profesionales específicas. Sin embargo, esa empresa-tipo no es fácil de encontrar. Aunque podría pensarse que las empresas mayores son las que pueden ofrecer un mayor número de opciones de promoción interna, en algunas ocasiones dichas posibilidades pueden quedar limitadas a determinados departamentos. La mayoría de las empresas analizadas plantean la

dificultad de planificar la formación continua a medio-largo plazo, así como la existencia de plantillas demasiado planas como para ofrecer carreras profesionales a sus trabajadores. Esta situación se da especialmente en los departamentos más directamente relacionados con la producción.

8.2.5. Otras actividades.

La información proporcionada por los entrevistados ha permitido identificar varias actividades adicionales que se desarrollan por parte de los centros de FP, y que tienen su origen en su vocación de 'estar al servicio de las empresas del entorno' y en la cercanía a las mismas que se ha observado a lo largo de las entrevistas.

En primer lugar, se ha identificado la prestación de un servicio de orientación para la cualificación y el empleo, surgida en las oficinas del centro de una manera natural y progresiva, como consecuencia de una de las características propias del centro: un centro integral, dedicado en exclusiva a la formación profesional. Este tipo de centro ofrece horarios de atención amplios, ya que tienen que adaptarse a las necesidades de empresas y de trabajadores que necesiten formarse después de su jornada laboral. Desde un profundo conocimiento del sistema de cualificaciones y sus instrumentos, por un lado, y de las necesidades y la evolución de las empresas del entorno, por otro, este servicio ha venido contribuyendo a diseñar itinerarios formativos con posibilidades de integración en el mercado laboral de la zona a cualquier persona interesada. Desde ese punto de vista, este centro ha suplido la función más propia del servicio de empleo que, por diversos motivos, no ha venido desarrollando su labor desde un profundo conocimiento de las empresas. La cultura industrial en la zona, especialmente arraigada en determinadas bailaras y el prestigio de la formación profesional en general, y de determinados centros, en particular, ha contribuido a generar la confianza requerida para constituirse en servicio de orientación.

En segundo lugar, tal y como se ha descrito en la Primera Parte de este informe de resultados, la combinación entre una metodología de diseño de contenidos formativos basada en el sistema de cualificaciones; la colaboración con las empresas del entorno, que permite detectar carencias de formación concretas; y el apoyo institucional y empresarial para la realización de inversiones, ha permitido la configuración de

programas de formación especializada. La capacidad de incorporar y coordinar también a empresas y universidades de referencia extranjeras para asegurar la máxima actualización tecnológica de los contenidos refleja la capacidad de trabajo en red del centro.

Finalmente, los centros de FP que cuentan con laboratorios equipados con maquinaria y tecnología avanzada, similar o igual a las de las empresas, realizan una importante labor. Sus instalaciones permiten ofrecer diferentes servicios, como permitir testear nuevos procesos productivos sin necesidad de realizar parada de máquina en la empresa; o, en el caso de empresas pequeñas, realizar mediciones, procesos que quedan fuera del alcance de sus propias instalaciones e incluso desarrollar trabajo conjunto para solucionar problemas concretos.

Estos tres ejemplos ponen de manifiesto que la interacción entre centros de FP y empresas trasciende el mero proceso de provisión de competencias basado en el listado de ciclos y de titulaciones ya definido. Más bien podría decirse que contribuye a convertir a los centros en aliados en el desarrollo de la actividad productiva.

8.3. Conclusiones preliminares

8.3.1. La interacción centro-empresa en el proceso formativo.

A la luz de la información analizada, y tal y como se ha descrito en la Segunda Parte del informe de resultados, se observa que los centros de FP y las empresas interactúan a lo largo de todo el proceso de provisión de competencias que constituyen los subsistemas de formación profesional inicial (especialmente) y continua. Esta interacción influye de manera significativa en los procesos formativos.

En la Formación Profesional Inicial que se ofrece en el centro, el conocimiento de las empresas del entorno se emplea para adaptar los contenidos educativos de cada centro, concretando de forma específica el amplio programa propuesto por el DCB. Las enseñanzas prácticas en el centro se desarrollan en laboratorios y/o talleres en cuyo diseño y equipamiento influyen las empresas.

La gestión por parte de los tutores de la FCT proporciona una oportunidad para intensificar la relación con las empresas. Y es que, aunque la ubicación de estudiantes en centros de trabajo y, muy especialmente, la definición, seguimiento y evaluación de

los programas formativos son susceptibles de mejora, el intercambio de información mutua permite a los tutores seguir la evolución de las empresas; y a las empresas conocer las herramientas de diseño y evaluación de la formación que se utilizan en los centros, aunque esto se produce en mucha menor medida. Además, de esta relación entre centros y empresas surgen iniciativas adicionales: programas formativos específicos de especialización, estancias de profesorado en empresas y servicios basados en la idoneidad de las instalaciones de los centros y en el conocimiento, experiencia y trabajo en red propios del profesorado de FP.

La provisión de la formación continua de trabajadores está menos regulada y se ha observado más dispersa. Esto es debido a que, por un lado, cuenta con un mayor número de agentes implicados: Hobetuz, centros de formación no reglada, proveedores de equipamiento y servicio que, a su vez, ofrecen formación en las empresas. Y, por otro lado, y en parte como consecuencia de lo anterior, no existe una conciencia tan clara de lo que constituyen las actividades de formación continua. Esta última reflexión se aplica especialmente a la formación '*in-company*' ofrecida por el personal de las empresas, una formación que es fundamentalmente práctica (CEDEFOP 2015c, 2015d).

En cuanto a la relación centro-empresa, no se han observado entre los centros diferencias que puedan atribuirse a su condición de público/concertado. Sin embargo, es importante constatar que las iniciativas adicionales descritas se han desarrollado en los centros integrales. Este hecho parece coherente con los objetivos de la iniciativa que impulsó al Gobierno Vasco en la implementación del Primer Plan Vasco de FP. Según se relata en la Primera Fase de este proyecto, fue una idea que se inspiró en Holanda y cuyo objetivo era el de impulsar la integración efectiva de los subsistemas de formación profesional. En opinión de uno de los informantes, la dedicación en exclusiva a la formación profesional redundaba en una relación más activa con las empresas y, como consecuencia de ello, en la posibilidad de desarrollar proyectos adicionales.

Por último, se constata que la valoración general y compartida es de cercanía de los centros de FP hacia las empresas. Este es el *objetivo* de los centros y, en una gran medida, la sensación que se ha percibido en los representantes de las empresas. Más específicamente, se ha manifestado el interés de los tutores por lograr la inserción laboral de los estudiantes. Y es que, en esta línea, las elevadas tasas de inserción laboral

de los ciclos formativos (IVET y CVET), especialmente las familias profesionales industriales, junto con su capacidad de ofrecer trayectorias profesionales representan el núcleo de los mensajes públicos que tratan de fomentar la incorporación de alumnos a la FP. Puede decirse que, en buena medida, el prestigio de los centros de FP se mide por sus tasas de inserción laboral (basadas en la gestión de la FCT y de las Bolsas de Trabajo de los centros). Esta necesidad de lograr la inserción laboral de alumnao/as intensifica la orientación hacia la empresa de los centros.

8.3.2. Los factores empresariales que determinan la diversidad en los procesos formativos.

A pesar de que a lo largo de las entrevistas no se han apreciado diferencias significativas que respondan a patrones específicos de empresas, sí se han observado elementos que originan diferencias en los procesos formativos, y que tienen que ver con las características de las empresas.

El primero de los factores observados se refiere al **tamaño de la empresa**. La capacidad de las empresas grandes de acoger de forma periódica a grupos de alumnos de FCT las convierte en empresa *preferentes* para los centros. Además, el hecho de que estas empresas suelen tener mayores posibilidades para la contratación de trabajadores contribuye a esta relación.

Sin embargo, también se han observado diferencias significativas que tienen que ver con el **tipo de actividad** que desarrolla la empresa y, más concretamente, con las características del **departamento** en el que los alumnos de FCT de las familias profesionales industriales desarrollan su período formativo.

Los procesos productivos de series largas de piezas no requieren especial cualificación, sino más bien personas que, gracias a su experiencia en actividades similares, puedan incorporarse y ser productivas en un corto espacio de tiempo. En estos casos no se exige una formación mínima para la incorporación al puesto de trabajo, y la posterior formación continua es limitada. Los alumnos de FCT que se incorporan en estos departamentos tienden a tener una experiencia formativa más restrictiva, que puede limitarse a recorrer diferentes puestos de producción.

Por el contrario, la producción de series cortas, que pueden tener elevado valor añadido, y de productos propios (maquinaria y piezas específicas y/o tecnológicamente complejas) requieren cualificación. Por ello, es habitual que se establezcan niveles formativos mínimos para la contratación, e incluso se prefieran aquellos perfiles que demuestran polivalencia (haber cursado varios ciclos). Las personas que se incorporan en empresas que desarrollan este tipo de actividad necesitan un período de aprendizaje en la empresa que, dependiendo del caso concreto, oscila entre un año y tres. La formación continua asociada a estos puestos es más habitual y estructurada. En coherencia con lo anterior, los alumnos que realizan el módulo de FCT en este tipo de empresa tienden a tener experiencias formativas más amplias. Esta situación es también propia de departamentos cuya función no es la producción propiamente, como la Oficina Técnica.

Por otra parte, se ha observado que el Departamento de Mantenimiento, por su propia naturaleza, plantea una característica propia: la imprevisibilidad del día a día, determinada en buena medida por las incidencias que puedan surgir en las instalaciones productivas, condiciona especialmente el desarrollo del programa de FCT. Además, la creciente complejidad de las instalaciones industriales actuales determina la necesidad de que los perfiles que se integran en estos departamentos necesiten, por una parte, una especial polivalencia; y, por otra, una permanente actualización de conocimientos a través de la formación continua.

Pero la especificidad más diferencial que se ha observado con relación al enfoque de la empresa hacia la FCT y la formación continua tiene que ver con la combinación del factor **cultura de empresa** asociado a la forma jurídica de **cooperativa**. En una de las empresas analizadas (EMPRESA_6), su vocación de largo plazo con respecto a sus trabajadores se apoya en un proceso formativo estructurado que, además de recoger los contenidos necesarios para garantizar el desarrollo técnico de los/as recién incorporados/as, establece los hitos y plazos para su conversión en socio/a de pleno derecho de la cooperativa. Además, la estructuración de la formación continua también busca la homologación de los procesos de diseño y fabricación. Es en esta empresa donde se ha observado un enfoque próximo al ideal con relación a la FCT: una orientación a la contratación de nuevas incorporaciones en la empresa, con la oferta de un proceso

formativo integrado con la estructura de formación continua de la empresa y trayectorias profesionales claras y apoyadas desde la dirección. Según relata el Responsable de Personal de la empresa, la condición de cooperativa no es, por sí sola, la causa de esta situación, sino que, además, se ha combinado con un estilo de dirección a lo largo de muchos años de historia de la empresa. A ello debe añadirse el hecho de que aborde el proceso completo (diseño, fabricación, montaje, venta y servicio de asistencia de máquina herramienta–soluciones de mecanizado) lo que posibilita la oferta de trayectorias de desarrollo profesional diversas en la propia empresa.

Por último, hay un elemento que, lejos de suponer un factor diferenciador, se ha observado en prácticamente todas las entrevistas. Se trata de la importancia que se otorga a la denominada *actitud*. La relevancia de la aportación que cada persona individual realiza al proceso formativo, en cualquiera que sea su configuración, ha quedado claramente constatada.

8.3.3. El grado de eficiencia del sistema de cualificaciones desarrollado.

Tal y como se ha descrito en la Sección 4.3., los marcos de cualificaciones (NQFs) se han planteado en numerosas ocasiones en términos estáticos, como matrices de niveles y campos de conocimiento que funcionan como estándares para el diseño de cualificaciones. Sin embargo, los marcos son entidades dinámicas, resultado de procesos complejos y largos en el tiempo (Raffle, 2009: 23), lo que, además, redundando en una dificultad para distinguir el marco en sí de la sucesión de reformas políticas de la que suele formar parte (Raffe, 2009: 28).

Los marcos de cualificaciones han evolucionado desde las primeras implementaciones, los denominados ‘de primera generación’ introducidos en el ámbito anglosajón, hasta los ‘de segunda generación’, como Francia o Irlanda y, posteriormente, las diversas implementaciones influidas en gran medida desde la Unión Europea, a través del Marco Europeo de Cualificaciones y otros instrumentos complementarios. Muchos de los últimos sistemas implementados se encuentran aún lejos de haberse desarrollado completamente, por lo que se puede afirmar que no se cuenta con una amplia evidencia académica del grado de impacto y de eficacia de este tipo de estructuras.

Desde el análisis de las características observadas en el Sistema Integral de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional que se comenzó a desarrollar en la CAV a partir de 1998 con el despliegue del Primer Plan de Formación Profesional, se puede afirmar que, aún estando basado en un marco de primera generación (el modelo inglés), sus características (objetivos, metodología en la introducción y despliegue) lo colocan más próximo al denominado marco de comunicación ('communications framework' en Raffe, 2009: 25-26). El objetivo de su implementación era **racionalizar la oferta formativa**, darle coherencia y transparencia y, como consecuencia, facilitar a las personas el acceso a la cualificación y a la progresión dentro del propio sistema de cualificaciones. Se introdujo como un sistema voluntario, en cuyo diseño e implementación participaron los diferentes agentes, incluyendo las propias instituciones educativas y formativas (centros de FP). La introducción del marco se ha ido complementando con un conjunto de medidas y de reformas, y desarrollándose de una manera tranquila, sin contestación política ni social, contribuyendo a que el sistema de FP siga **manteniendo hasta hoy la confianza por parte de los principales agentes**. En este sentido, y a la luz de los resultados de la investigación, se puede concluir que los objetivos planteados inicialmente se han alcanzado en gran medida.

Sin embargo, a la consecución de los objetivos iniciales mencionados cabe incorporar un *pero*, referido a la plena integración de los subsistemas de la FP (inicial reglada, continua y para el empleo), que se constata que no ha sido alcanzada de manera efectiva. La falta de lo que Raffe (2009: 35) denomina 'policy breadth', es decir, el completo alineamiento de todas las entidades políticas e institucionales, ha contribuido a ello. La distribución competencial (estado-autonomía) de la formación para el empleo, en un primer momento, y la separación de los subsistemas en diferentes departamentos del gobierno autonómico, posteriormente, han representado un obstáculo relevante en la consecución del objetivo de integración y racionalización de la oferta de formación profesional.

Sin embargo, existe todo un conjunto de cuestiones que se deben considerar en todo proceso de implementación de NQF, y que se corresponden con sus tres dimensiones (Raffe, 2009: 32) diferenciadas: técnica, social y política. Aunque la experiencia a lo largo de las sucesivas implementaciones ha demostrado que la dimensión técnica del enfoque

resulta ciertamente relevante, no ha sido, sin embargo, el foco de interés de esta investigación, más centrada en las dimensiones social y política.

La **dimensión social** (cultural e institucional) de un proceso de implementación de NQF refleja, de hecho, la amplia naturaleza de los cambios que la introducción de este tipo de estructura implica. Tres son los factores que, con relación a esta dimensión, se han observado.

En primer lugar, no puede afirmarse que el marco se haya convertido en lenguaje nacional del aprendizaje que se utilice por parte de todos los agentes que participan en el proceso. Si bien es ampliamente conocido y utilizado por los representantes del ámbito educativo, no se ha observado el mismo nivel de familiaridad en el ámbito de la empresa.

En segundo lugar, la introducción de los NQFs implica construir en torno al marco la confianza de todos los usuarios del sistema, de manera que se produzca un desplazamiento de la confianza en las instituciones formativas y en los programas que éstas imparten, y se ubique en los propios marcos de cualificaciones que, con independencia de la institución y el programa que haya dado lugar a su adquisición, sean de transparente interpretación y utilización tanto en el sistema educativo-formativo, como en el mercado laboral ('currency of qualifications'). En base a los resultados obtenidos, se puede afirmar que los representantes del ámbito empresarial siguen basando su confianza a la hora de acoger alumnos de FCT y, como consecuencia, de iniciar un proceso de selección de personal, en la relación que las empresas mantienen con el centro y en el conocimiento mutuo que, como consecuencia de esa relación, se ha desarrollado entre ambos agentes.

En tercer lugar, el proceso de introducción de NQFs depende de la intensidad con la que es apoyada por factores económicos y sociales amplios que van haciendo evolucionar los espacios de trabajo y las demandas de los empresarios en términos de cualificaciones, los cambiantes modelos de movilidad social y ocupacional, así como la extensión de los principios del mercado (Allais, 2003; Phillips, 2003). En el caso del SICFP, puede afirmarse que ha sabido evolucionar y que su capacidad de adaptación, acompañada de iniciativas complementarias, le ha permitido mantener su utilidad como instrumento para el diseño de programas formativos que respondan mejor a las

necesidades del tejido productivo y, como consecuencia, el sistema de FP ha sabido construir y mantener a su alrededor la confianza de los principales agentes.

La dimensión política de la implementación de los NQFs se refiere a los conflictos que implica, debido a que, por su sistémica naturaleza, tiene como objetivo regular un sistema o redistribuir el poder entre diferentes agentes de un mismo sistema. En este sentido, podría decirse que la existencia de agentes con elevado peso y capacidad de presión (por ejemplo, el subsistema de educación universitaria) puede dificultar el proceso. En el caso de la CAV, el sistema de cualificaciones se diseñó para su introducción en el ámbito de la formación profesional y contó con el apoyo de las asociaciones empresariales, así como con la solidez de una tradición industrial y de relación empresas-centros de FP arraigadas. De esta manera, el *sistema FP* se ha desarrollado de forma diferenciada con respecto a los otros subsistemas educativos, que se han visto más condicionados por cuestiones sociopolíticas. Esta situación contrasta con procesos de introducción de marcos comprensivos de cualificaciones (que incorporan todos los subsistemas educativos, desde educación secundaria hasta universitaria y de tercer ciclo), en los que el enorme peso de la educación universitaria ha añadido complejidad adicional.

Basándose en las experiencias de introducción de marcos de cualificaciones irlandés y escocés, que parecen haber conseguido un importante grado de éxito, Raffe (2009: 37) establece una serie de factores contextuales relacionados que, en buena medida, también se observan en la CAV: una forma de hacer política caracterizada por la continuidad y la progresividad, el amplio consenso, el predominio del interés del ámbito productivo y la colaboración; una pequeña escala, es decir, una población y ámbito territorial reducidos; una disposición institucional uniforme y transparente; grupos de interés razonablemente organizados (empresarios y trabajadores); políticas previas que contribuyen a su coherencia; una economía desarrollada; y recursos suficientes (incluyendo conocimiento, capacidad organizativa y recursos financieros).

Capítulo 9. Conclusiones

El objetivo de este trabajo de investigación ha sido profundizar en los procesos sociales que se desarrollan en el contexto Europeo de Formación Profesional para la provisión de competencias al ámbito industrial y, más específicamente, estudiar la manera en la que los centros formativos y las empresas interactúan en dichos procesos. Para ello, se ha analizado el contexto educativo actual, caracterizado por la naturaleza transnacional de las políticas que los diferentes estados implementan y por el carácter central que la educación basada en competencias, los denominados resultados de aprendizaje y los marcos de cualificaciones presentan en los debates educativos. Conviene resaltar que, durante las últimas décadas, la UE ha otorgado una creciente importancia a la formación profesional, hasta convertirla en eje de actuación de su estrategia para impulsar la competitividad y el empleo en Europa. Además, se ha reafirmado en la importancia que la implicación de los diferentes agentes del ámbito educativo y laboral tiene para el desarrollo de políticas formativas eficaces (gobiernos, asociaciones de empresarios, sindicatos, centros formativos, estudiantes, cámaras de comercio). Respondiendo a este impulso, todos los países miembro han venido desarrollando importantes reformas en el ámbito de la formación profesional.

La estrategia de la investigación ha consistido en el estudio de caso, concretamente del sistema de Formación Profesional de la Comunidad Autónoma Vasca en el estado español. Se ha considerado que el estudio del caso de una región resulta de interés por varios motivos. En primer lugar, porque las políticas formativas bajo análisis se desarrollan en un marco de competencias compartidas entre el estado y la región, cuando la mayoría de las referencias encontradas en la literatura (y documentos oficiales de la UE) corresponden a estados. Y, en segundo lugar, el caso pone de manifiesto la manera específica y diferenciada en la que problemáticas comunes relacionadas con la formación profesional pueden ser abordadas dentro de un mismo estado, con el objetivo de adaptarse mejor a las circunstancias particulares y a los distintos contextos socio-políticos y económicos. A la hora de elegir el caso, se ha tenido en cuenta el hecho de que la CAV cuenta con una amplia capacidad de autogobierno, necesaria para el desarrollo de políticas diferenciadas con relación al estado.

La investigación ha partido de dos **hipótesis principales**:

1. La tradición industrial de la región ha venido condicionando el enfoque del sistema de provisión de capacidades productivas y de formación profesional que se ha desarrollado a lo largo del último siglo, y ha favorecido la relación entre centros formativos y empresas.

2. A pesar de la cercanía entre centros formativos y empresas, los instrumentos desarrollados para la provisión de competencias al entorno productivo siguen siendo construcciones más próximas al entorno educativo, desde donde se han desarrollado, que al laboral.

Tal y como se ha argumentado, entender la dinámica actual de las relaciones entre centros de FP y empresas en los procesos de provisión de competencias requiere considerar la manera en la que ambos agentes han venido desarrollando su relación en las últimas décadas, caracterizadas por profundos cambios en los sistemas de formación profesional europeos y, especialmente, español. Por ello, se adoptó la decisión metodológica de dividir el proyecto en dos fases diferenciadas.

Una **primera fase** del proyecto se ha centrado en el proceso de modernización de la FP en la CAV y la introducción del sistema de cualificaciones profesionales, realizándose una descripción cronológica de las reformas e identificándose los principales elementos que han influido en la evolución de las relaciones entre centros de FP y empresas durante las últimas décadas. El proceso de modernización arrancó con la transferencia al recién creado Gobierno Vasco de las competencias en educación y formación profesional en 1980. Aunque las reformas se basaron en la legislación estatal básica, la región desarrolló un modelo diferenciado, tanto en el diseño de iniciativas específicas como, especialmente, en las características del proceso de implementación de las medidas. Esta primera parte de la investigación se ha centrado en el ámbito educativo y ha analizado la manera en la que agentes políticos y formativos han abordado las reformas orientadas a satisfacer las necesidades del ámbito productivo.

En claro contraste con la primera fase de la investigación, la **segunda fase** trata de realizar una fotografía puntual (en el año 2015) de las relaciones entre centros y

empresas. Esta fase de la investigación ha estado más centrada en el ámbito productivo y ha buscado dilucidar la manera en la que las relaciones centro-empresa influyen en los procesos formativos. Adicionalmente, se ha tratado de determinar los factores que puedan explicar las diferencias en dichas relaciones. Para ello, la investigación ha analizado los subsistemas de formación inicial (IVET), especialmente, y continua (CVET). En el caso de la formación inicial, el objeto de análisis ha sido el programa formativo denominado Formación en Centros de Trabajo, que se desarrolla de manera íntegra en las empresas, provocando que buena parte de las relaciones entre representantes de los centros y de las empresas discurren en torno a su gestión. Se trata del programa que, en la práctica, representa para muchos/as jóvenes la transición del ámbito educativo al laboral. Finalmente, y teniendo en cuenta la relevancia que en el Marco Europeo de Formación Profesional se otorga al desarrollo de políticas formativas basadas en los resultados de aprendizaje y los marcos de cualificaciones, la investigación ha tratado de determinar el grado de eficacia de dichos instrumentos en el logro de los objetivos de portabilidad y transparencia de las cualificaciones profesionales.

Los resultados de la investigación ponen de manifiesto que la dinámica actual de las relaciones entre centros y empresas cuenta con unos antecedentes históricos que se remontan a etapas anteriores a la que este proyecto ha abordado, de manera acorde con la primera de las hipótesis planteadas. En efecto, la tradición industrial de la región y la ausencia de un verdadero sistema de formación profesional a nivel del estado durante décadas motivó el surgimiento de iniciativas formativas pioneras en la región. Los informantes que participaron directamente en la modernización de la FP vasca a partir de 1980 coinciden en destacar que la formación profesional ha estado *siempre* muy próxima a la empresa, con una vocación de 'satisfacer las necesidades de las empresas de su alrededor', hasta el punto de que buena parte del profesorado había desarrollado una importante experiencia profesional en la actividad productiva.

Además, la sensibilidad de las diferentes instituciones de la región con respecto a la importancia de la FP en el desarrollo industrial impulsó la puesta en marcha de diversas iniciativas de relevancia a partir de 1980: integración de centros públicos y privados en una única red, formación de profesorado y equipamiento de centros en

función de las necesidades en las empresas del entorno, etc. La iniciativa desarrollada desde Confebask y la puesta en marcha de sus propuestas también contribuyó a proporcionar una sólida base de relación entre centros y empresas sobre la que se implementó el Primer Plan Vasco de FP. El impulso a la Formación Compartida (que se convirtió en la FCT actual) por parte del empresariado, y la inclusión de representantes de los centros de FP en el Consejo Vasco de FP desde su creación en 1994 son indicadores de la particular aproximación a la FP que se realizó en la CAV a partir de 1980.

Cabe destacar que en el entorno de la década de 1990 la dinámica internacional de reformas formativas se caracterizaba por la transferencia entre países de políticas y *mejores prácticas (best practices)* que, en muchos casos, poco tenían que ver con las especificidades y verdaderas necesidades de los países receptores de las mismas. En ese contexto la CAV inició un proceso que le permitió seguir construyendo sobre su pasado, evitando que la innovación en políticas de FP se convirtiera en lo que Pollitt (2008) denomina 'policy amnesia' o 'expanded present' (Pollitt, 2000), con muy poca consideración del pasado y escasa visión del largo plazo (citado en Hodgson and Spours, 2016: 511). Así, el punto de inflexión lo constituyó el Primer Plan Vasco de FP (PPVFP), que fue aprobado por unanimidad en el Consejo Vasco de FP en 1997. El principal objetivo del Plan era la consecución de un sistema integrado de formación profesional (formación inicial, continua y para el empleo) que permitiera racionalizar la oferta formativa y adaptarla a las necesidades del sistema productivo industrial en un momento de profundos cambios. Para ello, se planteó la introducción del Sistema Integral de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional (SICFP) que, inspirado en las cualificaciones profesionales del modelo inglés (National Vocational Qualifications), buscaba ir más allá de los objetivos planteados para el estado por la LOGSE.

La implementación del PPVFP y, más concretamente, del SICFP, ha influido claramente en las relaciones que durante las últimas décadas han venido desarrollándose entre centros de FP y empresas. Y ello porque los marcos de cualificaciones profesionales, instrumentos de reforma educativa ampliamente extendidos internacionalmente, ofrecen la oportunidad de desarrollar modelos colaborativos de reforma política en los que se involucra activamente a los diferentes agentes (Castejon, 2007; Grootings,

2007). También debe de tenerse en cuenta que se trata de entidades dinámicas, cuya introducción supone un proceso largo y cuyo impacto sólo puede observarse a largo plazo (Raffe, 2009: 23).

Pero, además de la implementación del sistema de cualificaciones, las reformas incorporaron también otras medidas innovadoras con relación al estado. La aplicación de los esquemas de calidad de la EFQM más propios del ámbito productivo, la creación de centros exclusivamente centrados en la formación profesional, así como iniciativas que posibilitan las estancias en empresas de alumnos (FCT y aproximaciones a la formación dual) y profesores son ejemplos de iniciativas que contribuyeron a intensificar las relaciones entre los centros y las empresas.

La investigación desarrollada ha podido demostrar que el proceso político seguido en la modernización de la FP respondió a un enfoque (*a policy making approach*) próximo a lo que en el ámbito académico y político se denomina aprendizaje de políticas (o *policy learning*). Concretamente, el proceso implicó activamente a los agentes con conocimiento del tejido industrial y formativo. Las iniciativas internacionales se analizaron para identificar aquellos elementos que mejor respondían a las necesidades de la CAV y adaptarlos al contexto de la región, en lugar de *importar* mejores prácticas. Además, el diseño y la implementación del Plan de FP respondió a un proceso de amplio debate, y al acuerdo entre todos los agentes que participaban en el Consejo Vasco de FP.

Desde un punto de vista político, el desarrollo de una FP eficaz que contribuyera al desarrollo industrial y a la reducción del desempleo se había convertido en un objetivo político ampliamente compartido, y el despliegue del Primer Plan (y de los sucesivos planes que siguieron; el V Plan se presentó en la primavera de 2018) se vio favorecido por un clima de continuidad política y de falta de conflictividad social en el que, a diferencia de otros campos de actuación política, se desarrollaron las reformas. La propia configuración institucional de la CAV y su amplia capacidad de autogobierno facilitaron el proceso de diferenciación con respecto al resto del estado. Y es que, como afirma Borrás 'son los países con capacidades organizativas más robustas quienes tienden a aprender y a cambiar más' (2011: 713).

Por todo ello, se puede afirmar que el Gobierno Vasco lideró un proceso colectivo para la implementación de un modelo propio de formación profesional, realizado desde la reflexión sobre sus antecedentes y con una visión de largo plazo. Como consecuencia de ello, se ha desarrollado una capacidad colectiva para aprender de otros modelos e iniciativas, y para cambiar y transformar el propio modelo en la medida en que las circunstancias económicas y tecnológicas lo requieren, capacidad que aún perdura. El enfoque colaborativo aplicado en las reformas ha contribuido a intensificar las relaciones entre centros formativos y empresas, y a constituir lo que he denominado *comunidad FP*¹.

En los resultados de la investigación se pueden observar las ventajas que el carácter colaborativo de las reformas ha traído consigo. Concretamente, el análisis de las dinámicas actuales entre centros de FP y empresas ha puesto de manifiesto su relevante aportación a la mejora de los procesos formativos y, como consecuencia, a la mejora de la competitividad de las empresas.

La investigación ha puesto de manifiesto que los centros de FP y las empresas interactúan prácticamente a lo largo de todo el proceso correspondiente a la formación inicial, aunque la gestión de la FCT justifica buena parte de estas relaciones. Los contenidos educativos se adaptan en cada centro a las necesidades específicas de las empresas del entorno. Los talleres y laboratorios de los centros buscan ofrecer tecnologías y equipamientos similares a las implantadas en las empresas y, en muchos casos, son las propias empresas las que contribuyen a su financiación. La comunicación permanente entre tutores de FCT (y responsables de relaciones con las empresas, figura que se ha observado en los diferentes centros) con representantes de las empresas permite un intercambio de comunicación permanente y propicia la gestación de nuevos proyectos, como estancias de profesorado en las empresas para actualizar sus conocimientos sobre los procesos y las tecnologías empleadas en las empresas; o la definición de programas formativos específicos y adicionales a los ofrecidos en el catálogo de títulos, propiciando una actualización permanente de los

¹ He denominado *comunidad FP* al conjunto de personas que se sienten partícipes directas de las iniciativas que, desde la década de 1980, han contribuido a conformar el modelo vasco de FP. En las entrevistas realizadas a personas con largo recorrido en la FP se puede apreciar un cierto sentido y orgullo de pertenencia, así como una percepción colectiva de apoyo por parte de las instituciones y de las organizaciones empresariales.

contenidos formativos. Por último, existe un servicio que los centros de FP ofrecen a las empresas, especialmente a las pequeñas y medianas, gracias a la actualización de sus instalaciones y a la formación del profesorado. Y es que los centros de referencia pueden actuar como *hubs* tecnológicos, aportando a las empresas soluciones técnicas a las que, en muchos casos, éstas no tienen acceso.

En el caso de la formación continua se ha observado que, aunque la relación entre centros y empresas continúa en la provisión de formación para los/as trabajadores/as, ésta es más dispersa. De acuerdo con la información recogida y analizada en la investigación esta relación puede deberse a dos motivos principales. En primer lugar, la formación continua se encuentra menos regulada que la inicial y, como consecuencia de ello, no se observa una conciencia tan clara de los contenidos que constituyen acciones de formación continua como tal. En segundo lugar, la formación continua cuenta con un mayor número de agentes implicados, como centros de formación no reglada, diversos proveedores de servicios y equipamiento a las empresas que, a su vez, se convierten en agentes formativos y, finalmente, los/as propios/as trabajadores/as que, contando con experiencia en la empresa, ofrecen formación a otros/as trabajadores/as menos experimentados/as, fundamentalmente en cuestiones técnicas.

A lo largo de las entrevistas realizadas a representantes de las empresas, se ha constatado una valoración positiva compartida con relación a la cercanía de los centros de FP a las empresas. Además de las constantes referencias que los tutores de empresa han realizado en el sentido de entender que *los centros se deben a las empresas*, se ha observado que el propio prestigio de los centros se mide, en gran medida, por su capacidad de inserción laboral de los alumnos, lo que, necesariamente, intensifica la orientación de los centros hacia la empresa.

Un dato de interés lo representa el hecho de que la mayor cantidad de actividades formativas, correspondientes tanto a IVET como a CVET, se han observado en los denominados centros integrales, es decir, aquellos centros de FP que se encuentran específicamente orientados a la formación profesional en coherencia con los objetivos iniciales planteados en el PPVFP. La dedicación exclusiva al ámbito de la formación

profesional fomenta una relación más activa con las empresas y, como consecuencia, redundando en una mejora de la oferta formativa.

A la hora de valorar los factores empresariales que determinan la diversidad en los programas formativos, los resultados de la investigación permiten afirmar que los factores que más influyen son el tamaño de la empresa y su actividad concreta. En general, las empresas de mayor tamaño tienden a incorporar un mayor número de alumnos/as de FCT, lo que intensifica las relaciones con los centros y permite ofrecer mejores experiencias formativas. Además, son estas empresas las que mayor interés suscitan en los centros, por su mayor capacidad de incorporar alumnado de FCT y de ofrecer estancias al profesorado, además de apoyo económico para las instalaciones. Por otro lado, y más allá de la FCT e IVET, las empresas de mayor tamaño que cuentan con diversos departamentos tienen la posibilidad de ofrecer procesos formativos más estructurados y de más largo plazo a sus trabajadores/as.

También se ha observado que el tipo de actividad de la empresa y/o del departamento concreto condiciona la calidad de la experiencia formativa. Así, existe un enorme contraste entre las posibilidades formativas de puestos de departamentos puramente productivos de series largas de piezas, y los de departamentos de producción de series cortas de piezas (habitualmente, con un mayor valor añadido, como en el caso de productos propios o tecnológicamente complejos) o de diseño (oficina técnica, por ejemplo).

El factor empresarial más significativo que se ha observado con relación a su impacto en la relación con los centros de FP y los programas formativos ha sido el de la cultura empresarial característica de una de las empresas participantes. Su visión de largo plazo con respecto a sus trabajadores se apoya, entre otros, en una estructuración de la formación continua que integra también la propia FCT, y que permite desarrollar profesionalmente y promocionar internamente a los/as trabajadores/as, ya que pueden recorrer los diferentes departamentos. El tamaño de la empresa y el amplio espectro de su actividad (diseño, fabricación, montaje, venta, servicio de asistencia) también posibilitan la oferta interna de carrera profesional.

A la vista de todo lo anterior, se puede afirmar que el proceso de modernización de la formación profesional en la CAV y la introducción del marco de competencias

profesionales (SICFP), desarrollado en base a un enfoque político próximo al denominado aprendizaje de políticas ha permitido desarrollar un modelo diferenciado con respecto al resto del estado que, basado en la colaboración entre los diferentes agentes, se adapta mejor a las necesidades de un sistema productivo industrial en constante evolución y mantiene la confianza en el modelo de todos ellos. Más concretamente, la implementación de la formación profesional basada en competencias y resultados de aprendizaje ha permitido desarrollar una metodología que se ha observado útil para el diseño y actualización de los programas formativos. Sin embargo, para determinar la eficiencia de los instrumentos desarrollados resulta necesario considerar también los objetivos iniciales planteados con el PPVFP y la introducción del SICFP.

Uno de los principales objetivos perseguidos era racionalizar la oferta formativa y darle coherencia y transparencia, con el objetivo de facilitar a las personas el acceso a la cualificación y a la progresión dentro del propio sistema de cualificaciones. Con ese objetivo se planteó la integración de los tres subsistemas de formación profesional en torno a un mismo marco de cualificaciones profesionales. Sin embargo, no se puede afirmar que dicho objetivo se haya logrado. A la luz de la información analizada, las relaciones entre centros y empresas se encuentran en la actualidad muy centradas en los procesos de provisión de competencias y cualificaciones gestionados desde el ámbito educativo, observándose cierta distancia con respecto a los programas (convocatorias para la oferta de cursos de formación) e instrumentos (certificados de profesionalidad, Dispositivo para el Reconocimiento de las Competencias) más propios de la administración laboral y/o del empleo. Esta distancia podría ser el resultado de décadas de un reparto competencial (estado-comunidad autónoma) y de una posterior gestión separada en distintos departamentos e instancias en la propia comunidad. De esta manera, y a pesar de la demostrada continuidad en el desarrollo de las reformas por parte de los sucesivos equipos responsables del área de educación de la CAV a lo largo de estos años, se puede afirmar la ausencia de lo que Raffe (2009: 35) denomina 'policy breadth', es decir, una insuficiente coherencia entre distintas instancias gubernamentales, especialmente las relacionadas con la educación y el empleo.

Otro de objetivos perseguidos por la formación basada en resultados de aprendizaje (y/o competencias) es el de lograr transferir la confianza (*trust*) en las instituciones que ofrecen los programas que conducen a la obtención de certificados y cualificaciones al propio sistema de cualificaciones. Se trata de evitar lo que el término ‘provider capture’², que se popularizó en la década de 1980 (Raggatt and Williams, 1999), resumía y que sintetiza en gran medida las críticas al tradicional sistema formativo basado exclusivamente en la confianza en las instituciones formativas (institution-based). Las cualificaciones serían independientes de las instituciones, lo que facilitaría que su desarrollo fuera más acorde con las necesidades del ámbito laboral. Por su parte, la transparencia y portabilidad de las cualificaciones facilitaría la movilidad, tanto dentro del propio sistema formativo como entre sistemas formativos. Los resultados de la investigación ponen de manifiesto que los representantes de las empresas (principales receptores de las certificaciones de profesionalidad y de las cualificaciones profesionales) no tienen el conocimiento suficiente de dichos instrumentos que les permita basarse sólo en ellos. Por ello, buena parte de sus decisiones, entre ellas las de contratación, se basan en la confianza que tienen en los centros de FP con quienes mantienen una relación cercana (en algunos casos, son incluso homologados por las empresas) y en sus profesores, tutores de FCT y responsables de relación con las empresas. Además, los representantes de las empresas reconocen su falta de familiaridad con la terminología empleada en los centros de FP. Se puede afirmar, por lo tanto, que a pesar de la gran aportación del sistema de cualificaciones (SICFP) a la formación profesional y a la provisión de competencias productivas, éste no se ha convertido aún en un “lenguaje nacional de aprendizaje”, hablado por usuarios y grupos de interés, así como por proveedores’, tal y como se había planteado como segunda hipótesis al inicio de la investigación. Y es que, como él mismo afirma, ‘hace falta tiempo para que este lenguaje sea ampliamente hablado y entendido’ (Raffe, 2009: 32).

² El concepto traslada la idea de que las instituciones formativas se encuentran más centradas en sí mismas y en sus necesidades en términos de negocio que en su papel como entidades formativas, limitando la oferta formativa y entorpeciendo la entrada de nuevos agentes formadores. De ahí que se atribuya a las mismas una ‘captura’ de la oferta formativa que, como consecuencia, se encuentra menos alineada con las necesidades de las empresas.

Finalmente, resulta de interés mencionar una cuestión relacionada con los cambios que la aplicación de las nociones competencia y cualificación (tal y como se ha descrito en la Sección 2.3.), en sustitución de la tradicional *calificación* y de las clasificaciones (o categorías) profesionales asociadas, incorpora a un aspecto concreto del ámbito laboral: el de la negociación colectiva. Tal y como argumenta Tanguy (2001: 120), ambas nociones, competencia y calificación, buscan ‘relacionar y hacer corresponder dos órdenes de distribución, el de las propiedades de los puestos de trabajo y el de las atribuciones de las personas, ambas distribuciones jerarquizadas’ y, como consecuencia, ordenadoras también de las retribuciones salariales en las empresas. La necesidad de garantizar una visibilidad clara de las competencias atribuidas a cada puesto y de establecer los mecanismos necesarios para su reconocimiento objetivo requiere en las empresas unas transformaciones que, a menudo, chocan con la configuración actual de los convenios colectivos, tal y como se ha reflejado en algunas de las entrevistas con representantes de empresa. Sin embargo, analizar las implicaciones que la introducción de instrumentos desarrollados desde el ámbito formativo (resultados de aprendizaje, competencias, marcos de cualificaciones) tiene en el ámbito laboral y en la negociación colectiva no era el objeto de esta investigación. Por ello, me limito a apuntar el interés que esta cuestión ofrece para el logro de un mayor despliegue de los modelos basados en competencias en el ámbito laboral.

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