

Improving the image of TVET: Making TVET attractive to youth

Virtual conference on the UNESCO-UNEVOC TVET Forum from 16 to 24 July 2018

Moderated by Stephen Billett

Introduction

Compared with that of other education sectors, the image of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is often quite low, albeit more so in some countries than others. This issue is evident in countries with advanced industrial economies and those that might be described as having developing economies.

Here, the provision of TVET refers to and includes those programmes at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3) and at the post-secondary level (ISCED 4-5). Yet, this discussion needs to extend to provisions of initial occupational preparation for young people that occurs outside of the TVET system. This includes what is referred to as informal or traditional apprenticeships, in countries with developing economies.

The consequences of the low standing of TVET can be profound. They include how governments, industry, enterprises and communities view, support and engage with TVET, and also what constitutes its purposes, forms, governance and administration, and potential outcomes. In addition, these perceptions can also shape employers' willingness to engage with and sponsor TVET, including the provision of workplace experiences and their employment of apprenticeships.

Concurrently, there is growing shortage of skilled workers of the kinds that graduate from TVET and can meet the needs of enterprises and communities. For instance, the UK is experiencing declining levels of participation in courses for advanced technical skills required for contemporary economy (Wolf, 2016). German enterprises are experiencing difficulties securing adequate numbers of quality candidates for apprenticeship. This has led to competition amongst companies to secure such apprentices. South Korea has long struggled to attract young people to the manufacturing sector that sustains its economy (Cho & Apple, 1998).

There is also a current and growing concern across many countries, and not only those with advanced industrial economies, that young people increasingly preferring to attend higher education courses that have no direct employment outcomes, and potentially limited prospects of employment outcomes. TVET is, at best, viewed as a second or non-preferred choice.

So, the perceptions or image of TVET also shape how young people select their occupations and parents, teachers and familiars advise about these young people pathways into further study or working life. Consequently, beyond narrowing the range of educational, occupational and work life options for young people, the low status of much of TVET and its resultant unattractiveness for young people is having consequences for countries achieving their social and economic goals, as well as enterprises maintaining their viability.

Whilst widely experienced, this issue is manifested in different ways across countries, educational systems and occupational disciplines. For instance, where there are provisions of TVET in universities of applied science (e.g. Netherlands), those provisions are held in higher regard, and the status of occupations and their attractiveness to young people also differs across countries, as does provisions of TVET that have work-based components in them. In some instance, public concerns about higher education courses that lack occupational outcomes are elevating the attractiveness of TVET (e.g. Switzerland).

Organized on the occasion of **World Youth Skills Day 2018**, this virtual conference aims to engage with this issue by initiating, guiding and synthesising a range of perspectives, evidence and advice about the factors influencing the image of TVET and the occupations it serves, and, importantly how these addressed to make TVET attractive to youth.



Structure and intended

The **intended outcomes** of the conference are for participants to:

- Understand the factors influencing the image of TVET, and the impact this image has on individuals/business/society;
- Appreciate some of the factors and challenges impacting the decision of young people when choosing their career/education path;
- Identify suitable measures that can help improve the image of TVET in their context; and
- Explore ways to assess the impact of measures to improve the image of TVET.

The **structure and sequencing** of the virtual conference's events are founded on five topics. These topics will be 'opened' for discussion on the following days:

Monday, 16 July	Topic 1	The image of TVET and its consequences
Tuesday, 17 July	Topic 2	Factors shaping the standing of TVET
Wednesday, 18 July	Topic 3	Perspective of young people, their parents and familiars
Thursday, 19 July	Topic 4	Policies and practices that might enhance the image of TVET
Monday, 23 July	Topic 5	Evaluating the impact of those policies and practices

Topics and leading questions

Topic 1 – The image of TVET and its consequences

The standing and status of TVET differs across countries, communities and individuals. This leads to it having particular kinds of images within those countries, communities and in the people's perceptions. There are a series of consequences that arise from these images.

These consequences include how governments view, fund and administer TVET, how the community, including workplaces, comes to engage with it and, very importantly, how young people come to make decisions about education and work life pathways beyond their secondary education, and also how parents, teachers and familiars advise young people about those pathways.

Young people's reluctance to participate in TVET leads to concerns about increasing numbers of young people preferring to engage in higher education programmes that do not have immediate employability outcomes, on the one hand, and on the other hand, concerns about the lack of development of the kinds of skills required to meet society's economic and social needs (Wolf 2016).

Therefore, action is required to enhance the image of TVET that likely extends to efforts to improve the standing of the occupations it serves.

Leading questions:

This topic discusses what is understood by the image of TVET and why it is important to address. Specifically, the topic asks participants:

- What constitutes the standing and image of TVET, as defined above, in your country?
- In what ways does that standing differ across occupational sectors, communities or societal groups?
- What are the personal, social and economic consequences of TVET having this standing or image?

Topic 2 – Factors shaping the image of TVET

There are a range of factors that shape the standing and status of TVET. There is the standing of the occupations for which it prepares and further develops people's capacities. That standing has been shaped by societal views and preferences. In particular, the voices and views of powerful others (e.g. aristocrats, theocrats, bureaucrats and academics) have progressively influenced the standing of occupations and also their preparation often without direct engagement with those occupation (Billett, 2014). This has profound implications for how people view TVET.

This societal privileging has, in many instances, and continues to come at a cost to the standing, processes of and goals for TVET, because it is positioned as being less worthwhile and prestigious educational pathway. In contemporary times, increasing level of aspirational by young people and parents are possibly strengthening and entrenching such views to the detriment of participation in TVET.

Schooling systems and those who teach in them are often primarily directed towards and rewarded for success in their students' university entrance. Consequently, they may downplay the role of TVET and sometimes even explicitly positioning this as an option only for students who are perceived to be low performing in their schooling subjects. Teachers' own experiences and preferences are likely to be implicit and even explicit in how TVET and the occupation it serves are discussed in school settings. Contemporary media also likely privileges high status occupations and reinforces such aspirations as being desirable and orthodox.

Also, desire for what is perceived to be well-paid, secure and clean work by young people and their parents that enjoys higher social status is shaping choices about education and work pathways and much of this works against the attractiveness of TVET. So factors such as occupations that are seen as offering clean work and secure employment, as well as changing demographics, volatility of the labour market, and the wider education system play a role in how young people and their parent imagine TVET.

These factors are presented and discussed in recent report such as:

- [Cedefop's research on the attractiveness of TVET](#) looked at a societal and perception, but also 'exogenous drivers' including economy, demographics, labour market, and the wider education system
- The [GIZ's report on the image of TVET](#) also looks at perception and attractiveness, and the actual market value / quality of TVET programmes

Leading questions:

This topic identifies some of the factors influencing the image of TVET, and shows how understanding the image of TVET requires looking at not only perceptions and societal factors, but also at the quality and market value of the TVET system. Participants will be asked to reflect on the factors and relate to their own contexts.

Topic 3 – Perspectives of young people, their parents and familiars

Perspectives of young people, as well as their parents and associates, about the image of TVET are central to the effectiveness of this education provision. It is young people, in particular, who decide in what kind of educational programmes they will try enter after secondary school, what level of interest they have in them and for how long they engage in and learn through these programmes.

Consequently, if young people come to engage with TVET programmes as being seeing it as either second choice, with other goals in mind, and/or in unwillingly engage, the participation and outcomes are likely to be suboptimal.

The evidence suggests that even in situations where there is positive employability outcomes from TVET programmes, young people may seek to use success in these programmes to progress to higher education, even when those employability outcomes are no higher or even lower from further education. So, while it is important to provide access to progress to higher education, there is also a need to assist young people experience and enjoy the direct benefits of their TVET courses.

Therefore understanding and shaping the views of young people about their choices associated with TVET becomes an important task to provide an effective educational provision and for young people to consider and develop the kinds of occupational capacities that can arise from TVET programmes.

This thread will be led by youth engaged in TVET, and will encourage young people to come forward and share their experiences.

Topic 4 – Policies and practices that might enhance the image of TVET

This topic focuses on the kinds of policies and practice that might be enacted by national governments, local interest groups or communities, specific enterprises and educational systems to enhance the image of TVET.

As noted, different institutional practices, provisions of TVET and societal sentiments have led to particular perceptions about TVET, which are described here is being those associated with its image. It would seem that there are important roles for government in championing the standing and status of TVET, its engagement at the local level by communities and enterprises, and the actions and values of those in all levels of schooling to bring about such a change. A number of projects, reports and forums are identifying means to enhance the standing and image of TVET (for example, GIZ and CEDEFOP reports). At the occasion of last year’s World Youth Skills Day, UNESCO and Cedefop held a webinar event to address the issue of attractiveness of vocational education that was engaged in by a wide international audience¹.

For example, it has been suggested programmes that are seen as comprising higher forms of TVET, such as those in the Netherlands, generate more positive images as they are not seen as ‘dead-end’ but provide articulation to higher levels of education and have competitive entry.

Societal views also seem to be important. A large numbers of apprentices in Germany have the option to take academic programmes at university, but do not take up that option. This latter point indicates that when the occupations are seen to be worthwhile and have high status, young people are attracted to those occupations and the TVET provisions of that prepare young people for them. Hence, promoting the standing of these programmes, and convincing young people, their parents and school teachers that such programmes constitute worthwhile and viable work or education pathways after secondary education is likely to be important. This reinforces the importance of, amongst others, career guidance, image campaigns, and ambassadors or role models.

Another example of measures to enhance the image of TVET are linked to improving the TVET system itself. As the synthesis report on ‘Improving the image of TVET’ published by the GIZ states, image campaigns can only be successful together with measures to improve the quality, costs and benefits of certain programmes. For example, one dimension of modernizing the TVET system includes ensuring that the TVET programmes respond to the emerging sectors, including renewable energies.

¹ *Researchers meets practitioners. Enhancing the attractiveness of TVET.* Organized in Bonn on 18 July 2017. For more information, please visit <https://unevoc.unesco.org/wysd/index17.html>

Given the fundamental issue of the low image of many of the occupations that TVET serves, there is clearly a role to be played by professional and industry groups in seeking to promote the worth and contributions of the occupations that they represent.

Leading questions:

Whereas Topics 2 and 3 addresses factors influencing the image of TVET, Topic 4 discusses the policies and practices that might redress these factors. Participants will be asked about their experiences and encourage them to present and share about measures they have undertaken.

Topic 5 – Evaluating the impact of those policies and practices

Specifically, this topic focuses on how the impact of these policies and practices might be evaluated. This focus is helpful because it supports and augments considerations of the nature and enactment of efforts to enhance the image of these occupations.

As a consequence, it is necessary to focus on how this problem can be addressed both individually and collectively by government; industry; enterprises; education systems; communities; families and familiars and young people themselves.

It is also acknowledged that these actions are likely to be quite different across countries, sectors and even communities.

It is through a process of contributions, discussions and moderation across these five themes that will assist in elaborating further this important topic, which is central to how TVET is positioned, participated in, supported, organized and evaluated, albeit in different ways across countries with distinct social and economic structures and cultural emphases.

Leading questions:

This topic focuses on the policies and practices discussed in Topic 4, and prompts participants to consider how the impact of these measures might be captured and evaluated.

About the moderator



Dr Stephen Billett is Professor of Adult and Vocational Education in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia and a National Teaching Fellow and Australian Research Council Future Fellow. After a career in garment manufacturing, he worked as a vocational educator, educational administrator, teacher educator, professional development practitioner and policy developer in the Australian vocational education system and as a teacher and researcher at Griffith University.

Since 1992, he has researched learning through and for work and has published widely in fields of learning of occupations, workplace learning, work and conceptual accounts of learning for vocational purposes. He is a Fulbright Scholar (1999), National Teaching Fellow (2008-2010), and Australian Research Council Future Fellowship (2011-15). In 2013, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Jyväskylä University (Finland) and elected Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia in 2015. He currently leads research projects in Australia, Singapore and the Middle East.

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