

Shaping VET Qualifications

3.1. Qualifications Design: Processes and Responsible Bodies

The Italian system of education and vocational training has been traditionally programme-based, where a programme is to be intended as a prescriptive list of disciplinary contents to be taught to students in a specified period of time. However, in time, the focus has been shifted from programmes to curricula, i.e. a range of learning outcomes comprising knowledge, skills and abilities to be achieved in each subject. During the last decade, all segments of the VET system have been affected by an important reform process still not entirely concluded. The high number of Regulations that complemented the legislative provisions shows a common intention to place students rather than programmes at the centre of the training activity and, at the same time, to get training organisations to design their pathways. In the case of the secondary education system reform, for instance, the documents attached to the Regulations of Law 53/2003 issued for each type of training offer included in the cycle, lay out the expected outcomes in terms of knowledge, abilities and skills results. In particular, the 'Student educational, cultural and professional profile' defined in Annex D of the Regulations indicates the learning outcomes common to all pathways and the learning outcomes for each pathway included in *lyceums* and technical and professional institutes, making it clear that these should comprise skills, abilities and knowledge often outlined on the basis of EQF standards.

Specific guidelines to support training institutions in drawing up their Training offer plans (*Piano dell'Offerta Formativa* - POF) according to a learning outcomes approach were also provided by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with thousands of teachers of different subjects, the social partners, professional associations and the Regions and Autonomous Provinces. More recently, since 2008, new regulations for the upper secondary education and training system have been introduced²⁷ aiming at increasing its stability and foster cooperation at multi-regional and national level as well as with the social partners. In this legal framework, a new body was set up besides the *Comitato Nazionale IFTS*²⁸

27 Law n. 40/07, art.13: 'Disposizioni urgenti in materia di istruzione tecnico-professionale e di valorizzazione dell'autonomia scolastica' (Urgent provisions for technical and professional education and for enhancing school autonomy); Prime Minister Decree n. 86/08 'Linee guida per la riorganizzazione del sistema di istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore e la costituzione degli Istituti Tecnici Superiori' (Guidelines for reorganising higher technical education and training and establishing higher technical institutes); Inter-ministerial Decree dated 7th September 2011, 'Norme generali concernenti i diplomi degli istituti tecnici superiori – ITS e relative figure nazionali di riferimento, la verifica e la certificazione delle competenze' (General rules concerning Diplomas of higher technical institutes and national reference profiles, skills assessment and certification); Decreto-legge n. 5/2012 convertito con legge n. 35/2012, art. 52: 'Misure di semplificazione e promozione dell'istruzione tecnico-professionale e degli istituti tecnici superiori – ITS' (Simplification and promotion measures for technical-professional education and higher technical institutes).

28 The National Committee for Higher Technical Education and Training was established in 1998 to identify general guidelines for the new education segment. It is made up of representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, the Local Autonomies and the social partners, besides some institutes entrusted with the task of providing technical assistance (i.e. ISFOL, ISTAT and ANSAS). To date, the National

established in 1998 (National Committee for Higher Technical Education and Training): the ‘*Conferenza annuale nazionale*’ (National Annual Services Conference) promoted by the Ministry of Education, and made up of representatives of the State/Regions Conference, the social partners, the Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of Economic Development, aiming at evaluating systems adjustments in light of the labour market needs.

3.1.1. The introduction of new qualifications

The introduction of new qualifications in the national qualification system is directly managed by the authorities that are responsible for awarding them: the Ministry of Education and the Regions. Those awarded by the Ministry of Education are regulated by the principle of ‘legal value of the qualification’ (*valore legale del titolo studio*). This principle implies that any qualification - either newly established or pre-existent- should be formally recognised as official qualification by the public body responsible for the specific VET segment involved. As regards education and vocational training, which falls under the Regions’ responsibility, the qualifications that can be acquired by attending the courses (‘*Attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale*’ – Certificate of Professional Competence and ‘*Diploma professionale di tecnico*’ – Professional Technician Diploma) are strictly limited to those included in the ‘*Repertorio nazionale stabile di qualificazioni*’, a national index of the qualifications which was established by the State/Regions Conference, the most important forum for political negotiation between the central and the local administrations, with the drawing up of a State/Region Agreement. Any modification or addition to the index has to be authorised by the same body. Also for higher technical education and training (*Istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore*; post-secondary level, ISCED 4), partly managed by the Regions (‘*Certificati di specializzazione tecnica superiore*’ – Certificate of Higher Technical Specialization) and partly by the Ministry of Education (*Diploma di tecnico superiore* – Higher Technician Diploma), qualifications are in limited number and any addition can be made only through an across-the-board consultation process.

3.2. Forecasting labour market needs - the contribution of the National Information System for Professional Needs

This section illustrates the characteristics of an information system managed and promoted by ISFOL for the last ten years on behalf of the Ministry of Labour to support the actions undertaken by market operators to prevent skill mismatches. The system (available at: <http://professionioccupazione.isfol.it/>) contains data and information obtained from a wide range of studies and surveys among which it is worth mentioning:

- ‘*Indagine campionaria sulle professioni*’ (Sample Survey on Occupations): A sample survey centred on the 800 occupational units listed in the National Occupational

Committee is still the technical body responsible for setting guidelines, features of the courses provided and training standards as well as operational instructions in accordance with which each Region can design its own courses.

Classification (Level five); first conducted in 2007. The survey, carried out using CAPI methodology (Computer Assisted Personal Interview), involved around 16 000 workers and contained about 300 variables clustered in a 10-section questionnaire. Based on the US *ONet Survey methodological model, it aimed at measuring the importance and complexity of each variable in carrying out a job. Its second edition is under preparation and the results will be available at the beginning of 2013;

- *'Audit permanente dei fabbisogni professionali'* (Permanent Audit of Professional Needs): An audit in which the results provided by the aforementioned survey are used as a benchmark. With a sample of 35 000 enterprises selected by size, sector and geographic area, it gathers qualitative information on workers' skills and knowledge needs. The training needs identified will be subsequently listed in the occupational unit profiles included in the information system. Designed as an annual survey, its first edition is under preparation and the results will be available at the end of the year;
- other studies and research conducted simultaneously with the survey described in point 2 to anticipate medium-term sector skills needs using scenario-based methodologies;
- forecast studies on mid-term recruitment needs (five years) conducted both at national and regional level using a model based on the E3ME Model (Energy-Environment-Economy Model of Europe).

ISFOL's information system is connected to the systems managed by other public bodies such as ISTAT (*Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* - Italian National Institute of Statistics), INAIL (*Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul lavoro* - Italian National Institute for Insurance Against Industrial Injuries) and the Ministry of Labour to enable users to access all available information on occupations (including, for instance, ISTAT's workforce survey, INAIL statistics on industrial accidents and the portal set up by the Ministry of Labour to help match labour demand and supply). Information comparability is ensured by the use of a common classification for occupations. In addition, the system contains a number of tools designed to support people's job searching, encourage career mobility and offer career guidance. In the first two cases users can identify the skills needed to either access the labour market or take up a new profession; in the third they can compare their personality traits with those deemed suitable for a certain occupation according to the classification drawn up by J.L. Holland.

3.3. Non-formal and informal learning validation

In Italy, despite a general consensus about the right to formal and social recognition of learning, regardless of the context and experiences from which it is derived, the principles that would enable the development of instruments and processes for skills validation and certification have only been partially implemented due to both the lack of a National Qualification Framework and to the specific features of each single regional system. Nevertheless, institutions have become increasingly aware of the need to address the issue

through cohesive and binding regulations, also considering its close connection with the European strategy for people's mobility and employability and a number of other EU initiatives (including EQF, ECVET, EUROPASS, and EQAVET) that have made remarkable progress in the last two years.

In the case of apprenticeships some concrete measures to enhance the value of learning were adopted with Legislative Decree 167/11, '*Testo Unico sull'Apprendistato*' (Consolidated Text on Apprenticeships). The law establishes that the skills developed by apprentices shall be certified in accordance with the criteria set by the Regions on the basis of the Index of Professions ('*Repertorio sulle professioni*'), a national list including all the professional profiles and qualifications that can be gained through apprenticeship schemes currently under construction, and subsequently recorded in the Training Record Book (*Libretto formativo del cittadino*, see below for a brief description). The decree was followed by a phase of close cooperation between the Regions and competent Ministries which resulted in the State/Regions Agreement '*Definizione di un sistema nazionale di certificazione delle competenze comunque acquisite per l'apprendistato*' (Establishing a National Certification System for Skills Recognition within the framework of Apprenticeship Schemes) signed on 19th April 2012.

In addition, in July 2012, Law 92/2012 by the Ministry of Labour '*Disposizioni in materia di riforma del mercato del lavoro in una prospettiva di crescita*' (Provisions for Reforming the Labour Market and Fostering Growth) entered into force. The Law identifies in skills certification and non-formal and informal learning validation two fundamental elements for applying the principle of lifelong learning with a view to boosting people's employability. By addressing the matter comprehensively and fully in line with the European guidelines, the Law lays down a number of important principles for learning recognition:

- skills can be developed in different contexts, be they formal, non-formal or informal;
- certifications are public acts aimed at ensuring transparency and learning recognition, in line with EU guidelines;
- certifiable skills are intended as a structured set of knowledge and abilities, developed in different contexts and for which training credits can be awarded;
- a system for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should be set up with a view to increasing the value of people's cultural and professional background and to assessing whether these can be certified or recognised through training credits;
- working experiences should be recognised as an essential part of people's educational, training and professional path;
- checks should be made on the basis of nationally valid reference frameworks and regulations as well as on the basis of the EU referencing levels and systems, to ensure comparability of certified skills across the national territory and fair and equal treatment for all.

In parallel with the measures adopted at national level, all the Regions developed suitable approaches and instruments for their specific contexts. Where the systems and strategies are more firmly established and operational, regulations were also introduced to establish professional standards and qualifications, as well as mechanisms for skills recognition and credits awarding. It is likely that in the next few years also the criteria and instruments devised at national level, as well the more general European guiding principles, will be integrated into the Regional systems.

Among the instruments developed at national level it is worth recalling the Training Record Book introduced by Legislative Decree n. 276/03 (*'Attuazione delle deleghe in materia di occupazione e mercato del lavoro, di cui alla legge 14 febbraio 2003, n. 30'* - Implementing Proxies for Labour Market and Employment as provided for under Law n. 30 of 14th February 2003) and established by Decree n. 256/05 (*'Approvazione del modello di Libretto Formativo del Cittadino'* - Approval of the Training Record Book Model). Neither a certification nor a qualification but an instrument designed to document learning experiences and skills regardless of their source (school, training or everyday life), it has been adopted (whether experimentally or fully integrated into the systems) by several Regions since 2006, albeit in different forms and aimed at different population groups (e.g. unemployed, apprentices, migrant workers, young people who have completed their military service and volunteers). The practices developed to date through the implementation of the Training Record Book are an important benchmark and should be capitalised on to undertake further action and speed up the development of a national framework.