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Graduate tracking – case study 2 | G4 VET institutes

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This research paper is the second of a series of three, published by EQAVET, to describe several practices of the current state of VET (Vocational Education and Training) graduate tracking on VET provider level in the Netherlands and other EU member states. This series of short papers will be translated into a longer research paper in 2023 in which the conclusions of all three papers will be presented. The goal of this paper(s) is to provide guidelines, best practices and lessons learned from the different case studies.

The second case study focuses on current VET graduate tracking practices in the Netherlands. This case focuses on matching different administrative data sources to map and track students through but also after VET. This paper aims to provide information on the context of the case, the proposed goal of the case, challenges, and recommendations.

Graduate tracking

Tracking graduates can provide insight in the quality of the qualifications and the programs offered in Vocational Education and Training and to a certain extent how well the programs meet the labour market needs. Graduate tracking can be used for different goals, for example for: 1) keeping the curricula up to date to make sure students learn relevant skills for employability or 2) improve career counselling and guidance for current and future students.

Background of the case study

Every student has the right to education which is of satisfactory quality. To ensure every student can assume that the programmes they follow provide adequate quality, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education issues a framework. This framework describes the inspection regime for Dutch VET-education. Every four years programs of schools are assessed on basic quality requirements. The framework differentiates between qualitative and quantitative assessments. The quantitative assessments consist of a benchmark, based on four key performance indicators (KPIs): year results, diploma results, starters results and early school leavers[1].

In the recent years there have been numerous debates between the largest VET institutes in the G4[2], the municipalities of the G4 and the Dutch Inspectorate of Education discussing the benchmark set by the framework of the Inspectorate. The VET institutes in the G4 argue they serve a complex group of students consisting of students with diverse (social) backgrounds and circumstances; making it more difficult to meet the standards (KPIs) set by the Inspectorate of Education. In particular, the institutes argue the benchmark does not take into account the specific group of students the G4 VET institutes serve.

[1] Early school leavers, in Dutch *Vroegtijdig School Verlaters* (VSV). People aged between 18-24 years who have left education without a basic qualification, i.e., a diploma in senior secondary general education (havo), pre-university education (vwo), or level 2 of senior secondary vocational education (mbo).

[2] The four major cities in the Netherlands, namely: The Hague, Utrecht, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam (i.e., G4).

According to the Dutch VET Council (*MBO Raad* in Dutch), the student characteristics and demographics in the G4 (major cities) differ from those outside the G4. The Inspectorate framework does not take any of those factors into account, nor makes any corrections for these factors to the benchmark.

Summarized, the institutes expressed their concerns about the benchmark set by the Inspectorate of Education. The Inspectorate acknowledges the shortcomings in the current framework and offers the institutes an opportunity to prove their claim.

Graduate tracking in the G4

Following these discussions, the VET institutes in the G4 embarked on a journey to better map and understand factors which affect the chance on early school leaving, with a particular focus on the importance of student demographics and background. In addition, the consortium of G4 VET institutes strongly believe that early school leaving is not permanent but can also be temporary. In other words, the students return to school. By conducting this research, the G4 VET institutes want to improve their own steering policy, quality assurance and generate input for the discussions held with the Inspectorate of Education.

Research
The G4 study explains early school leaving, taking into account study characteristics and APCG[3]. The findings present a unique new insight into what happens with students after leaving the VET institutes (with or without a NLQF 2 or higher qualification). Using data from three cohorts, provided by the VET institutes, the Statistics Netherlands (CBS) complemented the data with the labour market position from the students. Enriching the data with extra features from the Statistics Netherlands (CBS) enables the VET institutes to track their students after leaving school.

Dashboard
To maximize the utilization of the generated insights for purpose of quality assurance a dashboard was designed to improve the tracking of graduates. The dashboard can be used to determine the success of the strategies set out by the VET institutes and the performance of the school leavers. The interactive dashboards visualises the position of school leavers, with the option to distinguish between by 1) institution, 2) location, 3) level, 4) learning pathway, 5) domain, 6) vocational training, 7) cohort, and 8) diploma attainment.

Conclusions
The research suggests that not all early school leavers (ESL) without a qualification remain an ESL; 1 out of 12 students return to school. In other words, students marked as early school leaver do not always remain an early school leaver. This provides an alternative promising insight into the student's position: ESL is not necessarily permanent. When comparing the outcomes to the official percentage of ESL students based on the no diploma outflow from study programmes, it was clear that 1 in 5 of the ESL students returns to education in the short term.

A key finding is that obtaining a qualification and student demographics play a significant role in the student's labour market position. For example, school leavers in the G4 without a qualification are twice more likely to end up in an unemployment benefits position than

[3] APCG, in Dutch *armoedeprobleem-cumulatie-gebied*, refers to a geographical area in which there is a relatively high share of households with low income, a relatively high share of households whose main source of income are social benefits, and a relatively high share of households whose main breadwinner has a non-western migration background.

students who obtain a qualification. The same applies for student demographics. Students in APCG areas are twice as likely to end up in an unemployment benefit position. The intersection effect of not obtaining a qualification and living in an APCG area is even more robust.

Challenges and recommendations

VET institutes collect a great amount of data from their student, this data is protected by the General Data Protection Regulation (GPDR). GPDR protects the data from individuals and therefore making data from small cohorts useless. In this specific case the data was enriched by the Statistics Netherlands (CBS). The CBS applies output control, for example only output for groups larger than 10 students is available. This renders data from a lot of VET programmes in combination with NLQF qualification useless; thus, making it impossible for this study to track all the graduates from the institutes. Research design is crucial. The structure and implementation of a study can have great impact on the findings. Therefore, it is crucial to identify risks in the design.

There are multiple structures when working with data supplied from the Statistics Netherlands (CBS). In this case the Statistics Netherlands enriched the data from the G4 VET institutes and returned an aggregated data file (not traceable to individuals). Working with aggregated data makes it impossible to use statistics techniques (for example regressions). However, it is also possible to work in the secured CBS microdata environment. All the microdata remains secure in the CBS environment. This enables the researcher to work with data on an individual level and therefore making it possible to use more complex statistics research techniques. When exporting the results to the outside environment, the CBS conducts an output control to prevent any disclosure risks. Therefore, in the follow up research, the microdata environment is used.

Want to know more about this topic?

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