



Strategic evaluation of the National Strategy Reference Framework – Lot 1



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

October 2013



1. INTRODUCTION

The “Evaluation Study on the Contribution of NSRF to Tackle Early School Leaving”, was carried out between November 2012 and October 2013 by the consortium Quaternaire Portugal/IESE. The current document constitutes the Executive Summary of the Final Report and it aims at summing up the main contents of the Study. Thus, the first section presents the global objectives of the evaluation and the main questions it intended to answer. The second section summarises the methodological path that was followed in order to fulfil the strategy leading to the answers to the evaluation questions. The main evaluation conclusions and recommendations are gathered in the third section of the Executive Summary.

The development of the Study benefited from comments and suggestions made along the way by the Follow-up Group, which encompassed the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (*ANQEP*), the Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics (*DGEEC*), the Financial Institute for Regional Development (*IFDR*), the Institute for the Management of the European Social Fund (*IGFSE*), the NSRF Observatory and the Human Potential Operational Programme (*POPH*). We underline the value of those contributions and we hereby state formally how grateful we are. We also express a special recognition to all those people who were listened during the fieldwork and, as a consequence, contributed to the conclusion of the work and to the achievement of results.

2. EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

Bearing in mind that the evaluation is focused on the identification of how NSRF contributed to reduce early school leaving from the beginning of its execution, in 2007, until now¹, it privileges the analysis of contributions from the tools which, within the NSRF programming, are specifically directed to the school leaving issue and which are included in the Thematic Operational Agenda for Human Potential.

As a consequence, the intervention typologies distinguished as object of study are (i) the **dual certification training supply** directed to the initial qualification of young people; and (ii) the **Priority Intervention Education Areas (TEIP)**² which promote the adoption of extraordinary measures for the territories/communities with significant issues affecting the education system, specifically drop-out and early school leaving. The territorial coverage of the evaluation exercise was the national territory and the NSRF Operational Programmes that were taken into consideration were, as a result of the tools assessed, the Human Potential Operational Programme (Mainland), the *Rumos* Programme (Autonomous Region of Madeira) and the *PRO-EMPREGO* Programme (Autonomous Region of Azores).

As far as the dual certification courses are concerned, it is important to distinguish between lower and upper secondary education cycles, once at lower secondary education level (called in Portugal as basic education level) the Education Training Courses for Young People (*CEF*) are hegemonic from the supply point of view, whereas at upper secondary education (called in Portugal simply as secondary education) the supply diversity includes the Vocational Training (with higher representativeness) and the Learning System; the Education Training Courses for Young People at the latter educational level are not co-financed by the ESF.

Regarding the Learning System, ESF represents 100% of the expenses in the convergence regions (North, Centre and Alentejo) and 78% of the Mainland’s total. The Vocational Training and the *CEF* represent more than half (58%) of the expenses in the convergence regions and 45% of the total. Concerning the *TEIP*, ESF represents 72% of the expenses in the convergence regions, half of the expenses in the Lisbon region and 65% of the Mainland’s total.

The following table systematises the questions and sub-questions that guide the current evaluation study.

¹ In some situations, the period of analysis considered to answer each of the evaluation questions does not include the total period mentioned. The situation differs according to the type of analysis considered and the data availability for each system and to the source of information considered.

² Financed by the Integrated Programmes for the Promotion of Educational Success under the scope of *POPH*.

Table 1 – Questions, sub-questions and fields of analysis

Q	S.Q.1 – Does the professionalising vocational training to young people under school age contribute to reduce early school leaving and to improve the trainees’ school and professional performance?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the contribution from the strategy of pedagogic diversification supported by ESF to promote the generalisation of the basic and secondary education levels and the quality of learning? • What is the contribution from the dual certification strategy supported by ESF to promote the trainees’ insertion in the labour market?
Q	S.2 – Does the initiative “Priority Intervention Education Areas” contribute to reduce early school leaving and to improve the school performance of the young people covered by the initiative?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the evolution of the performance in <i>TEIP</i> schools relevant in comparison with the average confirmed in the other schools? • Did the <i>TEIP</i> projects guarantee an increased articulation of the school’s educational project with the characteristics of its surroundings? • To what extent did the <i>TEIP</i> projects contribute for the innovation at organisational level and at the level of the pedagogical practices?
Q	S.3 – Does the supported vocational training available to young people under school age answer the shortage of competencies in the productive structure in the various territories (regarding the training areas and the training quality, at present and in the foreseeable future)?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the training areas articulate with the regional economic profile? • What is the employability of the certified young people in the vocational education, per area? • What is the efficacy of the institutional mechanisms to structure the training supply and the demand?
Q	S.4 – Is the registered downward trajectory of school leaving sustainable, given the interventions currently being supported (without compromising the quality of the training)?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do the NSRF interventions to tackle school leaving facilitate a response to the needs of the young people who persist in dropping-out trajectories? • To what extent does the dynamic of demand for dual certification options make it possible to sustain a visible tendency to reduce early school leaving? • Which practices developed at school contribute to potentiate the contributions from the NSRF interventions to tackle school leaving? • To what extent does the context where the NSRF interventions are implemented contribute to the downward trend in school quitting?
Q	T.1 – Which impacts (both effective and potential) do the interventions supported by NSRF have on the different types of expected outcomes, in quantitative and qualitative terms?
SQ	The same used for S1 and S3.
Q	T.2 – How do those impacts change according to the tools of public intervention, the groups of beneficiaries / recipients and the relevant regions?
SQ	The same used for S1 and S2.
Q	T.3 Have the interventions been privileging the groups of beneficiaries/recipients and territories which represent the most pressing challenges and to whom the impacts may be more significant?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the dual certification supply been effective in the promotion of the school success of the most deprived beneficiaries/ recipients with risky schooling trajectories, from a social point of view? • Do the created <i>TEIP</i> correspond to the most problematic territories as far as school leaving is concerned? • Is the regional participation profile in the dual certification choices in line with the drop-out profile recorded in the exact same regions?
Q	T.4 – Do the estimated impacts of the interventions supported by NSRF justify the associated costs?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the volume and the evolution of the investment and how much does it weight regarding the global investment framework in the education and training policies? • To what extent is the financial weight given to the dual certification choices adequate considering the global expense and its representativeness in the education and training system? • Are the unit costs of the supported interventions adequate?
Q	T.5 – Is the volume of financial resources allocated to the interventions adequate, given the strategic challenge(s) at stake and the total volume of resources available in the NSRF?
SQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the resources allocated by the ESF proportional to the policy objectives, given the costs’ structure inherent to the chosen tools? • Are the resources allocated by the ESF proportional to the relevance and requirement of the strategic challenge at stake, given the whole investment programmed by NSRF? • Which financing requirements may be associated with short- and medium-term targets established for this strategic challenge?

Q	T.6 – Which factors emerge as decisive for the efficacy, the efficiency and the usefulness of the interventions?
SQ	The same used for S1, S2, S3 and S4.

In order to limit the dimension of the report and optimise the analysis' development strategy, the answer to the transversal questions 1, 2 and 6 was given throughout the approach to the specific questions and, more critically, in the chapter dedicated to conclusions and recommendations; therefore, the sub-questions associated with these questions are exactly the same that are taken into consideration along the four specific questions.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the Evaluation Study on the Contribution of NSRF to Reduce Early School Leaving encompasses a multimethod approach and includes certain innovative approaches, though not unprecedented, in the context of the evaluation of public policies in Portugal. In particular, it is highlighted the counterfactual analysis regarding the evaluation of outcomes and impacts guaranteed by the policy tools that constitute the evaluation object. The choice for the counterfactual method aimed at reinforcing the response capacity of the evaluation exercise in the determination of the achieved outcomes and in the validation of the expected cause-and-effect relations.

For the purpose of evaluating the contribution of the dual certification types to reduce school leaving, the analysis performed focused on the administrative databases of the different information systems (*DGEEC*, *DGE*, *IEFP* and *IGFSE*). The counterfactual exercise enabled the evaluation of the cause-and-effect relationship among the different variables under analysis, thus assessing the outcomes and impacts of the interventions at stake regarding the following fields of analysis: premature leaving, school success and employability.

Taken together, the methodological approach comprehended the triangulation of different methods and techniques to collect and treat qualitative information, for instance, via the participatory involvement of stakeholders in interviews, case studies and focus group that provided inputs that were later content analysed, and quantitative information, for instance, via the treatment of documents and databases of the most structuring information systems considering the subject of the study object (*SIIFSE*, *MISI*, *PISA*, *OTES*, *SGFOR*), through a thorough application of counterfactual analysis. As a result, the information collected during the evaluation process was vast and diverse, enhancing the complementarity of the evidence collected to answer the different evaluation questions.

4. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

The Study's conclusions and recommendations roadmap is organised in two main reading topics whose purpose is to enable a more integrated approach to the achieved outcomes in the answers to each of the evaluation questions asked.

I. Tackle School Leaving and Failure: the contribution from the dual certification supply and from the TEIP

The evolution of early school leaving and educational success over the last decade

I.1. Both the expansion movements of the dual certification available and the progressive rebalance between the representativeness of these training types and the regular education path follows a continuous improvement in key-indicators to assess the performance of the education and training system; the clearest examples are the education level, the school abandonment and early drop-out and the completion rates.

The relation between the intensification of the gains and the expansion of the dual certification options is proved by the counterfactual analysis, which measures the impact differences in the completion, drop-out, transition and class repetition rates. As far as the basic education is concerned, the characteristics of the pupils attending the regular path are controlled by the *CEF* trainees; we found that the completion rate of the trainees enrolled in the *CEF* is 65,7 pp higher than the rate of the pupils enrolled in the regular education. At secondary level and regarding

the comparison between the Vocational Training and the Upper Secondary Scientific-Humanistic Course, that value is in the 20,7 pp. Regarding the drop-out rate, there is a progressive reduction for the trainees enrolled in the *CEF*, currently at 9,7 pp below the pupils enrolled in regular education two years after the normal course's completion date. At secondary education the same indicator has declined by 4,9 pp. Taken together, the data resulting from counterfactual analysis show the relevant contribution from the dual certification tracks to the reduction of early leaving and class repetition levels; simultaneously, it confers an even greater expression to the improvement in the completion rates.

The early school leaving in the territory and the contribution from the TEIP

I.2. Despite the significant reduction in the early school and training leaving rate, the data show that some regional inequality still persists in the convergence trajectory.

In the mainland, the Algarve is the region with the higher percentage of young people (18-24 years old) who cumulatively abandoned school prior to concluding secondary level and have not rejoined education and training (26% in 2011). The autonomous regions reveal the highest early school and training leaving rates in the country – Azores with 44,3% and Madeira with 31,7%. Altogether, from the point of view of the outcomes and their associated investment, the performance reached by the strategy designed under the scope of *QREN* presents relevant territorial nuances and it comes up especially fragile in the autonomous regions.

I.3. The results achieved with the *TEIP* Programme reflect the need to tune strategies that can bring the Programme's action to a level of higher efficacy. In fact, an analysis to the evolution in the leaving rates at *TEIP* schools leads to the conclusion that this policy tool assumes a moderately positive contribution to the reduction of early leaving from the education system. The way the Programme's action contributed to reduce early leaving is more visible for the 3rd cycle of the basic school level (- 2,5 pp) and the secondary education (- 3,9 pp).

Regarding the promotion of school success, the determined outcomes reflect lesser consistency in the achieved gains. At 3rd cycle level, the gains in reducing the failure rate in *TEIP*³ schools compared to the national average reached 5,3 pp between 2006/07 and 2010/11, but declined by 4 pp in the period, if we consider the failure rate determined in the school year 2011/12 and compare it to the rate observed in 2007/08. At secondary education the evolution is also globally negative for the period (the records indicate a drop of 2,9 pp between 2007/08 and 2011/12).

In addition, regarding the results obtained by the *TEIP* school pupils, there is also an evolution that follows the curve dictated by the results' evolution at national level with no remarkable gains in terms of convergence with national averages.

The counterfactual analysis corroborates the evidence that the gains achieved by the *TEIP* Programme in the discrimination of problematic territories provide a modest contribution to the policy goal it aims to address. Regarding the basic education, the completion rate for the students enrolled in *TEIP* schools is 7,6 pp inferior to non-*TEIP* schools at the normal year of cycle completion. As regards secondary education, the same indicator is 11,3 pp inferior. The difference verified in the drop-out rates, although much smaller, continues to show an unfavourable behaviour of the *TEIP* schools (the drop-out rate is 0,1 pp higher in the non-*TEIP* schools at basic level and 0,7 pp at secondary level). Despite stressing the negative picture of the performance reached by the programme, the counterfactual exercise corroborates the perspective given by the statistic indicators collected: the results are more fragile regarding the reduction of school failure than regarding the reduction of an early interruption of the school path.

The counterfactual exercise has also showed that, when compared to the schools that did not join the *TEIP* Programme, the *TEIP* schools reveal a slightly more favourable performance regarding the dual certification training types, i.e., these types are favourably appropriated by the *TEIP* projects in the promotion of school success

³ The Failure Rate is the indicator calculated by the coordination team of the *TEIP* Programme and it takes into consideration the no. of pupils who failed at the 3rd period's final evaluation and the total no. of enrolled pupils (excluding the transferred pupils and those still undergoing the evaluation process).

(the completion rate in the Vocational Training at *TEIP* schools was 2,1 pp higher than at non-*TEIP* schools, whereas in the Upper Secondary Scientific-Humanistic Courses it was 8,6 pp lower).

At the level of the qualitative collection, what is emphasised is the effect of the focus on the response to problematic cases and the internalisation of action strategies. The intervention from the classroom and the centrality conferred to the learning strategies assume a greater role than the mediation actions with the surrounding family and social background. The fragility of the results requests the strategy to act on the social and family insertion contexts which accentuate the untying effect regarding school and compromise the efficacy of the learning-centred strategies.

Future sustainability of the trajectory to reduce early school leaving

I.4. Despite the remarkable improvement registered over the last years in reducing early school and training leaving, the fulfilment of the targets established under the Strategy Europe 2020 still represents an enormous challenge for the Portuguese educational system.

Regarding secondary education, it will be decisive to invest in an increase of the real schooling rate (72,5% in 2011) to levels close to the basic education rate (92,1% in the 3rd cycle in 2011), but also in the continuous improvement of school success (transition/conclusion, class repetition and drop-out) and of the efficiency and efficacy levels reached in the meantime. The increase in the participation in secondary education among the 15-18 age bracket, on the one hand, and the improvement in the completion rates at that cycle, on the other hand, will be crucial to progressively reduce the early school leavers among the 18-24 age bracket. In 2011/2012, the existing completion rate, both for the VT and the regular education at secondary level, was still around 62%, in spite of the already residual values of the drop-out rates in any of the education types.

The basic education registers, as well, quite satisfactory success levels, namely regarding drop-out control. Still, the transition /completion rates, especially in the 3rd cycle of basic education (86,2% in 2009/2010) and in the *CEF* (completion rate of 68,9% in 20011/2012), reveal significant room for improvement.

Notwithstanding, the sustainability of the results achieved in Portugal regarding the reduction in school leaving will have to consider the need to combine prevention and intervention strategies in the educational system, thus avoiding the early exits from the system, with an effective and broad use of recovery strategies for young adults (18-24 years old) who, outside school, have access to alternative education and training opportunities to complete secondary education.

I.5. Bearing in mind that in Portugal there are around 150 to 200 thousand young people who leave school without completing secondary education and who are not attending education and training, the compensation strategies gain particular relevance, provided that they are directed to the decrease in the stock of available young labour supply with low qualifications in the labour market.

It is more and more acknowledgeable that the investment strategies in the available dual certification, with a strong vocational training component, both at basic and secondary levels, constitute education and training paths specially suitable to the diversity of pupils, capable of attracting those who show risk of early school leaving and potentially capable of retrieving the young adults who have already abandoned the school.

However, this element does not seem enough to answer the needs of young people at risk of early school leaving. The decision- and choice-making processes are difficult and still immature and usually with little success expectations. The drop-out risk is kept particularly high during the first year of the courses, especially due to inadequate vocational choices or inadequate expectations of the young people in relation to the courses' demand.

In order to tackle early school leaving, it is compulsory for the professionals to monitor timely, regularly and closely the young people and their families; at the same time, the education and training system must give complementary answers so to guarantee, together with permanence in education, a progressive improvement in the school performance of these pupils.

Differentiated contributions per training type

1.6. The analysis to each of the dual certification types supported by the ESF suggests the existence of a distinction in the covered recipients and in the type of answer provided.

Taken together, the identified results relate the impact on the Education Training Courses for Young People at basic level with the repair to exclusion trajectories characterised by processes of non-identification with the school, commonly associated with rejection, abandon, indiscipline and failure processes to which male pupils are particularly exposed to. Regarding the secondary level, the positive impact associated with the Vocational Training highlights the response to situations of economic disadvantage, boosting the girls' performance gains, traditionally higher on average.

Still at secondary education level, the analysis between training types also underlines differences in the recruitment profile, training areas and performance indicators between the Vocational Training and the Learning System; it is possible to find a differentiation in the attributes that help outlining unique identities. In particular, the emphasis goes to the audience, more hegemonic around pupils with bumpy school paths, and the training areas, with a higher representation of industrial activities, in the case of the Learning System. The pedagogic differentiation in the Learning System, based on the reinforcement of the practical component, but, also, on the reinforcement of the pupils' mentoring and monitoring function and the greater expression of practical training areas constitute an asset of this training type to address pupils with higher risk of premature leaving and with more learning difficulties in the academic areas of the general training.

The Vocational Training, on the other hand, gathers differentiated attributes in the diversity of training areas included, in the preservation of a greater focus on the initial training and in the development of a greater efficacy in the promotion of strategies to further progression of studies into higher education.

Recommendations: Tackle School Leaving and Failure: the contribution from the available dual certification

In order to **guarantee more efficacy in the promotion of educational success at basic education level** and, as a consequence, to reduce the failure rates and the number of pupils who do not complete this education level and/or do not proceed to secondary education:

1. Reinforce pedagogic diversification as a strategy in the basic tracks through an increase of vocational components and practical training in the curriculum; under this scope, expand the offer of professionalising/vocational courses for the 3rd cycle of basic education. Together with the diversification effort, it is recommended to preserve the governmental targets, so to increase the representativeness of the dual certification choices at basic education level (3rd cycle) and secondary level (for the latter assuming as a reference the target of 50%). (MEC; MEE; ANQEP)
2. Reinforce the mechanisms of early detection and individualised monitoring of the pupils with weaker school performances and with higher risk of following paths of failure and abandonment. Attempt to dislocate the individualised attention efforts from the reactive action to undisciplined and unaccountable behaviours to the preventive action that aims to identify and act on the factors that induce such behaviour. The strategies of individualised monitoring shall conciliate the support to the learning process through an intensification of the classroom work and the additional study time with mechanisms to cope with problems of social and family insertion that jeopardise school performance. In this domain, it is important to reinforce the articulation between the school and the family, investing in professional mediation strategies that foster the participation of the family and assure an adequate mobilisation of the social and economic support resources available within the intervention from the state or from non-profit organisations. To promote a higher involvement of the parents and the family in the school life and the investment in programmes to raise awareness and educate the parents, whenever the parents' lower academic levels influence negatively the expectations and the behaviour towards the children's school trajectory and whenever their educational responsibilities are not fully taken, is definitely a relevant aspect of this investment. (MEC; DGE; ANQEP)
3. In order to better calibrate some of the options that have to be made, it is considered useful to evaluate the facts underneath the decline in some of the main success indicators at the level of the education system, namely from the academic year 2010/2011 onwards, balancing the relation between that evolution and the options regarding (re)organisational and educational policy associated with the process of budget restraint felt since 2010. (MEC)

Recommendations: Tackle School Leaving and Failure: the contribution from the available dual certification

4. The improvement in the intervention model of the *TEIP* Programme, privileging a higher focus on the action through an increased selectivity in the type of problems and recipients addressed and a modelling of the intervention strategy to promote an increased capacity of articulation with the family and social contexts where the young people belong. This effort of increased articulation must rely on the reinforcement of the school's mediation/connection role next to the family and on the tools and institutions that, on the field, may provide support to the resolution of existing problems, hence strengthening the strategy included in the recommendation described above. The experience and the learning developed within the project *EPIS* – Entrepreneurs For the Social Inclusion (namely at mediation level), as well as with the diverse implementation framework of the *TEIP* projects, must be taken into consideration at this level. A mediation that is close, professional and vested in stability in the relationship technician-pupil reveals attributes that are valued by the *EPIS* project and contribute to a better articulation, within the *TEIP* projects, between the learning support dimension and the promotion of a reinforced context of social and family inclusion. (MEC; DGE)
5. Under the scope of the *TEIP* Programmes, and considering the fact that in these schools the performance associated with the dual certification offers is comparatively better than in the other schools, increase the value of the dual certification types as part of an offer diversification. Still regarding the intervention of the *TEIP* Programme, boost the operation of a local commission to support the school, where all the relevant entities meet to guarantee a better capacity to activate the strategies and mobilise the adequate resources to provide an answer to the identified problems. The purpose is to encourage the creation of a local and close network which, with a more personalised and prompt approach, complements the school's role in relevant domains to improve the support provided to the pupils. Areas such as social security, health, justice, protection of young people at risk and housing are some examples of sectors to include. The commission shall meet on a regular basis at the school and ensure the participation of the local entities whose scope relates to the areas considered necessary (including private entities with a relevant activity for the purposes at stake). (MEC; DGE)

Regarding secondary education and in order to increase the efficacy in the reduction of early school leaving and to promote educational success:

6. Reorganise the *CEF* paths so to, on the one hand, allow the integration of pupils who have not been approved at the 10th grade and of those who, despite having a school diploma, want to get a level 4 occupational diploma from the National Qualifications Framework (*QNQ*) and, on the other hand, turn the demands regarding the alignment of the training areas with the basic education more flexible. The reinforcement of the on-the-job training component is also a relevant option to value the *CEF*'s pedagogic efficacy. However, this option does not seem articulable, in its premises, with the undergoing conception of a new supply at secondary education level (Vocational Training). (MEC; MEE; ANQEP; IEFPP)
7. The reduction of the premature leaving trajectories without completion of the secondary education, namely for the young people who are out of the compulsory education is still an extremely relevant priority; as a consequence, it is considered useful to expand the pedagogic diversification regarding the professionalising training types, namely given the introduction of a type dedicated to the development of schooling recovery strategies (starting at the 10th, 11th or 12th grades) for young people who interrupt their path at secondary level (in particular for Upper Secondary Scientific-Humanistic Courses); such diversification strategy may imply the reactivation of the Adult Education and Training Courses of secondary level or the design of a new training type that gathers important properties such as the design of tailor-made paths regarding the moment when the path is interrupted and a significant curricular relevance of the practical and on-the-job training components. The pedagogic diversification and the effective expansion of the Adult Education and Training Courses of secondary level will allow a higher strategic individualisation of the Vocational Training and the Learning System. The results of the evaluation already reflect an individualisation of the type of response to take into consideration: the Adult Education and Training Courses, combined with the support strategies referred above, gather the best conditions to address the most critical problems of school performance and abandonment risk; the Learning System gathers the best conditions to consolidate an intermediate qualification choice directed more exclusively to the insertion in the labour market and to address training areas valued by the current vision regarding the country's productive specialisation – the specialisation of the network of training centres belonging to the *IEFP* constitutes an important added value for that purpose; the Vocational Training tends to increasingly correspond to the availability of an alternative choice to recipients with normal school paths and represents a preferential option to combine level 4 occupational certification with the possibility to align a vocational qualification row with higher

Recommendations: Tackle School Leaving and Failure: the contribution from the available dual certification

education. The perspective of an evolution in the polytechnic education as part of an effort to reinforce the professionalising spirit must be included in this consideration. (MEC)

8. Make the curricular strategies of the Vocational Training more flexible, thus enabling a better capacity to adequate to regional/sectorial contexts within the labour market and the reinforcement of the on-the-job training component, without compromising the differentiation space between these courses and the Learning System. The strategy of flexibility in the curricular outline and in the training programmes, valorised within the Vocational Training, may constitute a learning indication and element worth of valorisation under the scope of this recommendation. (MEC; ANQEP)
9. Given the proposal to reinforce on-the-job training and to reinforce the investment in the dual education, an investment declared in the governmental agenda, it shall be accompanied by a greater professionalism and regulation of the mentoring function; similarly to what happens in other European countries, it is then justifiable to develop a competencies' reference framework and, in a second stage, the certification for the mentoring function and, even broadly, of the conditions how on-the-job training is implemented in the enterprises. The specified mapping of the competencies to be developed in each course within on-the-job training (through the preparation of a guiding framework for the organisation and development of that training component) constitutes an important condition to preserve the adequacy in the learning. (MEC; ANQEP)
10. The valorisation of the professionalising component also justifies a greater investment in the pedagogic qualification of the trainers working in the technical component. (MEC; ANQEP; IEFP)
11. Guarantee that the revitalisation of the intervention strategy followed by the TEIP Programme reinforces the intervention in pupils from the secondary education.

Taking into consideration how demanding it is to apply the necessary effort to reach the **target of reducing early school leaving by 2020**, it is advisable to consider as well the system's progressive improvement capacity, particularly regarding the promotion, organisation, relevance and the permeability of the dual certification option:

12. Continuous investment in the social valorisation of these options, either for the completion of compulsory schooling and further studies, or for the employability, involving young people and families, employers and local communities, but also the schools and the teaching staff, avoiding the stigmatisation of these options inside the school itself.
13. Having taken the set of possibilities for the diversification of paths properly regulated for the Adult Education and Training Courses (EFA) as a starting point, activate a supply of secondary level courses, focusing on academic certification alone or offering a dual certification, with the purpose of recovering young adults (particularly for the 18-24 age bracket) for the education and training system, specifically those who have not completed secondary education and are neither studying nor working. The Learning System may as well be invited to provide a more directed answer to these recipients (MEC, MEE ANQEP; IEFP)
14. Aiming at a closer approach to the labour market, the reactivation of the availability of EFA Courses may concede privilege to the participation of the network of IEFP's training centres and the Vocational Training Schools – which is also beneficial given the greater availability and capacity of this network – and, in addition, explore a greater organisational flexibility of the curriculum's professionalising component (regarding the modules and the reinforcement of on-the-job training). Therefore, the flexibility of the curriculum to answer specific sectorial- or regional-based needs (exploring the flexibility allowed by the Catalogue's frameworks) and the reinforcement in the on-the-job training strategies, are options to be considered and thoroughly analysed. (MEC; MEE; ANQEP; IEFP)

II. Employability, Learning and Production of Competencies: the contribution from the dual certification tracks

Employability promotion

II.1. The employability rates of secondary education pupils confirm the professionalising nature of the dual certification courses. First of all, they confirm that the preference for the dual certification course is largely influenced by the possibility to move to the labour market by the end of secondary education. Circa 14 months after the expected completion date of a secondary course, 43,2% of the Vocational Training trainees were working and 9 months after the course's completion, 44,2% of the Learning System trainees were working, whereas the same indicator was of only 10% for those attending an Upper Secondary Scientific-Humanistic Course. This professionalising vocation is reinforced when we analyse the representativeness of those who, having decided not to study, were already working 14 months after the expected school completion date, that is, 53,3% in the Vocational Training, 46,2% in the CEF and 28,5% in the Upper Secondary Scientific-Humanistic Course.

Combined with the interpretation provided by the indicators on work quality (work arrangement and type of contract), this information emphasises a framework for professional insertion, 14 months after the regular time to complete the course, less precarious in the case of the dual certification pupils.

II.2. At organisational level, it is possible to verify an excessive concentration of the education and training tracks in the services area, whilst it is also evident that this tertiary emphasis partly followed the tertiary emphasis of the economic activity itself, registered during the last decade, namely in the social action, education and health sectors. The existing supply range is strongly influenced by the preferences of the demand from young people as well as by the schools' profile in terms of allocation of resources, both equipment and trainers. In other words, the organisation of the demand emerges influenced by the terms that are rigged by the training market, determined by the convergence of the supply's and the demand's preferences, which limits the transmission effect from the labour market.

II.3. These results show a limited capacity to include a more strategic perspective in the planning component. Nonetheless, some examples highlighted in the study show a relevant improvement at this level that shall be worked further. The limitations in a substantive strategic planning are connected with the weaknesses in the model to anticipate the training needs; among other reasons, the latter is vulnerable, for instance, due to an insufficient comprehensiveness of the methodologies and an insufficient systematisation of data production.

II.4. From a curricular point of view, the dynamic use of the National Catalogue of Qualifications has a limited impact on reversing the adjustment it tries to guarantee to the needs expressed by the productive structure regarding the professionalising options; although that work is already being developed, it is not possible yet to guarantee that the Vocational Training is aligned with the qualification frameworks included in the Catalogue.

Financing

II.5. The expenses associated with the evaluated tools, taking into consideration the number of pupils involved, shows a good efficiency via an unit cost comparatively lower regarding ESF. The data that were analysed suggest, however, that the costs differentiations are established according to the remuneration strategy and service distribution among sub-systems (public and private), suggesting, as well, that there is little room to promote significant efficacy gains within ESF financing framework without taking chances on the quality and the efficacy of the responses. As far as the dual certification options are concerned, the risk of sub-financing the necessary resources to the development of specific curricular components is especially relevant. For comparison, the information gathered at international level, despite the comparability limitations identified in the report, place anyhow the unit cost of the dual certification options supported by the ESF in a level that we can classify as "competitive".

II.6. Although the financial indicators presented point to a good efficiency level, the ambitious targets established by the Agenda 2020 in terms of reducing early school leaving and also the national targets to expand the professionalising education place the volume of financial resources allocated to the strategy as insufficient. In fact, scarcely will the increase in the number of pupils and the demands towards the supply qualification, with an emphasis on the importance of valuing the pedagogic arm and the resources allocated to practical training, be compatible with the current investment volume allocated to the professionalising tracks. This conclusion is especially important when what is at stake is the strategy to generalise the dual model to the secondary level professionalising tracks.

From the point of view of the public policy goals, the unavoidable option to promote the return to education and training paths for young people who left school too early, as well as the demand to expand the schooling rate at secondary level to fulfil compulsory schooling, confront the educational system with the need to allocate more resources to the available dual certification.

Recommendations: Employability, Learning Quality and Production of Competencies

The **effort to integrate the qualifying offers with the needs of the productive structure** constitutes a crucial investment line to value the dual certification options and to consolidate the path of social assertiveness that has been followed, and it shall prioritise:

15. The development of tools and methodologies dedicated to academic and vocational guidance and the effective generalisation of their application to the universe of pupils that complete basic education. Such development is a fundamental condition so that the purpose of achieving a better alignment between the supply and the demand can be met. Therefore, the full commissioning of the network of Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (*CQEP*) and the capacity to turn their performance into an integration link between schools, families and the employer structure will be a resource worth valuing. (*DGE; ANQEP; IEFP*)
16. Growing implementation of a “smart specialisation” logic with a regional base where the productive specialisation standard and the economic development options are integrated and reinforced by a differentiated supply of intermediate qualifications; this logic will tend to improve these options’ attractiveness due to the fact that it may boost more credible perspectives for the employability of young people. (*ANQEP; IEFP*)
17. Mobilise the Sector Qualification Councils as a platform to map the qualifications that may support the referred «smart specialisation», investing in the development of qualitative strategies to assess the needs and to create regional networks to guide the production of qualifications. It is worth stressing the usefulness of a proactive implementation of a diagnoses agenda with a sectorial scope and its articulation with networks of players that support the organisation of smart specialisation processes to produce qualifications. (*ANQEP; IEFP*)
18. Strengthen integrated and systematic strategies to anticipate the needs for competencies and that mobilise qualitative and quantitative prospecting strategies and guarantee relevant information to support the decision-making process at the level of the school network. In this perspective, the central investment shall go to the production of diagnoses and to the coordination of the dissemination process and data analysis. (*ANQEP; DGE; IEFP*)
19. Pursue the strategy of curricular flexibility within the National Catalogue of Qualifications, fostering the regional-based and business-based adequacy, conferring even more flexibility to its curricular organisation. Increase, for example, the curriculum optional component in the *CNQ* frameworks or encompass the possibility that part of the reference framework is tailor-made for determined sectorial and/or regional contexts are some examples of that strategy. In addition, the articulation between the *CNQ* and the Vocational Training curricular organisation must be ensured. This recommendation foresees that the possibility to organise the Vocational Training from the National Catalogue of Qualifications reference frameworks can be expedited; (*ANQEP*)
20. More readability of the available tracks and their career options, rationalising and avoiding overlaps, especially in delimited territorial contexts and/or with insufficient demand (young people and employers) in certain education and training areas. The creation of a new track (Vocational Training) may eventually represent an increased difficulty for the coordination effort that is required at this level. (*DGE; ANQEP; IEFP*)
21. Reduce the obstacles to proceed studying, between cycles, by providing adequate options of courses in the same education and training areas, or similar in the school environment or nearby. The relation between the basic-level

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CEF and the secondary professionalising options and between the latter and the vocational choices at higher education level. (MEC; ANQEP)

22. Guarantee that the educational paths have a sequence at higher education, at a regional level, in particular with the CET supply. (MEC; ANQEP)
23. Reconsider the courses' demands and adequacy in an attempt to match the pupils' specificity and expectations regarding the programmes' contents, school timetables and pedagogic strategies (especially among the sociocultural, scientific and technological components), with the quality of the learning and the demands of the required knowledge and competencies, either for the transitions of educational cycles or for the employability. (ANQEP; IEFP; DGE)

The option for the supply expansion and specialisation implies challenges at organisational and pedagogic levels, which constitute major **efficacy requirements and quality improvement for the learning**:

24. The 12 years of compulsory education and the goal of turning secondary education universal justify that the qualifying role of the basic-level courses may be reconsidered, specifically regarding the attribution of an occupational qualification level. The occupational certification at basic level shall avoid becoming a factor that induces an early transition to the labour market. Consequently, the certification at that education level shall tend to be articulated with the access to secondary level options that strengthen and complete the acquisition of professional competencies, thus preserving the vocational component as a resource of pedagogic differentiation and as initial training in line with qualifying paths at secondary level. (ANQEP; IEFP; DGE)
25. Regarding the Education Training Courses for Young People, the curricular development, namely at secondary education level, shall take into consideration the possibility to reinforce the on-the-job training components, guiding its development towards the acquisition of professional, but also behavioural, competencies. (ANQEP; IEFP; DGE)
26. The definition of learning frameworks based on competencies is a relevant condition to contribute for the learning quality and efficacy and it is also a guarantee mechanism twice as important given the prospective reinforcement of on-the-job training. (ANQEP)
27. The development of behavioural competencies also corresponds to a challenge for the curricular development of the training supply and, consequently, to the National Catalogue of Qualifications. (ANQEP)

Concerning the **financing of the analysed interventions and the sustainability of the existing policy targets and goals**, the following is included:

28. The need to adjust the level of investment to the targets ahead, assuming a different balance in the allocation of resources between the regular and the dual certification options and the reinforcement of the global financing allocated to the addressed policy tools and strategies. In particular, this need is associated with the goal to expand the schooling and the school success rates at secondary level, aiming at the fulfilment of the 12 years of compulsory education. (MEC; MTE)
29. The goal to reduce early school leaving rate (measured at the 18 – 24 age bracket) justifies the reinforcement of the financial resources allocated to the qualification strategy of young adults who have not completed secondary education. (MEC; MTE)