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From Lisbon to Copenhagen, London, Helsinki and Edinburgh – a study of vocational education and training (VET) policy making in four European countries (Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland)

Jane Margaret Lacey Pither

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

September 2021

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Abstract

In this study I explored the complex spatial and temporal relationships developed during vocational education and training (VET) policy making by the European Union (EU), three member states (Denmark, Finland and the United Kingdom) and a region, Scotland, covering the period from 2000 to 2019. Discourse and thematic analyses of EU and national VET policy documents were used to compare the distinctive nature of VET policy making in the four countries through comparative policy analysis. Illustrative thematic case studies, developed to better understand the interplay between the policy making processes were then compared with selected policy change theories of convergence, divergence, Europeanisation, Europeification, policy drift and policy diffusion.

Using Archer's morphogenetic approach within a critical realism framework to support analyses of different layers of discourse, it was found that there was no consistent understanding of the purpose of VET between the EU and its member states, or, indeed, within the nations of the UK. Nor did the EU establish a consistent VET policy space. The purpose of VET policy was varyingly perceived as either social, economic, educational or political between 2000 and 2019.

These nuanced relationships are portrayed through the conceptualisation of a VET policy making gyre, developed as an alternative to the policy making cycle. The gyre was found to represent more fully the ebb and flow of aspects of policy purposes and goals over time as well as the dynamics of structure and agent relationships in policy formulation. The gyre also reflected the shifts between top down, bottom up and peer to peer policy learning or absence of learning that was apparent as VET policy was developed.

Brief consideration is given to the future of VET policy making in the light of both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, based on the trajectories developed in the study.

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Glossary

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis (from ‘Language and Power’, Fairclough 2015)
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CR	Country Report (part of European Semester process)
CSR	Country Specific Recommendation (part of European Semester process)
cVET	Continuing vocational education and training, further training after initial VET qualifications, often in the workplace
DfE	Department for Education (England)
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EHEA	European Higher Education Area (linked to the Bologna process)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
FE	Further education
HE	Higher education
hVET	Higher level vocational education and training, equivalent to English levels 4 to 8 and EQF levels.
IfATE	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (England)
iVET	Initial vocational education and training, usually delivered between a VET institution and a work place, frequently following the end of compulsory education. Specifically targeted at young (post 16 year old) people
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training (usually applied to 16-25 year olds)
NRP	National Reform Programme – authored and submitted by a member state to the EU as part of the annual European Semester process
OKM	Opetus ja kulttuuri ministeriö The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PDA	Political Discourse Analysis (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012)

Tertiary education	Tertiary education is interpreted as post school or third stage education. A tertiary degree may therefore be a foundation degree or a post graduate diploma as well as bachelor's and master's degrees.
UK	United Kingdom
UVM	Børne og Undervisningsministeriet The Danish Ministry of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1. VET policy – introduction and background

After a brief personal introduction, I set out in this chapter my definition of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and outline the scope of the study (1.2). The next section (1.3) details the structure of the thesis. Subsequent sections (1.4, 1.5 and 1.6) draw from literature in order to define policy and identify key policy change theories of relevance to EU and national VET policy making, the subject of the study.

1.1 Personal introduction

I began this research after I developed an interest in comparative international VET following completion of a Master's degree. What particularly caught my imagination was, firstly differing further education policies in each of the United Kingdom's (UK) home nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and, subsequently the role of the European Union (EU) as a VET policy maker. As the UK prepared to leave the European Union after the referendum in June 2016 (hereafter referred to as Brexit) (Chapter 2), my personal sense of loss led to a resolve to find out what the EU and some of its member states had contributed to VET policy making in the UK, how this might change, and what preparations were in place to address the gaps that might emerge. However, as my research progressed, not only did the Brexit process elongate beyond original political expectations but also my cut off dates for data collection and the Covid 19 pandemic meant that the UK (and the rest of the world) were operating in survival rather than strategic modes. Consequently, the impact of Brexit on VET policy, rather than becoming more apparent over the period of my study, has diminished. The study gradually transformed into an examination of the relationship between a supranational organisation and its members as viewed from the perspective of VET policy making and an exploration of the perceived purpose of VET in each nation.

I became interested in VET because I worked in English further education (FE) for more than twenty years. Although my undergraduate degree was in Natural Sciences and I followed

this with an accountancy qualification and an MBA, my career led me to educational administration and management and having ‘accidentally’ discovered FE, I found a space in which to invest my enthusiasm for learning and a developing passion for social justice. Later research focussed on FE and led me to produce this study.

1.2 Introduction to study

This study provides insight into the complex policy making relationships that have influenced vocational education and training (VET) policy in four countries between 2000 and 2019. It focuses on policy making, rather than policy implementation or practice and nor does it assess the impact of policies on their recipients. The four selected countries were Denmark, Finland, Scotland and the United Kingdom (England). These were selected because of their positioning within the EU, the nuances of the difference between being a member state and a region within a member state (Scotland) and because their VET policies have not previously been compared in the way that has been undertaken in this study (Chapter 2). In my overarching research aim, I set out the focus of the study:

To find out what is the purpose/orientation of VET policy in the EU as illustrated by VET policy making between the EU, three member states and a region.

At a time when two major challenges (the Covid pandemic and Brexit) are potentially altering the way both societies and economies interact, expanding knowledge about VET policy making is particularly important. My aim is that my study informs further understanding of these processes through making comparisons across different spaces (the EU and the four countries) and over time. VET should be a vital part of any education and learning system as it provides an open route from initial education into work and work-related-learning, ideally without creating barriers to further learning and should also be closely connected to both societal and economic development, rather than being classified as an economic matter. Nor should VET be determined politically without the engagement

of those who understand it most – students, teachers and practitioners. VET's positioning in society is not universally acknowledged or understood and this disparity has formed the basis for my exploration of representations of the purposes of VET as manifested through VET policy making. This study, whilst influenced by political, economic and sociological considerations, also has an historical basis but centres on the making of VET policy itself, from whatever influence, and on what this then portrays about the perceptions and purposes of VET within the country concerned. An understanding of how VET is perceived is related to the broad or narrow focus of a country's approach to education and learning more widely and thus is also related to culture and ideology.

There have been many attempts at definitions of VET. Moodie (2002) considered four characteristics (epistemological, teleological, hierarchical and pragmatic) by which VET could be defined before arriving at the following definition:

the development and application of knowledge and skills for middle level occupations needed by society from time to time. (Moodie, 2002, p. 260).

In this, Moodie acknowledged applied knowledge, a concept that I have also referred to in my consideration of epistemological relativity and Mode 2 knowledge in Chapter 3 (Gibbons et al., 1994). On the other hand, Billett (2014) presented an historical perspective on vocational education, in which he sought to explain why it was often perceived less favourably than other forms of education; certainly, in part because of its association with the workplace that led policy makers to consider it as an adjunct to economic rather than educational activity. In an economic context, the terms VET and skills have often been linked. VET systems have been perceived as part of skills systems and, indeed, I found overlap between the terms in many of the documents analysed. My perspective is that skills acquisition may be an outcome from a VET (or other educational) system and that VET may be used to enhance or develop existing skills. Skills are frequently described as resources in connection with terms such as human capital. In short, skills may be an economic product of a VET system but I argue that VET develops knowledge as well as skills and have approached this study from this stance.

Accordingly, for the purposes of the study, I have deployed a set of educational definitions, from a pragmatic perspective. VET (as recognised in EU terminology) consisted of initial VET or i-VET. iVET is applied to non-general education and training for those aged over 16, or within the upper secondary phases of an education system, whether this is delivered in a formal educational institution, a workplace or a combination of both. Continuing VET or c-VET is targeted towards adults reskilling or upskilling either within or outside the workplace. It also encompasses higher VET or h-VET, where VET is delivered within the higher education system, although not necessarily in higher education institutions, for example, degree apprenticeships in England and Scotland. It may be delivered through formal or non-formal learning and tended to lead to a skills-based qualification with the goal of employment, usually below full degree level. In England this equated to qualifications levels 2 to 5 and in Europe the ISCED equivalent was levels 3 to 5. VET is also known as technical and vocational education (TVET), technical education or vocational training and education and forms part of the FE system within England and Scotland. For simplicity, VET is used throughout this study, except where there is a specific reference to a national system that uses another term. VET was viewed as being encompassed within lifelong learning, especially after the EU focus on lifelong learning, following the designation of the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996. Specific examples are shown in Table 1-1 below.

Table 1-1 Examples of VET qualifications

Country	Examples of iVET qualification	Examples of cVET qualification	Examples of hVET qualification
Denmark	EUX (Erhvervsuddannelse og gymnasial eksamen)	EUV (Erhvervsuddannelse for voksne)	Professional bachelors' degree
England	BTEC National Diploma, T levels	Higher National Diploma	Foundation degree
Finland	Vocational upper secondary qualification (Ammatilliset perustutkinnot)	Further vocational qualification (Ammattitutkinnot)	Specialist vocational qualification (Erikoisammattitutkinnot)
Scotland	Scottish Vocational Qualification (SQCF level 3)	Higher National Certificate	Professional apprenticeship

My study covered EU VET policy making and its relationship to VET policy making in Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland between 2000-2019. This period covered a renewed focus on VET across the EU (in the context of lifelong learning) following the Lisbon strategy of 2000 (European Council, 2000) and VET (in the context of skills) arising from the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010) as well as a potential VET policy disjunct after the UK's (England and Scotland) 'Brexit' referendum in 2016. The time period fell naturally into three stages. The first phase, between 2000 and 2008, covered a period of relative economic stability, during which the EU underwent a rapid expansion from 15 members to 27 within four years. The second phase followed the global financial recession of 2008-2009, when the EU aimed to be developing a sharper focus on economic recovery, potentially at the expense of social considerations. The third, most recent phase, between 2010 and 2019, followed significant changes in the way the EU interacted with its member states (Chapter 2). Despite the UK's aspirations to leave the EU by 1 March 2019, the date of exit was 31 January 2020 and the UK was in a transition phase, which was completed on 31 December 2020.

VET policies were held to be significant by policy makers in all three time periods, but I questioned whether the policy purpose was represented differently given differences in EU and national economic, social and political contexts. The establishment of EU VET policies and the translation of these nationally also appeared to be problematic. Finally, the Lisbon strategy's influence over national VET policy making was carefully examined because the Lisbon strategy (European Council, 2000) represented a key moment in the development of EU VET policy. These initial thoughts were shaped into research questions as follows:

1. How has the evolving relationship between national VET policy making and EU VET policy making shaped discourse about the purpose of VET?
2. To what extent and for what reasons have VET policies in the four countries converged or diverged within the period between 2011 and 2019?
3. In what aspects has the Lisbon strategy influenced national VET policy in Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland in the period between 2000 and 2019?

The development of these is further explored in Chapter 2.

From these research questions, the contributions to knowledge that I have made in this study are:

1. An expansion of knowledge about VET policy making in supranational and national spaces (EU, VET ministers of the EU and national);
2. A comparison of VET policy making between four countries with distinctive approaches to VET purpose, that have been infrequently compared, leading to a better understanding of the influence of the EU on national VET policy making;
3. The conceptualisation of a policy gyre to better understand VET policy making as a means of analysis of VET policy.

1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis is based on texts as a source of data that were then coded and critically analysed. These texts were drawn from national or European policy documents produced between 2000 and June 2019. These documents were either reports informing final policy (at national level), statements of national policy or legislation setting out national policy or form part of the European Semester cycle (at EU and national level) including reports outlining European VET policy activities (the specific VET policy aspects of the EU semester). Some documents therefore encompassed a full range of social and economic policies and others were specifically concerned with VET policies (or contained a significant proportion of VET policy alongside other education policy).

The selected policy theories were then located within a theoretical framework based on critical realism (Bhaskar, 2015), which is outlined in Chapter 3. The research design, including an evaluation of appropriate methodologies, for example, a comparative case study, and methods for a critical realism study, for example, critical discourse analysis, is described in Chapter 4. This chapter presents a rationale for discourse analysis of policy and a justification for the use of official documents from which to draw out discourse. Research

findings are presented in Chapters 5-7, aligned to the research questions summarised in section 1.2. The findings are presented with spatial (EU, sub-EU and national), temporal (2000 – 2019) and dynamic comparisons, linked to the three research questions. These chapters follow a common format, outlining the relevant methods used, a summary of literature specific to the chapter topic and an account and discussion of the findings. The findings chapters begin with the ‘real’ (Bhaskar, 2015) or deepest level of analysis as discussed in Chapter 3 from a political discourse analysis of the eight key EU documents that influenced VET policy over the period 2000 – 2019 (Chapter 5). This analysis provides a temporal comparison of VET policy making and the changes to purpose of VET and orientation of policy signalled by these policy making activities, from the EU (supranational) perspective. This provided a view on the EU discourse about VET policy (Research question 1).

The second findings chapter (Chapter 6) explores the ‘actual’ (Bhaskar, 2015) level of analysis. This was achieved through a critical discourse analysis (Chapter 4) of official European Semester documentation for the four countries between 2011 (when the Semester began) and 2019 and a discussion through case studies of four VET themes: adult VET, drop-out and completion, apprenticeships and VET institutions. This analysis facilitated both temporal (2011 – 2019) and spatial (EU and national) comparisons of VET policy making as well as identifying the changes to purpose of VET and orientation of policy in this timeline. What this chapter sought to establish is the interplay between the EU VET policy discourse as identified in Chapter 5 and the national VET policy discourses, or those expressed to the EU by the countries concerned. This was enabled by reference to policy convergence and divergence theories (Research questions 1 and 2).

The third findings chapter explores the ‘observed’ (Bhaskar, 2015) level of analysis. The understanding of this level was developed by a thematic analysis based on the Lisbon strategy, selecting some of the aspects of Lisbon that were raised in connection with VET policy and tracing, through opportunistically selected national policy documents, how these themes played out in VET policy in the countries, by case study. The selected documents

were not all EU facing, some were intended for national audiences and thus differences between the national and the member state approach became more apparent. This analysis looked at the influence of Lisbon on national VET policy at a surface level and national discourses about the purpose and orientation of VET, as expressed through the relationship between the themes and the discourse about them. This provided spatial (EU, sub-EU and national), temporal (2000 – 2019) and dynamic comparisons (Research question, 3).

A discussion of the findings and conclusions from the study is presented in Chapter 8. In this, I draw together responses to the three research questions (section 1.2).

In the following sections, I review research literature about policy in order to provide a definition of VET policy, identify contributions from other researchers on which to build my research and outline the policy change theories that form part of the theoretical framework.

1.4 Definitions of policy

Public policy

In order to arrive at a working definition of policy and more specifically education and VET policy, I drew from writings about public policy (I. Gordon, Lewis, & Young, 2002; Hill & Varone, 2017) as well as those who have extensively written about education policy, for example, Ball (1993); Ball (2017); Rizvi and Lingard (2010) and Ozga (2000). Hill and Varone (2017) recognised the nebulous nature of policy as they discussed a series of definitions, coalescing into public policy being defined as either an action or an inaction by public bodies. They emphasised that policy changes then arose through decision making, whether in isolation or in a series of steps, or alternatively a choice of approach or perspective. This decision making or choice was placed in a wider context of policy succession or evolution

over time, suggesting a rational sequence to policy making. However, they also cautioned that:

Readers need to be sceptical about writing that takes it for granted that a policy-making process is organised and has specific goals. (Hill & Varone, 2017, p. 20)

I found that this scepticism was entirely justifiable as I continued my research into VET policy; the assumptions of rational national VET policy making made by the EU were not borne out in my findings (Chapter 8).

In their writing about public policy, I. Gordon et al. (2002) provided a different perspective, recognising that the term policy was used in different ways within government departments. For example, they identified that policy was used to identify the defining of objectives, setting of priorities, describing a plan or for specifying decision rules. They also observed that policy might be part of a 'post hoc' rationalisation, rather than necessarily defined prior to action and that policy making was a political, rather than rational process, so the boundaries of engagement were not always clear and that the original formulation may emerge, after negotiation and contestation, in a different guise. They postulated that:

the major potential contribution of the social scientist lies in challenging the deep structures of policy making (I. Gordon et al., 2002, p. 16);

and that these deep structures were a collection of unspoken beliefs about the intentions of the organisations engaged in setting policy as well as about the actors who were influencing the policy and those who were recipients of it. This prompted me to construct my research aim about the purposes of VET policy (section 1.3) and draw on critical realism (Chapter 3) as a philosophical background for my research.

From this starting point, policy can be thought of as a statement of intent arising from society which may mandate, guide or influence actions by agents. These actions of agents have an impact on societal structures, as outlined in Bhaskar's transformational model of

society (Hawke, 2017) and further developed by Archer (2017c) (Chapter 3). This raised a question as to whether policies were themselves structures or agents or, in fact, both. In this study, I defined that structures may be thought of as societies, systems and organisations (depending on the levels considered), thus policies are viewed as partly defining the societies, systems or organisations in which they are found. They could perhaps be said to be micro-structural. Alternatively, as policies shape the societies, systems and organisations in which they are located, dynamically they may be viewed as agents (or agents' actions). I also questioned whether policies develop their own agency (as in actor-network theory, for example, explained by O'Mahoney, O'Mahoney, and Al-Amoudi (2016) or whether this is merely ascribed to them in an effort to explain unusual policy change phenomena. Indeed, the changes envisaged by Bhaskar in his transformational model (Chapter 3) related to policy reproduction or transformation in a dynamic interplay between societies as structures and individuals (human agents). Policies were then conceptualised as agents of change for humans, with a range of objectives from solving short term problems to changing practices within society, as Cort and Larson (2015) identified, and thus they could be described as sub-agents. Finally, of course, societies can define policies but policies can also define societies (Chapter 3). The realisation that VET policies may have both structural and agential properties in the EU and in the four countries was fundamental to my understanding of the policy making relationships and the discourse about them. It helped me to recognise the fluidity of policy making that led to the conceptualisation of a policy making gyre (Chapter 4). This serves to illustrate the complex nature of the study of policy in general, which was found also to apply to the study of education policy. Indeed, given the positioning of education in society, a general discussion of which is outside the scope of this thesis, education policy is not only complex by nature of it being policy but also as a reflection of society's varied perspectives on education. I traced this theme into my study of VET policy because my enquiry was about the specific purposes of VET policy manifested in differing spatial contexts within complex policy making systems.

Education policy

In order to further develop a working understanding of education policy, I considered the work of three major researchers of education policy: Ball, Lingard and Ozga. Working from a

schools background and principally located in England, Ball's early work (Ball, 1993) referred to 'two very different conceptualisations of policy', namely 'policy as text and policy as discourse'. He referred to policy trajectory studies and the policy cycle of 'influence, production and practice' and stressed the importance of context and criticality when considering policy analysis. However, Henry (1993) critiqued his 'descriptive route', arguing for a 'more structural approach'. She observed that text and discourse are part of a spectrum, rather than separate concepts and also that structural analysis, rather than contextual description, would better support policy analysis in looking below the surface for patterns and anomalies and seeking to explain them. In conducting my study, I recognised both the importance of understanding the context of policy making and its deeper undercurrents, particularly in the evolving relationships between the EU and the three member states. In using texts as statements of policy I also analysed the discourses manifested in them. This approach had more in common with Henry's critique, but also Ball's later theorisation in which he conceived policy, more widely, as a process, recognising, perhaps, its fluidity rather than its rigidity (Ball, 2017) and developed my thinking beyond the policy cycle into a policy gyre (Chapter 4). Indeed, the selection of policy making as the focus of my study was in keeping with an interpretation of policy as a process.

Comparing Ball's perspectives on policy with those of I. Gordon et al. (2002) showed similarities in that both conceived of policy in a wide sense and recognised the dynamic nature both of policy and of policy making. The differences lay in the more pragmatic approach of I. Gordon et al. (2002), who advocated the 'identification of an intellectual basis for a resource commitment to policy analytic research' (p. 121) and Ball's more recent conceptualisation about education policy and social theory (Ball, 2017). In particular, Ball (2017) drew attention to:

the relationship of education policy to the needs of the state and the economy, that is, to the contradictory requirements and necessities of the management of the population and, in particular, the problems of social authority, citizenship and social welfare over and against the role of the state as the 'midwife' for economic competitiveness (Ball, 2017, p. 7).

and thereby made explicit the links between education policy and change in society which was of relevance to the changes experienced by the EU and the four countries over the period of the study.

Lingard, on the other hand, increasingly concentrated on global education policy and drew examples from both Australia and the UK. Like Ball, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) recognised that education policy is concerned with change, whilst consistently exploring the policy as text theme. In earlier work also concerned with global education policy, Lingard and Ozga (2007) summarised their definition of education policy, focussing on texts, but interpreting this broadly:

Thus texts may include a speech by a Minister for Education, a press release by a senior education bureaucrat, as well as formal, 'official' policy texts. We also include the processes involved in the production of a policy text and those involved in its practice in our definition of education policy (Lingard & Ozga, 2007, p. 2).

This drew in policy as process albeit from a different viewpoint than that of Ball. They acknowledged that what is not decided or made into policy can also be as influential as what is and also observed that 'education policies are evidently political' as well as being aware that there is a 'politics of education policy', where politics is defined as:

practices and discourses to do with power (in its structural possessed, concentrated and congealed as well as poststructural dispersed, relational and practice forms) (Lingard & Ozga, 2007, p. 2).

A modified definition of politics in the context of the purposes of VET is discussed further in Chapter 6 (Table 6-2). Finally, the reference to education policy as 'the authoritative allocation of values within education systems' (Lingard & Ozga, 2007) enhanced my working definition of education policy that referred to structure and agency (p. 21) adding in VET systems as structures and where the 'authoritative allocation of values' would be carried out by a wide range of agents, not all of whom prioritise VET or even education, for example there were very different priorities between EU policy makers and the sub-EU policy makers who were ministers for VET (Chapter 5) and therefore focussed their policy making solely on

VET. Lingard and Ozga (2007) also crisped the definition of 'statement of intent', by adding values (and thus some form of ideological alignment) into context. In a parallel way, Archer broadened her approach to structure/agency theory to include culture (Archer & Morgan, 2020) (Chapter 3). This emphasised the importance of considering the spatial and temporal contexts of policy making as well as the structural elements.

VET policy and purpose

There are different perspectives about the purpose of VET within the literature about VET. For example, Avis (2019) in constructing an introduction to a special journal edition on Nordic countries' VET, identified the impact of the knowledge society on the relationship between VET and academic education, which he observed to create a greater polarisation in both education and economic terms. On the other hand, he considered that VET, and indeed education more generally, may reproduce class inequalities rather than ameliorate them, thereby harming society rather than bringing about social transformation. In an earlier work, Nilsson (2010) identified two main purposes for VET although they may be considered in opposition to each other: the promotion of economic growth and the fostering of social inclusion. He did conclude, however, that the evidence in support of either contention was not strong. Iannelli and Raffe (2007) had previously identified an education logic and an employment logic for VET, based on a study of transition systems from vocational education into employment. Desjardins (2017) used political economy to express a perspective on the purposes of adult learning systems, (largely included within the definition of VET above). Discourse about the multiple purposes of VET arising from its policy making is considered further in Chapters 5, 6 & 7 and forms part of the conclusions in Chapter 8.

Ball's policy conceptualisation (Ball, 2017) and the values debate outlined by Lingard and Ozga (2007) have combined to illustrate further the heart of the conflicts that seem to arise in VET policy, namely whether VET is treated as an economic factor or as a factor in improving social justice (Nilsson, 2010). The values that shape VET policy may therefore be very different, depending on its conceptualisation. A conflict may arise when VET is

ideologically perceived by some agents in a socio-cultural way but policy makers have shaped VET policies with a different set of values, for example, neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005) which resulted in the introduction of competitive markets into VET. As the values identified within a policy on the surface may not be the actual values embedded within it, the purpose of VET may be obscured and policies may have a distorted impact on future policy making through unintended consequences. Although policy impact is not the focus of this thesis, its influence on VET policy making is discussed on page 29.

Having considered some different accounts of education policy and initial alignments with critical realism (Chapter 3), the concept of VET policy being adopted for the purposes of this research was that used by Lingard and Ozga (2007) interpreted through the lens of structure and agency and with the caveat that policy can be thought of as process, although the visible evidence of that process may very often be through text (in the widest sense). Such text, however, may be concerned with setting out plans or priorities or identifying decision making structures, as identified by I. Gordon et al. (2002) and, in fact, may not be labelled specifically as policy although it may be interpreted by agents as policy. With this in mind, I used a broad collection of texts as data for analysis in my study (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7).

For the purposes of this study, education policies, and more specifically VET policies, were therefore considered to be the statements made by a variety of agents (the European Union, governments, regional authorities, colleges, employers) that shaped the vocational education and training processes within the VET system (a structure). As well as the official intent, these policies were also interpreted by agents (for example, staff, employers, parents, students, stakeholder groups, inspection bodies) and their implementation was coloured by these interpretations (Spours, Coffield, & Gregson, 2007) which then distorted any expected linear causal relationship between idea and impact. As a result, VET policies were, by nature of being policies, fluid, capable of many interpretations and operating in a space between structure, culture and agency as identified in Archer's morphogenetic model (Archer, 2007).

Stages in VET policy making – agenda setting

As was also the case for education policy, VET policy is, of course, a very broad field of study. I decided to focus on the stage of VET policy making or agenda setting and policy formulation as identified by Hill and Varone (2017), rather than policy implementation or impact because I was studying the influence of supranational and national institutions on VET policy and they had observed that this influence was held to be the most pronounced within the policy making phase. There was also an identifiable gap in the research literature based on a comparative analysis of VET policy making between the European Union (EU) and Denmark, Finland, Scotland and England. The convenience of the use of stages within the policy process for research purposes was debated by Hill and Varone (2017). Not only were there different definitions of these stages but there was a belief that these should not be applied in all circumstances because they may provide too rigid a structure for a set of dynamic processes. However, I selected the agenda setting and policy formulation stages on pragmatic grounds, while being mindful that representations of the policy process provide, at best, a two-dimensional interpretation of complexity. Hill and Varone (2017) presented a selection of agenda setting theories. As I was studying VET policy variation over both time and space, the punctuated equilibrium theory of Baumgartner and Jones, as explained by Hill and Varone (2017, pp. 185-186), provided an appropriate framework by describing policy continuity interspersed by periods of radical policy change. Policy was thought to be made incrementally through adaptation and evolution until, following a focus of political attention, engagement with a wider range of agents caused sudden policy change.

By way of illustration of different aspects of the punctuated equilibrium theory, although not specific to VET, Ljosland (2015) explored policy making in a language department in a Norwegian university, addressing this through a review of multi-level policy making at European, national and institutional level. She distinguished between political intentions and practical considerations, identifying the multidirectional flows of information and communication within a single institution as well as the conflicting considerations from existing international policies as factors affecting policy making during incremental phases of policy making. Her conclusion was that policy making did not flow in a top down

direction but that there were many interruptions and interjections between agents at different levels, which she described as a 'bidirectional influence' on the evolving relationships between all levels at which policy is made (Chapters 2 and 8).

Stages in VET policy making – policy formulation

Following agenda setting, policy formulation was also considered by Hill and Varone (2017) to be part of policy making. Politicians may be said to set the policy agenda, in this instance, the EU and national governments (Chapter 2). However, civil servants are then held to be responsible for policy formulation through the production of detailed texts as observed in the bureaucracy of both the EU and the Department for Education within the UK government. Hill and Varone (2017) identified that a stage within policy formulation involved the detailing of policy instruments with which to frame and enact the policy. These were variously referred to as drivers and levers but I have sought a simple set of definitions as set out below. Coffield et al. (2008, pp. 38-39) defined policy drivers as 'broad aims of government policy', considered that they provide a framework for policy levers and also noted that policy drivers may mainly be elicited from official documents. As an example, in their multi-level analysis of English learning and skills policy, Coffield et al. (2007) listed EU and UK policy drivers to include competitiveness, raising skills levels and increasing social inclusion and social mobility. These drivers were evident in the Lisbon strategy (Chapter 2).

Policy levers, on the other hand, were defined by Coffield et al. (2008, p. 39) as 'instruments that states use to change public services'. Policy levers operated at different levels within broader government approaches to policy enactment, for example 'austerity measures' to balance the national budget included under the heading of a funding lever; benefit cuts and reductions in funding of public services or in a different economic mindset, tax increases to fund future pensions. Coffield et al. (2008) cited planning, funding, initiatives, targets and inspection as some of the preferred education policy levers of the English government of the time. Evidence of the deployment of policy levers was found both at EU level (the many Europe-wide initiatives such as the European Qualification Framework) and in the country specific recommendations (CSRs) at national level (for example, the Finnish Youth

Guarantee. The trajectory of some key levers, such as the Youth Guarantee, were explored as part of the documentary analysis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) because this helped me to build a picture of the relationships between the EU and national VET policy making.

Stages in VET policy making – policy enactment

The relationship between the development and formulation of policy is then of significance in enactment; arguably a final state of policy making, where there is replication of both agenda setting and formulation through closer alignment with the actual recipients for whom the policy is intended (Hill & Varone, 2017). Whilst this level of operation may range from national to individual, part of which was therefore outside the scope of this thesis, reference has been made to it to illustrate the complex processes of policy making, from a political whim to an enacted policy, supposedly ready for implementation. Approaches to policy enactment in education were outlined by Heimans (2013) and Heimans, Singh, and Glasswell (2015). Simplistically, policy was enacted when it is brought into use. However, 'policy enactment is a process of social, cultural and emotional construction and interpretation' (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2014, p. 486). This process was therefore seen as broader than policy implementation, occupying a stage within policy making (Heimans, 2013) which also contributed to the argument that a simple policy cycle does not satisfactorily capture the nuances of policy development (Chapter 4). By way of illustration, it was usual in England that an Act of Parliament was enacted over several periods. Indeed, sometimes the Act was revised before some parts of it had been implemented, creating the potential for policy complexity and confusion at later stages of policy making. Methods of enactment varied from enforcement to recommendation, which gave rise to the potential for different interpretations of policy by different actors and at different organisational levels. This can be further clouded by the use of different policy levers within different spaces and at different times (Coffield et al., 2008).

A hypothetical example of policy enactment follows. A policy designed to reduce youth unemployment that mandated all unemployed young people to complete a training course that guaranteed a job at the end of it would be enacted differently from a policy that provided young people in work with a credit system that offered them job coaching or a

training course to ensure that they remained in work. Policy levers in both cases included funding, albeit through different channels (via training provider or employer or direct to the individual) and also targets (the measurement systems used to monitor training course retention and achievement or youth unemployment statistics). The exercise of these different policy levers encouraged different behaviours and sent different signals about what was valued by society (getting a job or staying in a job). Thus, the enactment of the policies affected different problems of youth unemployment (the initial training to gain a job versus the training that ensured that they remained and progressed in employment). What was enacted was also dependent on the structures in place (for example the welfare system, perceptions of unemployed youth) and the agents within the system (for example a supply of job coaches or training providers), demonstrating the complexity of policy enactment through the lens of structures and agents.

Stages in VET policy making - impact

As was made clear above, the focus of my study was VET policy making so the phases of VET policy implementation and of impact assessment were not studied. However, these distinctions were sometimes considered arbitrary in policy studies, because impact may sometimes be drawn into decisions about future policies. For the purposes of this study, I therefore interpreted policy impact as the influence of European policies on national policies and vice versa as explored through mapping and trajectory analysis. Impacts may differ within different structures, at different times and for different groups of actors affected by the policy. As Bell and Stevenson (2006, p. 3) observed, 'policy responses are shaped by cultural context'. The consequences of policy may, of course, be intended or unintended effects or influences (Jørgensen, 2016).

A definition of VET policy arising from definitions of public and education policy has been developed in this section. This definition was extended in terms of critical realism (Chapter 3). VET policy making has been identified as the focus of the study and various stages of policy making have been discussed.

1.5 Research into education policy

In this section, I review relevant research about education policy, where I considered it to be also applicable to my study.

Qualitative and quantitative education policy research

The contribution of qualitative research methodologies to policy research has been discussed by many authors including Rist (2000); Roller and Long (2001); and Vulliamy and Webb (2009). The shared view was that there was an important role for qualitative research within educational policy research. Qualitative research was thought to provide a suitable fresh approach to comparative education policy research with a focus on 'policy as practice' (Vulliamy & Webb, 2009). Rist (2000) argued that not every aspect of policy research is best suited to qualitative research although Roller and Long (2001) presented a case for qualitative research in every phase of a policy cycle, whilst acknowledging that qualitative researchers and policy makers occupied different cultural spaces so that attempts to create a shared space have to be made by both parties. In support of qualitative research, Luke and Hogan (2006) critiqued the trend towards quantitative educational research, in particular the rise of 'scientific evidence' and the generation and use of large data sets, which they observed combine to promote 'accountability' and the marketisation of education. In developing a project based on Singapore's educational policy, they provided evidence that a holistic multidisciplinary basis for educational research (both quantitative and qualitative) was capable of yielding rigorous information that can create a rich picture for the development of future policy. They noted that this approach has also been drawn upon in New Zealand and Queensland, Australia and that this was seen as a counterbalance to the 'policy by numbers' approach described by Lingard, Creagh, and Vass (2012). The specifics of qualitative research in relation to my research strategy and design are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Types of policy analysis

In policy research terms, Grace (1991) identified that some researchers have focussed on policy science, which (although conceding that it involves a form of analysis) he described as providing descriptions of the implementation of policy, thereby focusing on only some stages of the policy process, those relating to action, rather than developing understanding of the whole process, from inception to practice. Grace's (1991) theory of policy scholarship defined an approach that was 'analytical and evaluative', setting policy within its context and looking below the surface at the hidden meanings, which is in keeping with the importance of context identified on pages 14 and 39. Thomson (2006), writing about educational research on globalisation, also set out a view on policy scholarship, based on Bourdieu's arguments for 'engaged scholarship', which she interpreted to include 'reflexive intellectual practice', defining this as 'a practice of interrogating not only social phenomena but also the production of knowledge about them' and advocating 'treating all propositions with suspicion, especially those we hold dearest' (Thomson, 2006, p. 317). These approaches echoed the interpretation of critical realism that I have adopted as my theoretical framework because of the mention of different layers of objective reality and because of the emphasis on holistic critique, rather than mere description (section 1.4 and Chapter 3).

Rist (2000) identified differences between research that assisted in policy making and that which was about policy making. This related to I. Gordon et al. (2002)'s typology of policy analysis which distinguished between analysis 'for' policy and analysis 'of' policy. They concluded that, although these positions should be considered relative to the influence of the policy makers and/or independence of the researcher, which affected the stance adopted, policy analysis researchers should always recognise policy analysis as a holistic view of processes, systems and content. They viewed analysis for policy and analysis of policy as a continuum of policy advocacy, information for policy, policy monitoring and evaluation, analysis of policy determination and analysis of policy content. This perspective was developed further by Rizvi and Lingard (2010), whose explanation of the differences between analysis for policy and analysis of policy, the former being commissioned (and possibly influenced) by those who wish to make policy, whereas the latter allowed an

independent, critical and comparative approach, supported my view that analysis of policy was consistent with the framework of critical realism that I have applied. Additionally, they suggested that the development of educational policy research should be through critical pathways (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) which offer the mechanisms for policy to be examined in terms of the societal changes it may effect, not merely the economic impact. My approach combined this with analysis of policy determination and analysis of policy content from the continuum of I. Gordon et al. (2002), drawn together into an approach that was one of policy scholarship (Grace, 1991; Thomson, 2006).

On the other hand, Ozga (2000) presented an account based on work by Dale that suggested policy analysis was akin to policy science and was so heavily outcomes focussed that the research remains within the strategic space of existing policies and did not look critically at them (this may be compared with a conceptualisation of policy scales by Papanastasiou (2019a) outlined on p. 36). The conclusion was that this approach may be closer to policy advocacy. However, she also conceded that policy analysis has many interpretations, as outlined above, and concluded that there was another form of policy analysis (analysis of policy) that was concerned with how policies work and locating these findings alongside social theories to develop improved understanding. Ozga (2000) noted that Dale described this as 'social science' rather than 'policy analysis'. From this definition, my approach to analysis of policy in this research could be considered in Ozga's terminology as 'social science' or, indeed, 'policy scholarship'. In seeking a deeper understanding of policy scholarship, I reviewed the methodological terms introduced by Gale (2001) and Shore, Wright, and Però (2011). Gale based his typology of policy analysis methodology on Foucault's work and identified 'policy historiography', 'policy archaeology' and 'policy genealogy' whereas Shore, Wright and Però defined and discussed 'policy anthropology'. Whilst methodology can be viewed as a subset of scholarship it was helpful to look in depth at these terms in order to gain clarity about what I meant by policy scholarship and the type of policy analysis that I employed.

Gale (2001) provided key questions to make a distinction between his three methodologies. On this basis, I identified that my type of analysis lay between policy archaeology and policy

genealogy, looking at what conditions affected policy formation and how policy actors interacted with these conditions at a given time (policy archaeology) but also considering how policies changed over time. This approach was important to my spatial, temporal and dynamic comparison of VET policy making so that whilst Gale disputed whether a combination of methodologies can be made, I disagreed because I do not view policy as a series of frozen stages but as a continuum, that may merit a variety of methodological approaches. Additionally, Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 63) made critiques of Gale's typology, which, although grounded in a rationale based on different interpretations of Foucault, led me to conclude that Gale's analytical questions can indeed be blended to arrive at a comparative policy analysis methodology rooted in a critical realism philosophy (Chapter 4).

On the other hand, Shore et al. (2011) claimed that 'policy anthropology' (defined as a framework that links large-scale policy processes to small-scale daily practice) was a useful methodology because it enabled a small-scale investigation to question larger relationships between societal structures, agents and powers. They observed that 'the challenge is to study policies as they develop and as they are enacted in everyday practice' (p. 20) and endorsed views of policy as 'assemblages' that 'have agency and that change as they enter into relations with actors, objects and institutions in other domains'. This approach resonated with my conceptualisation of policy and the form of analysis was similar to the forms of analysis that I developed, because their critical approach was evident and I have adopted a critical approach in my study (Chapter 3). Given that a likely outcome of such a methodology would be insight into policies in a wider context, there was scope for critique and for identifying what could be improved. As an example, policy anthropology was used by Brøgger (2018) to study policy trajectories between the European Bologna Process and national policy implementation in Denmark. Although this was a higher education study, the policy anthropology methodology was of particular interest to me because it enabled Brøgger to draw conclusions about the relationships between aspects of Bologna policy and its implementation in Denmark by tracing how these aspects spread. This provided a direct parallel with tracing the VET aspects of the Lisbon strategy into national VET policy (Chapter 2).

Policy research (not just in education, but also in health fields) has also been much engaged with the 'evidence based' or 'evidence informed' policy debate (Hansen & Rieper, 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This debate may also be linked to the analysis for and of policy continuum. Those who were analysing for policy have been made aware that the policy makers looked for a robust evidence base (ideally a quantitative base) (Lingard et al., 2012; Luke & Hogan, 2006). Those who were carrying out analysis of policy may contribute evidence that informed policy although the policy may not solely be based on it. Indeed, it was difficult to envisage that any education policy will rely solely on new evidence, but was likely to stand on the shoulders of predecessor policies as in the stability phase of Baumgartner & Jones' punctuated equilibrium model (section 1.4). Even policy makers advocating a change of direction may have considered evidence for rejecting previous policies whilst accepting new evidence from different agencies to create a changed policy.

In my comparative study, the evidence base for information for policy change was frequently based on the existence of other policies rather than being a priori evidence of the need for change. This was despite the EU's principle of subsidiarity applicable to education (Chapter 2) but may illustrate the dilemma experienced by policy makers encountering different perspectives about the purposes of VET and the extent to which the EU therefore made the policy (if it is deemed to be economic, for example) rather than influencing the policy (if it is educational) (Chapter 8).

Comparative policy analysis

In addition to the aspects of education policy research already described, comparative policy analysis was clearly relevant to my research design (Chapter 4). Ochs and Phillips (2002) commented on the desire to learn from foreign education policy (considered in section 1.5 as part of 'policy borrowing' and 'policy learning') and developed a typology for the purposes of comparison, stressing the importance of context in which aspects of policy were being looked at. Vorbeck (1999), in celebrating European educational research achievements to date, observed that, given the wealth of information available at European

level, there were many opportunities to pursue comparative research. There was found to be a positive appetite for comparative education policy research, whether from the academic standpoint (Raffe, Brannen, Croxford, & Martin, 1999; Vorbeck, 1999) or from those closer to an analysis for policy stance (Ochs & Phillips, 2002; Vulliamy & Webb, 2009). Although comparative studies were identified as complex, the theorisation to date indicated that new knowledge and understandings can be gained from this type of research so that this type of analysis formed an integral part of my thesis.

In the next section, I consider the main education policy theories and concepts that led into the development of my theoretical framework (Chapter 3).

1.6 Education policy change – theories and concepts

As discussed in the previous section, some VET and educational policy researchers have explained the applications of policy whilst other approaches sought to draw together theory about policies. This section outlined selected theories about education policy change, which were then further considered in the context of European VET policy making. As an example, the EU's attempts to develop a shared VET policy area were arguably based on ideals of policy harmonisation (Dale, 2007) and convergence (Hill, 2013). As the member states all had individualised VET systems, mapping policy themes into individual national policies was expected to identify national approaches to policy transfer. Although this was considered in terms of findings later in the thesis, I have reviewed relevant literature about this topic and summarised the theoretical aspects in this chapter and further research from a European aspect in Chapter 2.

The theories about education policy change that I have chosen to review and also structure into the theoretical framework (Chapters 3 and 4) have been grouped in a typology relating to the policy dimensions that I have identified as follows (Table 1-2):

Table 1-2 Dimensions and policy change theories

Context	Process	Policy change theory	Resulting policy phenomenon
Spatial	Dynamic		Temporal
Policy space	Active (planned)	Policy transfer	Harmonisation
		Policy borrowing and learning Policy lending	Convergence
Policy scale	Passive (inadvertent)	Policy drift	Divergence
		Policy diffusion	

Policy scape and scale

Spatial dimensions of policy change have been theorized by Carney (2012) (policyscapes) and Papanastasiou (2019b) (policy scales). VET policy, in common with all education policy has been affected by globalization developments. This is discussed further, with particular reference to the EU as a supranational institution, in Chapter 2. However, within the spatial dimension to policy making, Carney proposed a concept of policyscapes, reflecting changes in the role of state in determining education policy. Rather than an hierarchical set of relationships between structures and agents, he suggested a multiconnected set of relationships. Thus, the policyscape was formed around the educational policy and process rather than it being bounded within the traditional role of the Ministry or Department of Education. Although the policy spaces that became apparent in my study were not as might either have been initially envisaged or as conceptualised by Carney, there may have been mechanisms akin to policy scapes developing at the sub-EU level (Chapter 2).

Papanastasiou (2019a), on the other hand, used an example from EU education policy making to illustrate her perspective on space as a dimension of policy making. She concluded that space, both as a political and a relational construct, played a key role in how policy making was conducted. Her argument extended to the reinforcement of hegemonies within the EU education policy making by reliance on scalar levels to describe policy spaces. As a result, she put forward a challenge to hierarchical perspectives within multilevel governance as exercised within the EU (Chapter 2). This reinforced Carney’s recognition of the possibility of different spaces within which policy was made. In my study, I selected

Papanastasiou's work as a basis for the construction of my dimensions of policy making (Table 1-2) because she specifically studied the EU. Carney's work, whilst not directly related to my research focus, provided me with insight into the ways in which spatial configurations of policy making may be considered.

Policy transfer

The significant group of policy transfer theories relating to policy borrowing and learning (discussed below) have a dynamic quality to them as the process of borrowing or learning involves the action of agents. On the other hand, the notions of policy convergence and divergence have a temporal quality as these effects may only be visible over time and may or may not be dependent on the intentions of agents. Policy drift and diffusion, whilst also being considered as policy transfer and therefore within a dynamic dimension may be passive, rather than active as they do not always result from agential action. The spaces in which policies are made formed the final dimension within the model.

Steiner-Khamsi (2012) summarised much of the policy change terminology in her editorial introduction to 'Policy Borrowing and Lending in Education'. In particular, she distinguished policy transfer as a term with origins in political science and hence providing a less neutral description of the movement of policies between nations (or institutions). However, I considered that policy transfer was an overarching term for the various policy change mechanisms that were subsequently defined. Steiner-Khamsi identified policy borrowing and lending as a term that emerged from comparative education policy studies and argued that it was politically neutral, although agency was recognised within these processes and again, therefore was debatable as agents may bring values into their decision making. She criticised the term 'policy learning' as suggesting that there was always a positive outcome from a policy transfer process, without acknowledging that the spectrum of policy learning processes might range from voluntary engagement to forced harmonisation.

On the other hand, Jakobi (2012) constructed a table of conceptual clarifications related to policy transfer that presented a different view of policy borrowing, lending and learning. She distinguished these policy concepts as arising from comparisons of policy experiences or

activities by governments but presented both learning and borrowing as involving dialogue between agents whilst lending was seen as a promotion of the good aspects of a policy by the state in which it originated. In other words, Jakobi perceived lending as less neutral than learning or borrowing. For my purpose, I acknowledged that these concepts were active in policy transfer mechanisms and that the ideological aspects of neutrality would be bounded by the political relationships between the EU and its member states or the UK and Scottish governments. I concluded that neutrality was not necessarily possible but that the context in which policy transfer was occurring should always be documented so that appropriate consideration of the level of interference in policy making can be made. As an example, the EU's recommendations to the UK about the adoption of a Youth Contract were made during a period of high levels of youth unemployment, following the global financial recession of 2008/2009 and this might be construed as advice rather than interference.

López-Guereñu (2018) on the other hand, related policy change theories, including policy borrowing and learning to VET policy making in the Basque country. This was a review of the influence of globalisation on policy making and the role of a regional government vis á vis the EU and Spanish national governments. The complexity of VET policy making was also acknowledged, because of the engagement between VET policy and other education, economic and social policies. The article outlined how the Basque government brought together three different perspectives on VET, represented by different government department stakeholders (economic development, education and labour market) to redesign VET systems. Whilst this also illustrated incremental, rather than sudden, policy change, some features of this case study demonstrated that the wider involvement of agents, brought in through the Basque regional government's approach to policy making, led to innovation within VET policy and a more radical change than might otherwise have been expected.

On a smaller scale, and generally referring to individual policies or even to aspects of them is the continuum between policy 'borrowing' (or lending) and policy 'learning'. In developing policy, some countries have borrowed the whole or part of a policy from another country (or potentially another discipline) to inform the formation or implementation of their policy

(P. Brown & Lauder, 2006; Dale, 2007; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). Ochs and Phillips (2002) developed a typology of cross-national attraction between English education systems and those in Germany. They viewed this through the sphere of policy borrowing; relating educational policy processes to factors involved in policy transfer and identifying which factors are important in borrowing educational policy. This enabled comparisons between the educational system in the host country and that of the country aspiring to borrow policy. They noted that interest did not always translate into policy, as Jakobi (2012) observed later, and also stressed the significance of context to policy borrowing. Criticisms of this approach included the fact that it sometimes ignored the context of the country, for example Finland's VET system was very different from England's because it is located in a very different social and economic context than England and thus policy conceived in Finland may not be operated as effectively in England. There have been recent examples of this when the Finnish school approach was studied internationally after Finland's 'successes' in the PISA league tables (Sahlberg, 2015).

There was also the consideration that the effectiveness of the policy may have been over-emphasised by the country that devised it and that certain factors (such as contributory policies) that impacted on its perceived success may not be clear to those seeking to borrow uncritically (Chung, 2010). It was debatable whether at EU level, policy borrowing was taking place, although the OECD, World Bank and United Nations may be influential 'partners' in the way EU policy was forming (Silova, 2012), but this was outside the scope of this thesis. It was also debatable whether the EU was advocating a policy borrowing approach within its Open Method of Coordination (OMC) approach to policy making or whether, indeed, other types of policy transfer were encouraged. Within the UK and referring specifically to English VET policy, the 'cherry picking approach' seen in the Sainsbury review (HM Government, 2016), was an example of indiscriminate policy borrowing (P. Brown & Lauder, 2006).

On the other hand, the concept of policy learning (Hanley & Orr, 2019; Hodgson, Spours, Gallacher, Irwin, & James, 2019; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012) was, as the name suggests, a more measured approach to policy development considering external influences

but being mindful of the local context. Hodgson et al. (2019) examined this concept recently in the context of the four nations of the United Kingdom, suggesting that the UK could represent an 'expansive policy laboratory' for learning. Keep (2019) however, observed that manifestations of England's VET policy at present did not readily suggest an appetite for policy learning on behalf of the English government.

Within my research it was clear that policy transfer could be identified but that at different times it might be more closely aligned to either any of the active methods identified in Table 1-2 or, indeed, to passive interactions. The relationship between VET policy making (p. 26) and temporal outcomes such as policy harmonisation of, convergence around or divergence from identified policy norms formed a key part of my study (Chapter 8).

Policy drift and diffusion

Less active forms of policy change such as drift or diffusion appeared less likely to result in a specified policy objective or outcome. However, these phenomena might also play a part in explanations of policy change. Policy drift was observed by Kay and Baines (2017), who identified the phenomenon in a case study of the UK pharmaceutical services sector, following a review of policy drift literature. They credited drift as a policy evolution occurrence when there were no significant planned changes or external environmental changes but policy changes arose in relation to the context in any case, resulting in unexpected consequences. In other words, policies did not remain stable without some form of intervention to maintain stability. Equally, Ochs and Phillips (2002) concluded:

there are no stable relationships between policy settings, the policy environment and the agency of actors (Ochs & Phillips, 2002, p. 186).

Although this was not first conceptualised in relation to policy drift, this could indeed be applied to it, providing a further perspective on the dynamic dimensions of policy making. Policy diffusion was described by Jakobi (2012) who assessed it in the context of international organisations' influence over lifelong learning policies. Her analysis of the introduction of lifelong learning reforms in different countries following the promotion of lifelong learning by international organisations such as the EU between 1996 and 2004 led

her to the conclusion that there can be widespread diffusion of ideas but that there is less diffusion of policies or reforms arising from these ideas. She related this to convergence/divergence theories (below) by acknowledging the convergence of ideas but a divergence of ways in which to bring these ideas into practice. In this instance, Jakobi considered that policy diffusion was a more active process than I have suggested in Table 1-2. However, given her findings that the diffusion of ideas was more widespread than the diffusion of policies arising from those ideas, my representation was appropriate from a policy making perspective.

Policy convergence and divergence

The temporal dimension of policy making has been previously conceptualised as a cycle. I have detailed in Chapter 4 the reasons why I believe that a cycle was a less appropriate model for VET policy making than a gyre. However, within this policy making dimension I considered that the concepts of policy convergence and divergence bore temporal aspects. Relevant theories of divergence and convergence have been summarised by Jørgensen and Aarkrog (2008). They defined policy convergence as arising from the copying of aspects of an idealised education policy model, often with the aim of transferability of skills and education across countries to aid the employability of individuals. Divergence, on the other hand, can arise from the reactions to this standardisation of education, once the influences of cultural context, systems and agents were brought to bear. They observed that the process of learning, in the widest sense, was influential in policy divergence, whereas more instrumental approaches to education might be detected within policy convergence aspirations. After this, Jørgensen and Aarkrog (2008) noted the links between unintended policy consequences and divergent developments arising from simplistic beliefs about the ease of policy transfer. They commented that within the EU's policy making mechanisms there was an expectation of convergence but that this was at odds with the influences of globalisation that had resulted in both divergence and convergence (Chapter 2). It was becoming clear to me that in a comparative study of policy, policies will either converge (for example through harmonisation) or diverge over time as there was no likely static state (Chapter 8).

Movements such as industrialisation, regionalisation and globalisation were considered to be mechanisms of policy convergence (Holzinger & Knill, 2005) or policy isomorphism (Shore et al., 2011). The most relevant of these mechanisms affecting VET policy within the EU were likely to be regionalisation and marketisation. However, Keep (2019), Hodgson et al. (2019) and Gallacher and Reeve (2019) observed that the levels of divergence between English and Scottish VET policy are growing, rather than reducing, with Scottish VET policy potentially more aligned to EU VET policy and English VET policy becoming an outlier within Europe, or, indeed, exceptionalist as identified by Hodgson and Spours (2014) and further confirmed by Roosmaa, Martma, and Saar (2019). This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

The policy change theories identified within the dimension table and outlined above have been subsequently discussed in relation to the policy gyre model (Chapter 4) and explored within the analysis of findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. They are then used to support and challenge these findings in Chapter 8.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the focus of my study on VET policy making in the EU and Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland. I have then defined policy in the context of education and VET policy. After reviewing relevant research on education policy to establish my research stance, I evaluated key education policy change theories that then formed part of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3 (p. 94). This policy framework was then carried through into Chapter 2, in which I continued a review of literature to set the context of VET policy making within the European Union and the nations selected for my study.

2. European and national VET policies

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I follow the introduction to VET policy making theories in Chapter 1 by outlining the way in which VET policy was made by the EU and the four countries. I then evaluate relevant literature to establish where there were gaps in existing knowledge. This developed my understanding of the relationships between the policy change theories outlined in literature and the reality of EU and national VET policy making. Reference is also made to the purposes for which VET policy is intended, as construed by other researchers, which is then evaluated later in my study, in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

As there was relatively little literature specifically about VET policy making in the EU (except for Alexiadou, Helgøy, and Homme (2019), Antunes (2016), Cort (2010) and Valiente, Capsada-Munsech, and de Otero (2020), examples have also been drawn from other relevant literature about education policy in the field of adult education (Milana & Klatt, 2018; Rasmussen, Larson, Rönnerberg, & Tsatsaroni, 2015) and in higher education (Brøgger, 2018), as well as in some instances about general education policy making where I believed that it was also applicable to EU VET policy making. Literature about national VET policy making was very often of a comparative nature and there were two overarching bodies of work relevant to my study: the NordVET study of VET in the Nordic countries led by Jørgensen and others (2014-2018) which reviewed both the history of and the current challenges to VET in Denmark and Finland until 2016, and the work begun by Raffe (2005) and continued by Hodgson and Spours (2014, 2016); Hodgson et al. (2019); Keep (2017, 2019) and Gallacher and Reeve (2019) among others based on VET policy (or its equivalent) in the four home countries of the United Kingdom which included England and Scotland. This study builds on the comparison of these distinctive countries, as discussed in Chapter 1.

The first part of this chapter summarises the processes of EU, sub-EU and national VET policy making within the period 2000-2019. The second part, in the form of a literature

review, assesses the field of research into globalisation of education policy where it is relevant to the EU, followed by research into EU education and VET policy, including the EU VET policy space and research into national VET policy. The final part draws out the policy change theories set out in Chapter 1 in relation to the EU and national policy making processes and situates these against the Research questions set out in Chapter 1 (p. 16).

2.2 EU VET policy making process between 2000 and 2019 – EU level

In order to better understand the specifics of the relationship between EU and national VET policy, this section sets out the historical processes of VET policy making within the EU in the period of study (2000 – 2019). Within this period, it has always been the case that education policy is subject to the principle of subsidiarity within the EU. This means that education policy is made, funded and controlled by member states, the EU does not dictate education policy to its members, as epitomised by the following:

The European Council emphasises the competence of Member States to define and implement quantitative targets in the field of education. (European Council., 2010, p. 12).

VET, from an educational perspective, might therefore be assumed to follow the same pattern. However, as became apparent during the study, policies made by the EU that had a direct bearing on VET, or were in fact VET policies, were latterly expected to be applied by member states rather than being the province of subsidiarity. Mechanisms such as pressures from league tables and peer benchmarking, evaluated by Brøgger (2018) in the context of HE, were more aggressively deployed in the making of VET policies. As set out in Research question 1, this raised questions about what the EU perceived the purpose of VET to be and why it was therefore permissible to seek to change national VET policies, rather than to influence them. As a result, I considered whether the evolving relationships between the EU VET policy and national VET policy may have been a result of the EU creating its own VET policy or national VET policies aggregating to become EU VET policy and whether this constituted a de facto European VET space (section 2.7). The possibility of policy divergence and convergence also informed my development of Research question 2.

The policy making processes which developed EU VET policy were subsumed within the EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC) policy process (p. 46), which originated from the Lisbon strategy in 2000. New VET policies were introduced by the Council of the European Union at its meeting in March 2000 as a series of statements and objectives (European Council, 2000), including a significant emphasis on lifelong learning since this strategy drew together the work of many other committees and built on the previously celebrated European year of lifelong learning (European Commission, 1996). The Lisbon strategy conclusions (subsequently referred to as the Lisbon strategy) created the expectation within the EU that member states would be shaping their national VET policies based on the objectives set out within the strategy. At European level, the OMC recommended the production of national reform programmes (NRPs), scheduled to be produced on a triennial basis, to monitor progress towards Lisbon objectives. However, it was decided following a review of the Lisbon strategy (Kok, 2004), even before the first NRPs were produced, that there was insufficient progress towards achieving objectives. This review, the increase in numbers of EU members (Table 2-1) and the global financial recession of 2008-2009 culminated in a new European strategy, produced in 2010 and known as Europe 2020, within which the discourse about VET had been altered (Chapter 5) and the controls exerted by the OMC had been tightened into the European Semester cycle. Confusingly, the OMC is referred to as extending into the European Semester, but the two processes differed in extent of control, rigour, time scales and arguably effectiveness, so that I have maintained a distinction between the two.

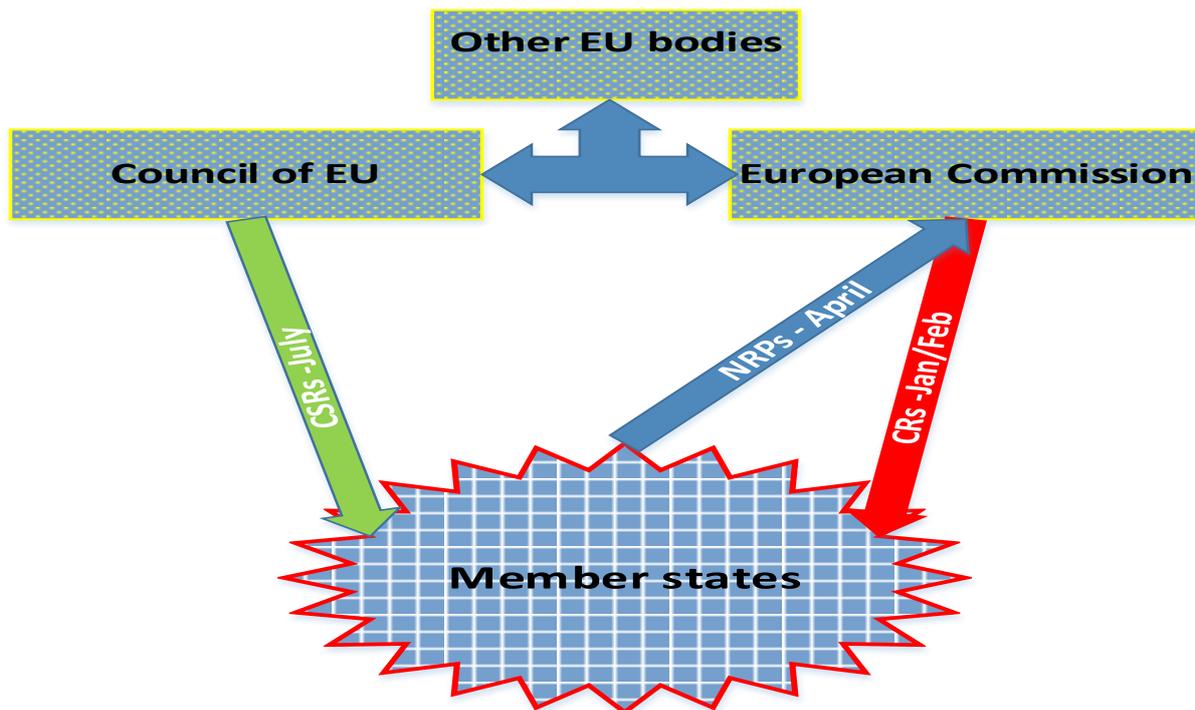


Figure 2-1 The European Semester reporting process

The OMC established regular reporting against the Lisbon strategy objectives so that the first National Reform Programmes (NRPs), produced by the member states, were submitted in 2005 and then triennially until 2011, after which an annual process was introduced, in line with the new European Semester, established as part of the Europe 2020 process (European Commission, 2010) (Figure 2-2). In addition to the reports, data was also submitted to EU databases on a regular basis, both to construct a common (European) approach as well as to monitor the impact of the policies. However, there was little formal feedback about the submissions and because VET policies were not mandatory but subject to subsidiarity (p. 44), the consistency and frequency of what was submitted was not always rigorous; whilst the Lisbon strategy referred to ‘a Europe-wide data base on jobs and learning opportunities’ (European Council, 2000. s. 29), ten years later this was rephrased as:

EU level policy-making in VET should be based on existing comparable data. To this end, and using the Lifelong Learning programme, Member States should collect relevant and reliable data on VET – including VET mobility – and make these available for Eurostat. Member States and the Commission should jointly agree on which data should be made available first. (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2010, p. 17)

During this period the EU was itself changing, growing in size (another 10 members joined in 2004, 2 in 2007 and 1 in 2013). The EU was made up of 28 member states until 31 January 2020, when the United Kingdom began a transition process to leave the EU and finally left on 31 December 2020. The policy monitoring became more rigorous following the move to the European Semester cycle. Member states were required to produce NRPs annually in response to EU generated Country Reports (CRs) and the EU developed a complex cycle of reporting across the year to monitor progress and provide feedback against the overall objectives and specific goals set for each member state in the country specific recommendations (CSRs) (Figure 2-1) that then fed into the next year's CRs and NRPs.

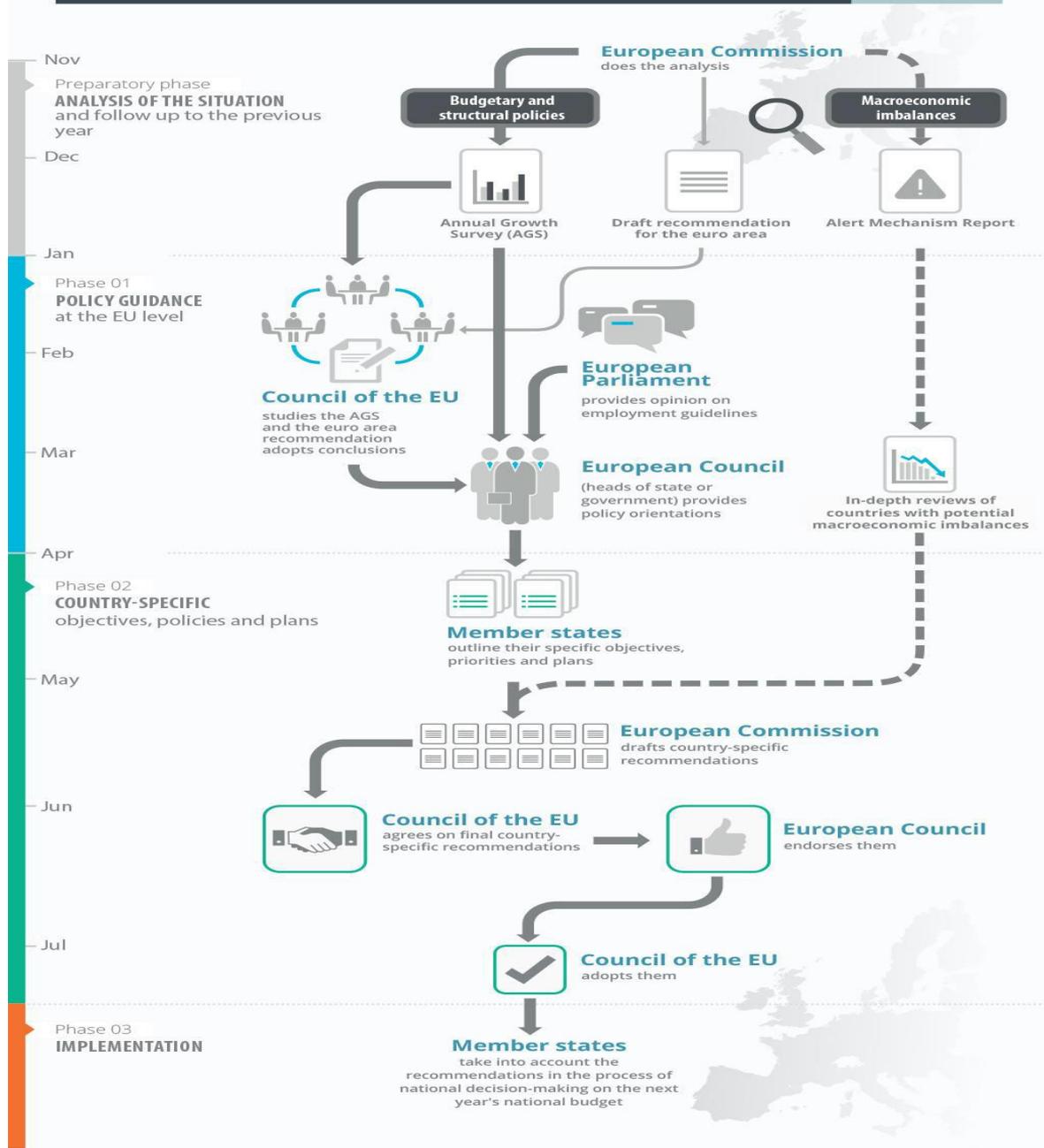
This method of control may have been perceived as necessary because of increased membership size and hence complexity (with increasing numbers of actors) or it may have been a response to the global financial recession in 2008. However, evaluations of the Lisbon strategy in 2004, 2008 and 2010 had already concluded that the monitoring processes were not sufficiently well co-ordinated as well as the overall conclusion that Lisbon had not led to rapid change in the way that was envisaged (Kok, 2004), and thus Europe 2020 came into being as the new strategy for developing the European Union.

It was already apparent that there were multiple layers of governance within the EU. In order to clarify the roles of EU bodies and national government within the latest set of EU policy making a recent structure diagram is included (Figure 2-2). European law is made in the European Parliament, made up of elected members from each of the member states, numbers of which depend on the size of the state. The European Parliament also has responsibility for budgets. The European Council is made up of the heads of the member states, meeting regularly to decide on the political agenda and priorities for the EU. Each member state takes it in turn to hold a six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union, made up of government ministers from member states, dependent on the policies under discussion. This Council is responsible for coordinating policies (for example VET policies) and negotiating and adopting EU laws and represents the governments of the member states. The European Commission is viewed as the leadership of the EU, supported by the EU's civil service, supporting the work of both the European Council and the European Parliament by proposing and monitoring legislation as well as implementing and

funding policies. One commissioner is put forward by each member state (European Union, 2019a). In VET terms, the principal structures are the European Council, the Council of the European Union (and its committees) and the European Commission, because of the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that education law is made in the member state's parliament and not in the European Parliament. Figure 2-2 overleaf represents the EU's 'official' guide to how the European Semester operates and reflects a top down process, that may not be borne out in the reality of VET policy making (Chapter 8).

English is the common language of the EU so that policy was discussed in English and policy documents were also produced in English before translation into national languages (Chapter 6). Thus, the language of the European Semester was English although CRs and CSRs were also produced in national languages. Danish and Finnish national policy documents such as NRPs were also produced in English, but in these instances as a translation from Danish or Finnish after the production of the original document. The implications of this are considered further in Chapter 6.

Who does what in the European Semester?



A new cycle starts again towards the end of the year, when the Commission gives an overview of the economic situation in its Annual Growth Survey for the coming year.



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Figure 2-2 European Semester

(European Union, 2017b)

The tone of Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010) was markedly different to that of the Lisbon strategy, not solely because it is a lengthier document (32 pages compared with 10), but also because of its greater emphasis on economic objectives and measures rather than social themes. As an example, the social themes of Lisbon, such as social inclusion and social cohesion were referenced 29 times in the Lisbon strategy text (European Council, 2000) compared with 16 times in the Europe 2020 text. There were also more specific numerical targets; for example, the Lisbon target of:

the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training should be halved by 2010 (European Council, 2000. s. 26.),

was replaced by:

The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree (European Union, 2010, p. 7).

Additionally, there appeared to be an attempt to engage with an (unspecified) audience by use of the words 'we', 'our' and 'I' which were entirely absent from the Lisbon strategy. Policies at this stage were clearly shaped by reactions to the global financial recession as well as emerging political tensions within the EU. There were also increasing influences from organisations such as the OECD, heralding the increasing effects of globalisation on education policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sahlberg, 2015) (section 2.5).

2.3 EU VET policy making process between 2000 and 2019 – Sub-EU level

In parallel with the early progress monitoring of the Lisbon objectives through the EU level OMC, the EU Ministers of Vocational Education and Training (and others including candidate member state representatives, EFTA/EEA representatives and social partners, Table 2-1 below), subsequently referred to as the EU VET ministers, held a series of meetings to oversee development and monitoring of VET policy. This constituted a sub-EU level of VET policy making with a single focus on VET policy. The Lisbon strategy VET objectives were reinterpreted during these subsequent communiqués and declarations during the period

2002-2010 and again in 2015. The VET biennial communiqués were widely published and some, in particular the Copenhagen declaration, (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, 2002) were continually referenced during the subsequent VET ministers’ meetings and also in national policy making, at least in Denmark (Cort, 2010).

Table 2.1– The European declarations and their ‘owners’

Document	Year of publication	Policy level	Numbers of partners to agreement	Number of member states
Lisbon strategy	2000	European Council	15	15
Europe 2020 strategy	2010	European Council	27	27
Copenhagen declaration	2002	European Ministers of VET	32	15
Maastricht Communiqué	2004	European Ministers responsible for VET	33	25
Helsinki Communiqué	2006	European Ministers of VET	37	25
Bordeaux Communiqué	2008	European Ministers for VET	37	27
Bruges Communiqué	2010	European Ministers for VET	38	27
Riga Declaration	2015	Ministers in charge of VET of EU member states	41	28

Procedures for the development of such strategies and communiqués, in keeping with OMC guidelines, were outlined in the Treaty on European Union (European Union Member States, 2012) as amended by the Rules of Procedure of the European Council (General Secretariat of the Council, 2010). There were, as might be expected, specific rules for the preparation and circulation of agendas and background documentation, for minute taking and for procedures during meetings, organised by the Secretary-General of the Council and the General Secretariat. EU education policy meetings (although not specifically related to VET) were physically observed by Papanastasiou (2019a) who found that the established way of arranging policy was through discussions which took place outside the formal

meetings, resulting in pre-determined decisions habitually eliding through the meetings into policy, rather than the policy being the subject of debate at the meeting.

2.4 National VET policy making processes between 2000 and 2019

In this section I present a brief summary of the policy making mechanisms in each country. Appendix A provides further background information about the VET systems in the four countries.

Denmark

In terms of skills formation, Danish VET policy making is widely held to be collective, because it involves the state, employers and trade unions and other social partners. Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) also recognised the high level of public commitment to VET training. Roosmaa et al. (2019), in their identification of VET systems based on the relationship between VET and general upper secondary education and, within VET, between apprenticeships and classroom-based VET, described the Danish VET system as a dual system, where policy supports a joint responsibility for training between schools (VET institutions) and workplaces and there is a predominance of apprenticeships. In general, there has been a stability of state responsibility for VET, within the Ministry of Children and Education (albeit under various different names), although there is a separate Ministry for Higher Education and Science with responsibility for formal adult education and the Ministry of Culture is responsible for non-formal adult education and training (Eurydice, 2021a). Policy is regularly updated through annual legislation, often for quite small aspects of VET, for example the use of particular IT systems (The Danish Government, 2018a).

Jørgensen (2015), as part of the NordVET project, summarised the current challenges for Danish VET as the need to improve access between VET systems and HE and the linkages between the schools (upper secondary education) and the workplace. In response to the first challenge, the EUX programme was planned to address this by providing both access to HE and a certificate of competence as a skilled worker, aiming by this to improve

perceptions of VET as well as to remove barriers to higher education. It was designed as a hybrid qualification to combine the dual system of school and workplace training with the school-based routes that traditionally led to university. At the time of his summary, the EUX was still being implemented but, after detailing previous attempts to address this challenge that had failed for a variety of reasons, he concluded that there may be some hope that this policy will succeed, albeit for relatively small numbers of students and that there was also a risk that it would create a further hierarchy of qualification within the academic/vocational education system. The second challenge was being addressed by the establishment of new training centres to offer work placements when there was a shortage in companies and by a new method of project learning, the 'Practicum', involving schoolteachers, workplaces and apprentices. Jørgensen linked the shortage of work placements to risks to social inclusion, as competition for scarce places meant that ethnic minority students missed opportunities as they had less well-developed networks and also to the drop-out challenges that the Danish VET system has faced (p. 197). Again, at the time of his assessment, the training centres and the 'Practicum' had just been implemented and it remained to be seen whether they would address the issues (Chapter 6).

England

England is referred to separately because the VET systems and policies in England and Scotland are completely different (Hodgson & Spours, 2014). There is no common UK VET policy. However, from the EU perspective, the member state was the United Kingdom, which led to opportunities for confusion in the monitoring of the European Semester (Chapter 6).

In England, in a very distinctive model, there is centralised control of policy making for further education (VET). In a report for the Institute for Government, Norris and Adam (2017) commented:

In the FE sector, since the 1980s, there have been 28 major pieces of legislation, 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities and no organisation has survived longer than a decade (Norris & Adam, 2017, p. 3).

There have been a further two secretaries of state for education since that report, and no fewer than four ministers have carried the skills portfolio. In practice, this has translated into a plethora of shifts in responsibility between government departments, executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies. Currently, responsibility for VET rests between the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Eurydice, 2021b). However, since 2000 it was previously shared between the Department for Education and Employment, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The current funding agency is the Education and Skills Funding agency, responsible for implementing the policy made by the DfE.

Bussemeyer and Trampusch (2011) described English VET policy making as liberal skills formation because of the reliance on market forces. Bussemeyer and Schlicht-Schmälzle (2014) later redefined this part of their typology to be residual skills formation in the case of England, although that suggested there was no commitment to an academic educational pathway. However, in a review of the Wolf report (see below) that discussed many of the challenges facing English education foregrounded in the report, Keep (2012) made reference to the 'other people's children' approach of policy makers to VET and their apparent preferences for general academic education, despite relatively similar numbers in each part of the sector. In recent years, English VET policy making has been influenced by expert reports from individuals, who did not necessarily have an educational background but were commissioned by the government, with the brief of reforming the VET system. There have been a significant number since 2010 (for example, Wolf (2011), Richard (2012), Sainsbury (HM Government, 2016) and Augar (2019)) and the effect has been to add complexity through overlap and dissonance, rather than to simplify the system (Chapter 7). These reports are then often adapted into law through Acts of Parliament (for example, the Sainsbury report became the Technical and Further Education Act (HM Government, 2017) although not all recommendations are adopted in full and, in the case of Augar, official policy has yet to be made.

Finland

In Finland, education policy and VET policy is initially stipulated in the government programme, from which the Ministry of Education and Culture derives its regular plans and budgets. Although governments have changed regularly (but with no specific interval) the education direction has not altered significantly, as the governments very often form from coalitions (as in Denmark) and education policy is deemed to be of such importance that it has survived political change (Sahlberg, 2015). The ministry responsible for VET has been the Ministry of Education and Culture (the Ministry of Education pre 2010), a ministry formed in 1809 (OKM, 2021) illustrating the stability of their approach to VET. Once the programme and budgets are established, policy making is then devolved to the municipalities and VET institutions and much curriculum policy is made by teachers themselves (Pither & Morris, 2020). Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) described Finnish VET policy making as statist skills formation, because of the high public commitment to VET policy but the low level of involvement of employers, unlike Denmark. Roosmaa et al. (2019) identified the Finnish VET system as a schools-based system, where policy has supported the responsibility for training within schools (VET institutions), separated from general upper secondary education and with apprenticeships also delivered separately (although there are very few apprenticeships in Finland, Chapter 6).

Also arising from the NordVET project, Virolainen and Stenström (2015) summarised the major challenges for Finnish VET. The NordVET project overall presented four challenges, whilst acknowledging that the degree of challenge in each country was different. From the Finnish perspective, therefore, the challenges have been around the supply of skills to the labour market, which has not always matched demand and the support for some adults with lower levels of basic skills. More recent changes to the policies to address these issues took place after the NordVET project completed. Unlike Denmark, Finland has created routes between VET and higher education, which have been in place for a number of years and, although experiencing some levels of drop-out, attempted to address this through its version of the Youth Guarantee (Chapter 6).

Scotland

Scotland has made its own education policies for many years and gained legislative control for education in 1998, during the Scottish devolution process. As a result, Scottish education, including VET, has diverged significantly from the English model. The Scottish Directorate for Education, Communities and Justice is responsible for VET, with a Cabinet Member for Education and Skills (formerly Education and Lifelong Learning). This structure has been broadly in place since 2007. Previously, post devolution education and lifelong learning were in separate education departments (Eurydice, 2021c) and Scotland has also commissioned its own OECD reports on skills beyond schools. Tett (2014) demonstrated how, despite OECD influences and the espoused Scottish government economically driven policies that set policy goals, adult literacy policy making retained an educational focus due to resistance from practitioners but noted the infiltration of economic policy into education.

However, Scotland's VET policy making has been considered similar to that of England, as a liberal skills formation (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011) although there was evidence more recently, however, that Scotland has increased the level of public commitment to VET, through the renationalisation of Scottish FE colleges in 2012, yet this has not come without detriment to individual colleges, as argued by Watson, Husband, and Young (2020).

Capsada-Munsech and Valiente (2020) have recently identified that the UK is positioned on the boundaries between liberal and collective skills formation, largely as a result of their UK study being based on Scottish regions. Scotland has more recently sought to engage employers more directly through regional joint planning and with colleges and through an expanding apprenticeship system. Scotland operates within a FE system, whereby the majority of VET is delivered in FE colleges (Roosmaa et al., 2019) but there are relatively high numbers of VET students in comparison with general upper secondary students.

Scotland's VET policies are encapsulated in the legal framework through Acts of Parliament, for example, the Act that put in place the reform of colleges (The Scottish Government, 2013) and are overseen by agencies such as Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Agency.

2.5 Globalisation and EU education policy making

Research literature about the EU's education policies was often developed in the context of the influence of globalisation on education policy. The wider aspects of globalisation were outside the scope of this thesis, but a brief outline below introduces the themes of global education policy transfer before focussing on the specifics of EU education policy. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) described the processes by which education policies may be viewed as global, both through spatial changes to perceived boundaries that have enabled policy transfer processes and through the creation of a dominant model of global education policy, that of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 23) contended that the globalisation process is: 'both an ideological formation and a social imaginary that shapes the discourses of education policy', arising through the ever-increasing use of information technology, the omni presence of media, including social media and the economic significance of transnational trade. Additionally, education policy transfer from those countries who were self-perceived as world leading to those who were led to believe that their systems were deficient, in the way that the influences of neoliberalism from the United States and the UK permeated other countries (Harvey, 2005), might result in homogenisation of educational culture (Milana, 2012), or a dominant form of education system that was not appropriate for every context.

However, as referred to in Chapter 1, convergence of education policy from the global perspective to a national education system was not always as clear-cut as might be expected, even when ideas converged, and, as Rizvi and Lingard (2010) have pointed out, filters at national level resulted in a diminishing of the impact of globalisation. This filtering was also perceived between the EU and its member states. Milana (2012) outlined the difference between global and EU perceptions of adult education through discourse analysis. Her interpretation was that global calls for adult education were put forward as ways of overcoming disadvantage in a nation, particularly through nations working together, and that it was perceived (at least by UNESCO) as a human right, whereas the EU linked learning arising from adult education to economic and political growth in an argument more akin to that of human capital theory (Sen, 1999). In a later article (Milana, 2015), she also

contended that distinctions between global and local adult education policy were scalar rather than 'intrinsic' so that global policy was represented at a local level within the local culture and context and in a single location there was likely to be both homogeneity and heterogeneity of policy. In other words, global policies might be recognised locally but were likely to have a local flavour. To further illustrate this, in a study of adult education policy in Europe, Milana and Klatt (2018) drew the distinction between EU education policy and global education policy processes by arguing that the EU processes were multi-level and steered towards EU regional integration through the way regulation operated and through the distribution of resources, so that adult education policy with the EU became more closely identified with EU aims rather than global goals for adult education. They identified that the specific processes of Europeanisation (section 2.9) predominate over the global processes. Although, as noted in Chapter 1, adult education constitutes a broader field than adult VET, the principles might also hold true for VET (section 6.4.2).

An additional perspective on globalisation of education policy was put forward by Sahlberg (2015) who presented a critique of supranational organisations, for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD and its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) benchmarking system, which he said were seen not only as influencers but also as originators of global education policy. The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) that they perpetuated, was not, he argued, based on an education agenda but on practices drawn from corporate management, such as increasing competition, standardisation, accountability and testing (Sahlberg, 2015). He contended that Finland, at least, has withstood many of these policies to date and has maintained its own education policies, albeit within the EU framework.

I found that there was a distinction between the globalisation of education policy, (Dale, 2007), and the particular processes by which the EU has developed its VET policy, referred to as Europeanisation (section 2.9). This distinction was not only one of scale, but also dependent on the formal arrangements in place, such as the quality of the national policy making filters, so that there were geographic (space) influences as well as temporal

influences. The extent to which the EU's approach to VET policy making influenced national VET policy making is considered further in Chapter 8.

2.6 European VET policy making – research literature

Critics of EU policy making have observed that both the Lisbon strategy and Europe 2020 had a predominantly economic purpose in relation to VET. Ertl (2006), for example, concluded that the predominant discourse in the EU with relation to VET had been economic and that Lisbon had seen no change from this. He cited many initiatives and targets in the early years of the EU and post Lisbon that had not been achieved and noted that the lack of educational purpose within EU VET policy making had contributed to this, leaving member states to pursue their national policies with little evidence of harmonisation or convergence but a reliance on subsidiarity although this had been thought originally only to be relevant to general education, when this was deemed to come within the remit of the EU. However, my study showed that this predominance of economic purpose was not always the case (Chapter 8) and that there were more nuanced purposes in later years. Whilst I also found that there was little evidence of VET policy convergence (Chapter 6), the need for such convergence was also not proven (Chapter 8).

Debates about the early operation of the OMC were summarised by Büchs (2009), who concluded that the points of view that suggested on the one hand, that the OMC supported national policy learning through encouraging the contributions of otherwise marginalised actors and, on the other, that the OMC was not strong enough to support social policy making within member states because it represented soft law, working through influence and idea exchange and was thereby not immune to the wider influences of globalisation, might be combined to achieve a broader understanding of the OMC. Her evidence indicated that discourses arising from the OMC had been demonstrated to influence national policy making frameworks although whether or not this was socially beneficial remains to be seen. There was a balance between which of the OMC's policy contexts, either the economic or the social (including skills policies) would predominate. However, this predates the

European Semester, which I found to have altered the EU's influence over national VET policy making (Chapter 8).

Changes arising from the Semester were initially discussed by West (2012), who summarised the history of EU VET policies from the early days of the European Economic Community until the changes that arose after Europe 2020. He identified phases relating lifelong learning to economic development, beginning in the 1990s and continuing through into the proposals to create a VET space akin to the HE space that existed as a result of the Bologna process (section 2.7). West observed that VET policy making in terms of the OMC proceeded on a voluntary basis and was found, within the investigations relating to lifelong learning, to be at a slower pace than intended. He noted the intent from the European Commission as early as 2003 to start to 'use the open method of coordination to the full – while fully complying with the principle of subsidiarity' (p. 14) in order to generate progress in achieving the Lisbon (and subsequent) VET policy objectives. He also noted that, following the introduction of the European Semester cycle in 2011, different stances with regard to compliance became more apparent. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6, the UK did not form its own targets from the educational targets set within Europe 2020 and therefore did not report annually against them. West observed that there was a perception that some countries were reporting existing policies whilst others were making attempts to provide additional information and some evidence of change, contrasting, for example, the three descriptive pages of the UK 2011 NRP submission about education with the nine pages of tables and performance targets from Romania for the same period. In asking whether the OMC has resulted in a common EU approach to VET policy making and in evaluating the possible models through which this might be answered, West has also sought to establish what the EU's purpose for VET appeared to be. He concluded that there were indeed economic agendas but that there was also evidence of social policy as well as, in some cases, an educational purpose. However, the political interplay within the EU and its member states has also had a significant impact on determining both EU and national VET policy making. My study has provided an update to this work from a critical realism perspective and also through the addition of documents from the later phases of the European semester and I concurred with West (2012) that there were multiple purposes for

VET from an EU perspective, whereas my study also explored the national perspectives and sought to understand the relationships between them (Chapter 8).

Stevenson's European Semester literature review (Stevenson, 2019), developed the narrative of the European Semester built by West (2012). Stevenson noted the changes in approach since it began, as well as its social dimension, which was of relevance to the debate about VET purpose. He emphasised the blurring of purpose between economic and social (and also political) and identified the demarcation between the financial recovery and later phases, although, from the perspective of this study, this was dominated for the UK by the aftermath of the Brexit vote and subsequent political crises. In conceptualising the Semester as a form of 'governance architecture', Stevenson has described both a structure and a process within which agents have interacted for policy making, whilst being clear about the fluidity rather than the rigidity of this architecture (Chapter 4).

On the other hand, in an analysis of all CSRs across the EU, Zeitlin and Vanhercke (2017) observed that social policy (including those CSRs relating to education and skills) dominated between 2011 and 2016. They perceived this as 'socialising' the European Semester but cautioned that this did not necessarily result in a socialising of national policy, especially as, at the date of their article, no member state had received any formal sanctions for non-compliance. Indeed, EU sanctions (which are outside the scope of this study) appear to have been reserved for economic matters.

The changes to policy making processes during the establishment of the European Semester, to some extent cut across the three-layered model of VET policy making that had been established in the first iteration of the OMC. Based on Rizvi and Lingard (2010)'s identification of the different layers of policy making (local, regional, national, international, transnational and global), two different phases of layering have been identified within this study. This identification was made because both Rizvi & Lingard and Shore et al. (2011), concluded that education policy analysis was best carried out in a critically reflexive manner by the mapping of layers of policy processes across space and time. The supranational (EU), sub-supranational (sub-EU) and national layers of interaction were replaced by the

supranational (EU) and the national (Chapter 8). Although, within the period of study, there was a final iteration of the EU VET ministers' meetings in Riga in 2015, the lowered frequency meant that less attention was paid to recommendations, at least from the EU perspective.

2.7 The EU VET space

After the Lisbon strategy conclusions, an EU VET policy governance process was established through the meetings of the EU VET ministers. This was often described as the Copenhagen process, following the 2002 Copenhagen declaration (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, 2002). The Copenhagen process has also been cited as the origins of a European VET policy space in relation to Europeanisation or Europeification and the policy convergence, divergence, borrowing or learning theories (Chapter 1, section 2.9). The question of an EU VET space arose within the Bordeaux (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2008) and Riga (Ministers in charge of vocational education and training – of EU Member States, 2015) declarations as well as some of the literature under review. This is relevant to this study because of the implications for the relationships between national and EU VET policy making, for example whether EU VET policy making was oriented towards the creation of a VET space equivalent to that of the HE space generated by the Bologna process or whether the processes of Europeanisation (p. 77) were resulting in a single VET policy for Europe. However, the definition of VET space was not always clear: was it, for example, intended to be a policy space or a space with common education systems, a policy governance space or an imaginary of global discourse as suggested by Rizvi and Lingard (2010)? Without such a definition, it was difficult to conclude whether this particular project had been successful or not. Potentially, it was deliberately left as ambiguous, so that policy makers could draw their own interpretations from it, as, for example, was the case with the concept of mobility in relation to VET policies (Chapter 7).

The understanding of an education policy space, drawn from Bologna and adopted in this study, establishes a space with common structures and frameworks for policy making, a common policy purpose around which there is evidence of policy convergence as well as

convergence of practice. However, the signatories to the Bologna process do not all have similar HE systems, although Bologna is a policy governance space. The distinction between the Bologna process and globalisation processes is outside the scope of this thesis although the discourse around it has indeed created an imaginary; the European Higher Education Area. By comparison although structures and frameworks were established under Copenhagen, for example the enhanced role for Cedefop (below), in parallel with a policy governance space, the policy and practice convergence implied within a policy space was less apparent (Chapter 8). Similarly, as will be illustrated later (Section 2.8) with reference to the VET systems studied in the four countries, there are by no means common education systems.

Cedefop, described as an EU decentralised agency, has long been established as an European VET resource, conducting longitudinal research and producing reports since 1975 with the aim of developing a common European VET policy (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2021). The regulations establishing Cedefop in 1975 were updated in 2019 to provide continuation of its funding from the EU general budget and to amend its remit to include skills and qualifications policy as well as VET (European Union, 2019a, 2019b). This was significant because it suggested that policy levers relating to ‘skills and qualifications and the validation of learning’ were not previously included within definitions of VET. Reports have either been pan Europe or focussed on a particular member state, and through ReferNet (created by Cedefop in 2002) these national reports were produced in partnership with the member state concerned to provide information on:

VET’s role, purpose, governance and structure, insights into developments and trends in VET policies, and in-depth analysis of how each country is progressing in its implementation of common European policy objectives (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2021)

Cedefop’s emphasis from 2019 was on the interface between:

education and training and the world of work in order to ensure that the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired support lifelong learning, integration

and employability in changing labour markets and are relevant to the needs of citizens and society (European Union, 2019b, p. 90).

In a study of data use in England, Scotland, Finland and Sweden, Grek et al. (2009) argued that the European education policy space was being forged through Europeanisation, through the pooling of shared data. However, this was also based on general education, the use of PISA data and putative relationships with the OECD, rather than the European Commission, which they suggested was causing the formation of an education policy space through comparative means of governance, rather than governing. Grek (2014), in further presenting a case for a European educational policy space, referred to compulsory education and put forward a strong argument for any such space being largely due to the role of the OECD in policy making rather than the European Commission (section 2.5). In any event, she concluded that:

the construction of the European education policy space was one of the continuous battles against a resisting nation-state education system which had embedded traditions and histories that were threatened by its emergence. Indeed, in the face of increasing internationalization and globalization, national education systems have been strengthened as education is seen as an important policy area, still administered nationally and locally (Grek, 2014, p. 279).

However, alongside this research and the parallels drawn with the Bologna process which established the European Higher Education Area in which co-operative approaches to policy development such as the OMC were also employed in the creation of the EHEA (Brøgger, 2018), there was an educational gap between the HE and compulsory spaces, into which VET might be placed. It is, of course, possible that an absence between two spaces does not necessarily constitute an intentional space, but might instead represent a policy vacuum.

From a different perspective, and perhaps attempting to fill the policy vacuum, Bonnafous (2014) reviewed the development of a European policy space for lifelong learning, which, she claimed, arose from EU VET policy. However, as she observed, neither the Lisbon strategy nor Europe 2020 has so far succeeded in achieving such a concept, whether measured statistically or recognised through behaviours. The linkage between the European Lifelong Learning Policy, the Education and Training Work Programme (incorporating

Bologna, Copenhagen and the OMC) was expected to bring about convergence of national VET systems, with the additional support of the European Lifelong Learning programme (projects such as Leonardo and Socrates) in a mix of top down and bottom up approaches. Bonnafous used the examples of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) to illustrate the difficulties of obtaining convergence, even of policy instruments and tools but, rather surprisingly, still considered that a European space for lifelong learning was emerging, despite identified logical tensions of space (supranational vs national) and purpose (economic or social).

Loogma (2016), on the other hand, acknowledged the shift to learning from education in EU education policy discourse and drew out the implication that this widened the locus of education to wherever learning takes place as well as encompassing lifelong learning across space and time. She referred to the impact of the Copenhagen declaration on Estonian VET as leading to the Europeanisation of Estonian VET and thereby contributing to an EU VET space. She also considered Europeanisation to be a process of convergence, with national policies becoming more similar as a result of adopting EU policy goals and instruments. Her review of the literature around common education spaces suggested a fluid conception of the term 'space' although her final definition of Europeanisation was more akin to that of Europeification (Antunes, 2016) (section 2.9) and her definition of EU VET space includes the existence of common policy instruments such as EQF, rather than a space for VET policy, so that she seemed to describe a VET policy governance space, rather than a VET space.

From the aspect of policy making bringing about change, Brøgger (2018) related the OMC processes to the formation of the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process. She noted the voluntary nature of the process and demonstrated the use of policy instruments such as benchmarking to bring about policy change through soft governance. Although Bologna was an HE process rather than a VET process, it was also a coordination process across 48 nations. Bologna may not have been completely successful in bringing about change in all the aspects of HE that it engaged with but the difference between this

space and the mooted parallel European VET space appeared to be that one was entirely voluntary (and related to post compulsory education) and one was linked more closely to the EU and related more closely to the labour market.

In summary, the expectations from the Bordeaux and Riga declarations of a European VET area had not been fully realised. This represented a divergence of policy trajectory as determined at sub-EU level which may be related to the tightening of control at the EU level, through the introduction of the Semester and the diminishing frequency of the EU VET ministers' meetings, taking control for EU VET policy making to the centre. This is discussed further against my findings in Chapter 8. It was certainly the case that there was shared governance through the sub-EU level meetings and through the OMC as well as some common structures, as Bonnafous (2014) identified, but these did not contribute to an education area like that of Bologna. Nor could it be argued that there was a policy making space, nor even a shared discourse about VET (Chapter 8). Bologna has, of course, a wider membership than the EU and HE is also a more clearly defined sector and system in any country than VET (notwithstanding the peculiarities of HE in FE in England). Despite there being references to universities and research institutions in Lisbon and the following declarations, HE was not a key focus of the European Semester. Within the CSRs for the four countries studied there were only three references to HE between 2011 and 2019, specifically to HE institutions. There appeared to have been little engagement between the Copenhagen process and the Bologna process; they have existed as parallel processes (Powell, Bernhard, & Graf, 2012) and there was little evidence of policy transfer between them. This may be due to different timings of developments or to different cultures within the processes as well as the direct intervention of the EU in VET in a way that was not paralleled in HE. Indeed, within Bologna, although there is a relatively well-developed set of policy processes and understandings, there are still differences in alignment in member states, notwithstanding the exercise of soft governance and hegemonic power (Brøgger, 2018). This is even more so in the case of the Copenhagen process because the divergence and dissimilarity of national VET systems was greater to begin with and there was potentially greater resistance to any form of harmonisation (Alexiadou & Lange, 2014). The difference in the EU's approach to HE and VET policy may reflect differing views about the

purposes of VET, which is the focus of my study, in the context of VET policy being represented as 'economic' or 'social' rather than 'educational'.

2.8 National VET policy making – research literature

In this section I evaluate the research literature about VET policy making in the four countries of the study, firstly through major comparative studies and secondly on an individual basis.

Comparative studies

This section draws highlights from two significant bodies of research: the home international studies instigated by Raffe, for example, Raffe and Byrne (2005), and continued by Hodgson and Spours (2012, 2014); Hodgson et al. (2019); Keep (2017, 2019) and Gallacher and Reeve (2019) focussing for this study on England and Scotland, and the NordVET study of 2014-2018 led by Jørgensen and Stenström, drawing specifically on the literature about Denmark and Finland. Whilst the NordVET project (2013-2015) provided very rich descriptions of the characteristics of each country's VET systems between the project did not offer as much comparability as did the two later publications (Jørgensen, Olsen, & Thunqvist, 2018; Michelsen & Stenström, 2018). Within those later publications, as noted by Pither (2020), there was reference both to the convergence of Finnish VET policies with those of the EU, in a Europeanisation mechanism (Stenström & Virolainen, 2018), with a consequent divergence between Finnish and Danish VET policies in this respect although Jørgensen (2018a) noted convergence of Finnish and Danish policies around specific problems of employability, retention and completion. Raffe and Byrne (2005) advocated that home international comparisons within the UK would support policy learning, by policy comparisons in context, extending the learning about responses to challenges into practical implementation. They envisaged that this policy learning might extend beyond policy borrowing and the 'cherry picking' of good practice, into detailed analysis of convergence and divergence patterns between the four home nations. However, whilst at the time of writing, it was suggested that the differences between the home nations were stable, it

appeared clear from my findings (Chapter 8) as well as from research literature (Hodgson & Spours, 2016; Keep, 2017), that the divergence between English and Scottish VET policy had increased and that this had an effect on the discourse about the purpose of VET policy (Research question 1) as well as providing evidence for the discussion of Research question 2.

Valiente et al. (2020) conducted a study of the translation of EU lifelong learning policy objectives into national lifelong learning policies, based on youth unemployment following the global financial crisis and covering the period 2010 -2016. They argued that the policies deployed in individual countries educationalised what they saw as an economic problem and that this was a short-term response to underlying problems about young people's roles in labour markets. Like my study, this was a documentary analysis but unlike my study it was conducted from an economic, rather than educational perspective. They identified policy convergence around the objective of improving youth employability and contended that educational solutions were put forward to economic policy challenges in this instance because they were less open to challenge. They did recognise, however, that the lifelong learning policy space was more a construct than a reality. However, I disagreed with their assumption that lifelong learning policy was only applicable to the young. Their starting point in relation to lifelong learning was economic, rather than educational and I also questioned their position about VET policy, given the principle of subsidiarity. The contrasts between the approach in their study and mine helped me to distinguish my educational focus and to strengthen the critical realism stance through which I sought to understand multiple layers of complexity.

In a comparison of apprenticeship programmes across Europe, Markowitsch and Wittig (2020) challenged some of the existing beliefs about apprenticeship training systems and combined origins, programme design and functions into a new typology which identified the existence of different systems within a single country. Within their conclusions, Denmark's apprenticeship systems were considered as professional education, England and Scotland's were considered as corporate training and Finland's as school-based education. This

reconceptualisation of apprenticeships sheds light on the different purposes of VET (educational or economic in this instance) as demonstrated through different approaches to policy making (Chapter 6).

Denmark

Cort (2010) analysed the impact of Europeanisation (section 2.9) on Danish VET. She linked developments in Danish VET post 2002 explicitly to the Copenhagen declaration and also signposted the rise of the EU as a stakeholder in VET policy making, which, she indicated, may widen the Danish policy space. She noted that Danish policies were not only based on EU policies but also on global policies (and considered the interaction between EU and global policies), positing that Europeanisation was a form of globalisation. She also found that the processes of harmonisation arising within the OMC were more warmly received in Denmark than previously, in part due to Danish ownership of the Copenhagen process and observed how incremental systemic changes were operating at the expense of nationally agreed values of collectivism to deliver the European VET policy agenda. By contrast, Rasmussen and Staugaard (2016) studied adult education policy at the local level in North Jutland. They drew parallels with other parts of Europe when concluding that themes of centralisation, the economy and politics appeared to be influencing adult education policy (and education policy more widely) indicating Europeanisation. However, they lamented the lack of strategic educational collaboration within the region, which meant that social and educational challenges were not being addressed and thus did not favour the impacts of Europeanisation. This represented a change of thinking between time periods. These contrasting studies informed Research questions 1 and 2.

Research question 1 was also informed by the comparative review of short track apprenticeships carried out by Di Maio, Graf, and Wilson (2019), in which they identified the Danish system as particularly oriented towards social goals, rather than economic goals, by comparison with Germany and Switzerland. This was in the case of provision for disadvantaged young people, in terms of social equality and in employers' social responsibility. On the other hand, Jørgensen (2016), who had specifically focussed on drop-

out from Danish VET (Chapter 6), concluded that the policies had been going in circles for many years as a result of framing the problem in different ways, observing that drop-out had been an issue in Denmark for over a century and that some of the earlier policies seen as solutions were latterly perceived to be part of the problem. He questioned whether simple solutions to a very complex problem were possible and argued for a more reflective approach to policy making. Jørgensen (2017) also critiqued the lack of routes from apprenticeships to higher education in Denmark, citing both the strengthening of a vertical academic route into HE and the social inclusion policies applied to apprenticeships as reasons for the decline, whilst acknowledging that the continuing popularity of apprenticeships, with routes into skilled employment contributed to social equality. He concluded that the balancing of the different social policies created a dilemma for Danish VET because many were seen as having contradictory effects on either inclusion or equality.

A rare comparison of Danish and English VET policy was made by Kersh and Juul (2015), albeit of policy outcomes rather than policy making, although the underlying purpose of VET and the differing approaches to policy making were evident. They considered the case of equality from the perspective of parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes and found that students in both countries were aware of the parity of esteem issue. However, because Danish employers were seen to be very much more supportive of Danish VET and VET was free to students in Denmark, although Danish students believed VET to be second best, students were not motivated to choose VET for economic reasons and their perceptions of second best were based on opinions about industry in Danish society which had the potential to change. By contrast, VET in England was often promoted by government initiative as only for the disadvantaged, so that students choosing VET were made aware that it was not only their second choice, but as a result they would be left economically as well as socially disadvantaged. This served to inform Research questions 1 and 2.

Background to Research question 3 was provided by Milana and Rasmussen (2018), who drew out a trajectory of significant policy reforms dating from the Lisbon strategy to 2016 in

a comparison of Italian and Danish adult education policy reform. They observed that there was no connection between the Danish policy reforms and global or European events such as the financial recession in 2008 or the Europe 2020 strategy in 2010 although there were changes in administration in line with, for example, changes to the administration of the European Social Fund. They also noted that compliance with EU or global norms was not used as an argument in the introduction of Danish policy reforms and referred to the stability of the Danish government from an ideological standpoint, facilitating policy making between multiple stakeholders, in particular the tripartite arrangements between the state, employers and trade unions.

England

Research literature about English VET policy was often expressed through comparisons with the four home nations about convergence and divergence of policies, which provided evidence in support of Research question 2. As an example, Hodgson and Spours (2016) reviewed upper secondary education in the four home nations and found that England was increasingly withdrawing from any form of policy learning within the UK, developing instead an educational model with no reference to its immediate neighbours, nor, it seemed to any coherent forms of policy learning, relying instead on 'cherry picking' and on the importance of the Secretary of State for Education's role within the government. As a consequence, they pointed out that Scotland increasingly looks to learn from Nordic models and also New Zealand and Australia, rather than from England. Furthermore, Hodgson and Spours (2019) traced the policy history of English FE into the current centralised and marketised position and concluded, that with some levels of limited devolution being offered, there may be opportunities for policy learning and collaboration with the other home nations, who had already experienced devolution. However, they did not hold out much hope as they described the English FE system as:

perceived as marginal to the education system (compared with schools and universities) yet continually socially and economically important; unstable yet resilient due to FE's ability to react and respond to central steering; and conflicted by

its competing roles and relationships nationally and locally, but still seeking to build its vocational mission (Hodgson & Spours, 2019, p. 6).

They also observed that the 'wild card' of Brexit might offer an opportunity for the FE system, ill-defined as it is, to support a resurgent skills strategy, although, as I discuss briefly later, there has been little evidence of this to date (Chapter 8). In addition to the initiatives that Hodgson & Spours quoted, some of which have been delayed by the Covid pandemic (T levels and apprenticeship reforms), further reforms such as a review of Level 3 qualifications and implementation of the Augar review of post 18 education have been added into the mix, creating further complexity. Hodgson & Spours also drew out the possibilities for policy learning in both divergent and convergent scenarios, observing that policy learning was more likely when there was convergence around shared problems or challenges (section 2.9, Chapter 8).

As noted above, Keep (2017) also distinguished between policy making in England and Scotland, describing the lack of joining up of skills and employment policies in England and the absence of a coherent education system. Indeed, within the VET sector alone there is a lack of coherence, illustrated by the plethora of providers: secondary schools, academies, sixth form colleges, Institutes of Technology National colleges, FE colleges, workplaces, private training providers and universities. Control, through funding and regulation, is centralised on the national government, rather than localised.

He commented that:

Policy learning and transfer requires a desire for sharing of experience and lessons learned, and also the capacity to facilitate such transfer. Neither seems to exist at present within England, which has decided on a stance of isolationism and unilateralism within the UK policy sphere (Keep, 2017, p. 747).

In a subsequent article, Keep (2019) reviewed the policy learning options across the four nations and offered three possible options of convergence or divergence:

Policy continuity around a reliance on markets with an overlay of hopes concerning limited cooperation persists, marketisation further intensifies, or a swing towards further devolution and the re-invention of mechanisms for local democratic accountability that ushers in a more cooperation, systems-based approach. (Keep, 2019, p. 12).

However, these distinctions emphasised a deep divide in terms of VET policy between England and Scotland, and even more so between England and other European countries. Indeed, from an EU perspective, and therefore reporting on the UK, rather than England, Alexiadou, Fink-Hafner, and Lange (2010) noted the defensive strategy of the UK with regard to the OMC, including education and training policies, its engagement in surface policy learning and its resistance to Europeanisation compared with Slovenia. This was developed further by Alexiadou and Lange (2014) from the perspective of the linkages between UK civil servants and those of the European Commission. They found a deflection of EU initiatives that had become linked to 'a national sovereignty discourse' with the change to the coalition government in 2010. The conclusions they drew were that the OMC was not seen as relevant to UK education policy work. Although not specific to VET policy, the Balance of Competences Review relating to Education, Vocational Training and Youth (HM Government, 2014) commissioned by the UK Coalition Government to analyse what national benefits arose from EU membership, demonstrated the government's resistance to any influence on education policy from the EU, except in a non-prescriptive manner, either via the OMC or the recently introduced Semester. This analysis found that there had been little impact on national policy development. This is discussed further in relation to Research questions 2 and 3 in Chapter 8.

The absence of much research literature about the purpose of English VET policy (Research question 1) represented a gap in knowledge. However, any comparisons about the evolving relationships in terms of VET policy making between England and the EU were, in fact, made

between the EU and the UK rather than the EU and England or Scotland because the UK was the member state.

Finland

There have been more comparative studies including Finland as an educational comparator, although as Sahlberg (2015) cautioned, Finland's PISA rankings have declined since 2009 and:

After PISA 2000 made Finland an international poster boy, education policies have brought fragmented projects and pieces of new legislation that municipalities have been obliged to implement without a shared view of the overall direction. (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 196).

He highlighted the dangers of complacency and of being drawn into forms of globalisation that did not fit the context into which they were being applied. However, PISA, as a product of a particular form of globalisation and as based on the testing of fifteen-year olds, was not wholly applicable as an indicator of Finnish VET policy 'success'. Additionally, these studies tended to present Finland as an exemplar and also focussed on compulsory education, which was not of direct relevance to my study.

VET policymaking research literature in Finland, available in English, was limited as much of the research focusses on practice because of the strong engagement of teachers in translating national policy to local policy. This therefore represented a gap in knowledge about Finnish VET policy making which has been partly addressed by this study. However, Saari and Sääntti (2017) critiqued the rhetoric in Finnish education policy documents in respect of digitalisation. As they observed, this was one of the themes of the Lisbon strategy, which has been constantly repeated in subsequent EU policies and has been absorbed into Finnish rhetoric through links between education and economic competitiveness. They also revealed a paradox in that Finnish teachers, frequently viewed as models of good practice, were believed to be reluctant to introduce new ICT wholesale.

This illustrated the dichotomy between EU expectations and the national education policy context and, potentially, the benchmarks by which the introduction of such policies were judged and contributed to the background for Research questions 1 and 3.

In a similar way, Afdal (2013) discussed Finnish policy making in teacher education. Although higher education rather than specifically VET, some key findings about the approach to policy making were thought to be relevant, namely that academic policy makers were involved over long periods, that there were high levels of trust between the government, the Ministry of Education and the institutions involved in the policy making and that it was judged to be egalitarian and 'steered from within'. This was viewed as a 'state supervision model' with strong reliance on academic input and has been developed over a long period so that policy making was viewed as stable. There was little significant critique of Finnish VET systems although the reconceptualisation of lifelong learning as continuous learning is reportedly believed to be undermining the educational purpose of VET (Käyhkö, 2019). However, this may indicate policy drift, rather than convergence with EU VET policy and is considered further in the evaluation of Research question 2 in Chapter 8.

Scotland

In terms of the purpose of VET (Research question 1), McMurray (2017), in a critique of FE funding cuts in Scotland, considered the tensions about the role of FE in the economy and society and observed that the balance between the logic of VET (as expressed by Iannelli and Raffe (2007)) was at risk of tilting towards employability rather than towards social inclusion, or, indeed education. In support of Research question 2, Valiente, Lowden, and Capsada-Munsech (2019) concluded that Scotland's challenges were in some ways more similar to other European countries, namely, youth transition to VET, aligning VET with the labour market and reskilling adults, albeit that this aspect of lifelong learning has been more recently considered as a lower priority.

There was little research literature specifically linking Scottish VET policy and the Lisbon strategy, representing a gap that has been addressed through Research question 3.

However, within the literature about home comparisons, Gallacher and Reeve (2019) drew

the distinction between Scottish and English VET policy making by classifying that Scottish policy making had a managed approach, rather than the purely market driven approach in England. The Scottish government, in managing policy to balance skills needs and social inclusion, has maintained the systems approach within Scottish policy making that was described by De Bruijn in the context of modularisation over twenty-five years ago (De Bruijn, 1995). Gallacher and Reeve (2019) commented on the consistent direction of these policies over more than ten years, aligned with Scotland's wider economic policy. Keep (2017), in comparing the divergence of skills strategies between England and Scotland, identified both different policy aims and also different delivery mechanisms. In Scotland, he described the system as encompassing a labour market strategy that related skills training to the demands of employment, through changes within the workplace as well as to VET and in terms of delivery compared the systems approach developed in Scotland, with linking of provision across different educational sectors to the fragmentation that has occurred in England. Although both countries operated centralised and top down models of policy making, Scotland had still assigned roles for local authorities, for providers and social partners that were not present in England.

2.9 Policy change theories related to EU and national VET policy making

This section relates the policy change theories outlined in Chapter 1, Table 1-2, to the education policy making processes observed within the EU, between the EU and its member states and the national policy making processes to support further exploration of the Research questions. A consideration of these change theories was preceded by the question of whether or not there was a comprehensive EU VET policy as might be expected through some form of policy harmonisation or towards which policies might converge. Some researchers (Alexiadou, 2007; Lange & Alexiadou, 2010; Phillips, 2006) have appeared to assume that there was indeed EU VET policy, although views may have changed more recently. It was certainly the case that the Bologna process (section 2.7) created policy that all signatories to the declaration considered in their HE policy making (Brøgger, 2018; Ertl & Phillips, 2006). The Lisbon strategy, on the other hand, emphasised lifelong learning, which had been previously defined within the EU mechanisms, and was prescriptive about some

aspects of VET but left further detail to the ministerial declarations at sub-EU level (section 2.3). As J. Gordon (2015) observed, the EU had identified drivers for VET policy such as labour market integration, mobility and social inclusion and recommended a number of policy levers, some which it deployed itself, such as funding, benchmarks and targets and some of which were intended for deployment by member states, such as recognition of prior learning, EQF and ECVET. By my definitions of policy making (Chapter 1), this constituted EU VET policy making, although it appeared that the principle of subsidiarity had thus been evaded, since any policy made by the EU should have been replicated in national policy making, as the EU could not make VET policy on behalf of the member states. As J. Gordon concluded:

the combination of a fairly stable EU set of priorities in the last decade, the continuing development of the European instruments, regularly monitored benchmarks, regular reporting processes and country specific recommendations all play a role in shaping national strategies for skills policies, lifelong learning and VET (J. Gordon, 2015, p. 456).

It appeared that the EU's intentions were to form a common VET policy through policy changes although this ambition undoubtedly changed over time and was never fully subscribed to by the UK (Chapter 6). Thus, the EU's initial policy making within its member states appeared to operate through mechanisms of policy harmonisation (Dale, 2007), or policy convergence (Aarkrog & Jørgensen, 2008) which were set by the OMC and the European Semester (section 2.2). Holzinger and Knill (2005) constructed a typology of processes of policy convergence, including international harmonisation, which was seen as a more coercive form of convergence, involving legal frameworks so it was not necessarily the case that voluntary harmonisation was, in fact, part of the EU's VET policy making agenda. Moving along a spectrum from policy harmonisation to policy convergence, Ertl and Phillips (2006) described 'unionisation' and the policy convergence in the forming of a European education space (section 2.7) although this was with reference to the Bologna process, rather than specifically for VET. Alexiadou (2007) provided a description of the OMC and 'soft law' that linked the OMC to policy learning and drew out its potential for peer pressure through the use of benchmarking and indicators. She also observed that the OMC as

applied to VET policy ran the risk of being grounded in the aim for economic growth rather than operating within an 'independent policy field'. She then defined Europeanisation as a process by which member states adapt their education policies through domestic cultural changes arising from the diffusion of ideas and decisions within the EU itself and distinguished it from policy convergence because policy convergence was held to be the outcome of the process of Europeanisation. Although she clarified that the EU was not exerting pressure on member states to change policy and defined the shift as a change from 'policy making by governments to policy through governance' (Alexiadou, 2007, p. 108) the implication was that Europeanisation was a top down process, or, at best, an interaction between member states to derive EU policy that was then pushed down. However, in policy making terms, I interpreted Europeanisation as a European variant of policy convergence, and have treated convergence as a process, rather than an outcome.

Antunes (2016) observed that the Copenhagen Process (and the Bologna Process) were less important since the introduction of the European Semester. Her analysis found that there was a greater degree of centralisation of EU education policy in the second decade of this century, linking this to a greater emphasis on the economic aspects of education (VET in particular), rather than some of the earlier social ideals. She defined Europeification as the process of developing national education policy within the framework set by EU policies, quoting examples from documentary analysis of policy texts about the Portuguese apprenticeship system. She suggested that Europeanisation was the production of EU policy and that Europeification was the production of national policy within that context. As such, she pointed out that they were connected through scale although approached distinctly in analysis. With this distinction in mind, Europeification might be viewed as national policy learning and Europeanisation as supranational policy learning. I found that Antunes' distinctions between national and supranational policy making processes provided a more nuanced approach than those of Alexiadou, and, in addition, that her research aligned with the complexities I had found using a critical realism framework (Chapter 8).

The processes of Europeanisation and Europeification, however labelled, were forms of policy convergence, although some researchers preferred to use the term policy learning rather than convergence. As Alexiadou (2019) observed:

The co-existence of contradictory discourses and practices that influence policy outcomes at both national and EU levels is a political reality and illustrates the complexities of policy making processes and their uneven outcomes (Alexiadou, 2019, p. 437).

Having stressed that the OMC's role in education policy governance was intended to operate in parallel with other policy spaces (the potential construction of a European education policy space – section 2.7), Alexiadou et al. (2010) discussed policy convergence into common education goals and observed that the EU language had changed from education to learning, with the associated notion that learning was too important to leave to individual member states. The inference was that the OMC was neither EU policy nor national policy but that it occupied a space between and enabled the EU to get further into national policy making than was either legal or possibly intended. They revisited the view of Europeanisation as both top down and bottom up process and described the OMC as operating within a multi-level governance framework of supranational, national, regional and local spaces as well as including non-state actors (rather than just national and supranational).

Further analysis within the EU space was carried out by Lange and Alexiadou (2010), who identified four policy learning styles within the EU OMC education policy making processes. Having defined policy learning as bringing about changes in behaviour as a result of changes in assumptions and beliefs, they claimed that policy learning is thus a 'deeply political process'. Their view was that the EU relied on member co-operation and therefore neither top down nor bottom up policy making processes were prevalent and that informal horizontal learning and influence were significant in policy making. The four categories: mutual policy learning, competitive policy learning, imperialistic policy learning and surface policy learning were all observed during their study of education policy making processes and illustrated the complexity as well as the dynamic nature of these processes.

In conclusion, the identification of policy change theories with the EU and national VET policy making processes through research literature demonstrated a coalescence of thinking about policy convergence and policy learning although it was acknowledged that these were different phenomena. EU VET policy making was alternatively treated as a top down creation, co-creation or, in fact, completely absent (section 2.7) and this is discussed further in relation to Research questions 2 and 3 in Chapter 8. Fewer researchers appeared to have studied policy divergence between EU education policies and member state policies. The implications appear to have been that policy convergence was the main mechanism, although Jørgensen and Aarkrog (2008) observed:

..... there seems to be a paradox of convergent and divergent developments in education and work at the same time (Jørgensen & Aarkrog, 2008, p. 13);

and that:

..... the unintended consequences of direct transfer and imitation overshadow the intended effects – and this implies divergent rather than convergent developments (Jørgensen & Aarkrog, 2008, p. 13).

This literature led me to question whether policy making was anticipated through top down, bottom up or peer influencing (side to side) mechanisms as inferred by Alexiadou et al. (2010). This has a bearing on the relationships between the member states and the EU and how far there was a shared purpose for VET, as discussed further in Chapter 8.

2.10 Conclusion

The above sections illustrate firstly the complexity of VET policy making in Europe and then the differing approaches within the four countries, showing why they were selected for comparison. The theoretical approaches of convergence and divergence in terms of policy

making as related to Europeanisation, Europeification or exceptionalism have been considered against the identified approaches. In some instances, this has led to an outline of the apparent purpose of VET as perceived by the country making its own VET policy which was further discussed against the findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and within the conclusions in Chapter 8.

In particular, at EU level, the questions drawn out from the literature crystallise around the creation of EU VET policy (whether or not this is through a governance space or a VET space or a policy space, section 2.7) and what that might suggest about the purposes of VET from an EU perspective. Additionally, what policy change processes were involved in the transmission or attempted transmission into national VET policies? Did Europeanisation exist? It has been suggested that Finland's VET policy has been influenced by European ideas although Denmark has been more sceptical of European ideas and, in fact, influenced the European ideas. Scotland, on the other hand, has been perceived to draw ideas from Nordic countries in particular, and to diverge, in policy terms, from other parts of the UK, particularly England. England has pursued an exceptionalist approach that has resisted the transmission of European ideas into VET and has also rejected influencing Europe about VET. In recent years, this has hardly been surprising. These considerations have been drawn together into the three Research questions initially stated in Chapter 1 and repeated here for ease of reference.

1. How has the evolving relationship between national VET policy making and EU VET policy making shaped discourse about the purpose of VET?
2. To what extent and for what reasons have VET policies in the four countries converged or diverged in the period between 2011 and 2019?
3. In what aspects has the Lisbon strategy influenced national VET policy in Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland in the period between 2000 and 2019?

3. Critical Realism as a theoretical framework

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for my research. Much educational research draws on the work of leading theorists such as Bourdieu and Foucault. For example, educational policy research has drawn from Bourdieu in exploring ideas of cultural capital and of space (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008, 2015) and from Foucault in terms of discourse, power and governmentality (Ball, 2017, 2018). There are, indeed, aspects of spatial relationships and governmentality within my study but I chose, through making use of critical realism, a backdrop of wider social theories at the macro level, which draw in part on functionalism and its perspective on evolutionary processes as well as the sense of dynamic reform represented by conflict theory. As policy making can be considered as a set of social processes, it was important to utilise a framework that supported the development of an explanation of changes to social processes. A critical realism perspective enables an exploration of the transmission and reproduction elements of social processes put forward in these theories combined with the transformation processes anticipated by social justice theories. Consequently, I based my research on the critical realism philosophy of Bhaskar, as informed by Archer (section 3.3) and use this framework to draw in education policy change theories of transmission, reproduction and transformation. (Chapter 1).

3.1 Introduction

I chose a critical realism framework for my study of VET policy because the principles of critical realism prompted, among other things, a careful unpicking of policy making background, the construction of trajectories of policy making and a pragmatic yet critical assessment of policy making. I perceived these to be complementary to my research study in which I have presented the background to EU and national VET policy making (Chapter 2), have developed VET policy making trajectories (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) and critiqued EU and national VET policymaking during discussion of my research questions (Chapter 8).

Critical realism has been described as a philosophical framework (Archer, Sharp, Stones, & Woodiwiss, 1999; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019) or a meta theory (Scott, 2005), as a paradigm (Ryan, 2019) and even as a methodology (Barron, 2013). The difference between philosophical frameworks and meta theories may be one of semantics, but I suggest that critical realism may represent both, depending on how it is deployed. There are many theories arising from critical realism, key examples being Archer's morphogenetic approach (Archer, 2017c) and Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), which would justify a description of critical realism as an overarching or meta theory. However, the original construction of critical realism, as proposed and developed by Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 2015; Hawke, 2017) was from a set of philosophical premises rather than as a theory. I concede that, although critical realism is a philosophical framework, it may also be viewed as a paradigm although other paradigms may overlap or nest within it (for example, constructionism and post structuralism (Bacchi, 2009). However, from my reading (section 4.2) there is not sufficient consensus about the nature of paradigms, let alone what does or does not constitute a paradigm to identify critical realism in this way. I have supported my view by considering critical realism from a philosophical perspective and defining how it has shaped this study of VET policy making. After I considered known methodologies and chose a comparative case study (section 4.4), I challenged the perspective that critical realism can solely be described as a methodology. This was because, in my opinion, critical realism is more effective when it is applied as an underpinning philosophical framework, rather than as a mere means of selection of research methods and designs to draw out knowledge through research. To use it only in this way risks omitting the ontological and epistemological depths that critical realism brings to research design. This view was foregrounded by Fletcher (2017) in her critique of the lack of connection between critical realism's ontology and epistemology and research findings in my papers purporting to use critical realism. As this was the case, I approached studies that claimed to use a critical realism methodology, without integration of its deeper backdrop (for example, Barron (2013), with a degree of scepticism, because I believed that the authors had missed opportunities offered by in depth analysis.

As a result of the above considerations, I have designed and created this research study within a critical realism framework, in other words, considering critical realism as a philosophy. At the beginning of my studies, when I was exploring theoretical options, I was attracted to critical realism because I perceived it to occupy a space between the natural and the social sciences. As a former natural scientist, now turning to social science, this offered a good starting point for me. I also found it intellectually interesting because of its complexity and because of the thought processes laid out during its theoretical evolution. As I progressed in my studies, a critical realism framework also offered a sophisticated framework with which to study complexity and, in particular, the complexity of multi-layer policy analysis. The layers of realism envisaged by Bhaskar (section 3.2) worked in three ways within the study. In the first instance, there were structural layers of policy making being analysed (EU, sub-EU and national) leading to a recognition that elements of all layers may be traced into any single VET policy, which was conceptually revealing. Secondly, within any act of policy making itself, there are many levels of agential influence, which are conceptually recognised within a critical realism framework, which posits that there are depths of realism which can be explored beyond a surface approach. Finally, aspects of the critical realism approach have been adopted in longitudinal models of education systems development, especially by Archer (1979, 2017c) and this wider application provided inspiration for developing my thinking about VET policy making.

3.2 Critical realism theory – background and philosophy

Critical realism, as originally proposed by Bhaskar (2015), was described as an explanatory theory about the philosophy of social science in interpretations of Bhaskar's work by both Collier (1994) and Scott (2010). This theory was conceived by Bhaskar (Hawke, 2017), when considering natural sciences research in relation to research about the human world, and, as such, has emerged to bridge a space between other conflicting philosophical approaches. Critical realism theory is not readily located within a positivist framework, where the study of facts leads to the development of verifiable knowledge, with little acknowledgement of other knowledge contexts, such as tacit knowledge (Pring, 2015), nor does it fit within constructivist realms where knowledge only exists in the current (human) context, in the

mind of the researcher, or the reader (Pring, 2015, pp. 132-134). Since it may be perceived as occupying a middle ground, an argument was advanced that it might be located within an interpretivist paradigm (Waring, 2012), because in addition to descriptions or explorations of knowledge about phenomena, explanations about these phenomena are sought. However, this may be too tidy a solution in the paradigm debate (section 4.2) and instead, I have chosen to place critical realism as external to paradigms.

Although Bhaskar (2015) and Collier (1994) recognised two elements within basic critical realism (transcendental realism and critical naturalism), many writers have chosen to refer simply to critical realism (Archer, 2017d; Brock, Carrigan, & Scambler, 2017; Gerrits & Verweij, 2013; Hawke, 2017; Scott, 2005) to describe the theory. I chose to employ a basic critical realism framework that incorporates both of these elements, rather than explore the subsequent developments of this theory (for example, dialectical critical realism and metaReality). The reason for this is because dialectical critical realism (Hawke, 2017) links critical realism very strongly with Marxism and although there has been a strong relationship between the philosophy and Marxist traditions from the outset (as discussed by Bhaskar and Callinicos (2003)), my research is designed to span two elements of social theory as discussed in the introduction to this chapter (one of which is Marxist in origin and one of which is not), rather than identify closely with one or the other. Bhaskar's later work on metaReality (Hawke, 2017), in delving more deeply into spirituality through discussion and reinterpretation, moved away from the clarity of the original ideas (Collier, 1994; Scott, 2010), and, in my opinion, confused, rather than enhanced, the essence of the critical realism philosophical framework.

In both transcendental realism and critical naturalism, blended into critical realism, Bhaskar (2015) outlined three elements. The first was an acceptance of realism at an ontological level (social realist ontology) (Archer, 2017d). This means that social objects or structures (Archer, 2000; Giddens & Hutton, 2000) (such as society, policies, organisations) exist whether or not an individual knows that they do (Edgley, Stickley, Timmons, & Meal, 2014). Realism also occurs through a series of domains, from the empirical (expressed through

experimental and human observation) through to the actual (in which events and activities occur whether or not they are observed) to the real (in which structures and generative mechanisms have inbuilt powers and properties that may or may not cause changes to the actual domain, whether or not these powers are used). Thus, social structures in the real domain are viewed as causal mechanisms that exist in relation alongside human activities (agency) although their powers may not always be exercised. When these powers are exercised, they are mediated through human activities although they are independent of any individual's activity (Archer, 2000, 2017d; Bhaskar, 2015; Brock et al., 2017; Collier, 1994; Fletcher, 2017). In other words, working by themselves, an individual cannot shape society. However, as collective agents, human activities may release latent powers from social structures that then lead to changes to those structures. Clearly this may occur on different scales and over different timescales. For example, a small group such as a college senior management team is likely to have a significant impact upon the policy structures within a college but may have less impact on national VET policy structures.

In searching for a metaphor to help me to distinguish between these levels of realism, in order to draw parallels between this concept of stratified structures and the different levels within society at which policies can have an influence, I have used oceans as an illustration (section 4.7). Waves on the ocean are created by wind, are visible and as such, can represent the empirical layer. Beneath the surface are currents and tides, influenced by factors such as water temperature and the moon, not always visible but sometimes measurable, and part of the oceanic system, representing the actual layer. The real layer is represented by the whole oceanic ecosystem, including the water cycle (from individual molecules of H₂O to evaporation, condensation, freezing and thawing), currents, tides and waves, with a power that is not always apparent. It is unlikely that we will ever understand the full complexity of the oceanic system because of its immense fluidity. Similarly, we can only gain a partial understanding of the societal context in which VET policy is made when seeking to find out how VET policies interact with society, in particular when unintended consequences of policy formation arise. This metaphor subsequently led to my conceptualisation of the policy gyre (section 4.7) as a way of explaining the complexity of VET policy making.

In summary, I decided that the stratified view of realism, the first element of critical realism, was suitable for comparative policy research for two key reasons. One was that it enabled explanations of complex situations such as policy making because it prompted attempts to unravel complexity (Gerrits & Verweij, 2013). The second was because of the multi layered nature of policy processes, for example, formulation, implementation and accountability (Rist, 2000), which occur at different spatial and time dimensions within the different layers of society.

Social structures are viewed as open systems (unlike the closed systems of laboratory conditions from which much scientific research has originated) and therefore will change over time as a result of actions (through agency). This belief gave rise to Bhaskar's second element (epistemological relativity) (Scott, 2010). It means that knowledge can change and develop over time as agents interact with the structures. Knowledge is fallible over time (or even within a given time period as it is acknowledged that we can never be entirely certain that something is correct). However, Al-Amoudi and Willmott (2011) contended in their evaluation of several empirical critical realism studies that fallibilism of knowledge does not represent the full extent of epistemological relativism. This evaluation indicated that insufficient emphasis was placed on this element of critical realism, which had led, they claimed, to the omission of the principle that there is 'no unmediated access to reality' (p. 34). They advocated that researchers should reflect on the categorisations selected for data analysis as well as maintaining an awareness that knowledge is historically contingent and transient.

I drew parallels between this conceptualisation of knowledge and that of the Mode 2 knowledge of Gibbons et al. (1994, p. 7) and also the knowledge spiral of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, p. 8), where tacit knowledge becomes explicit and then may subsequently transform into revised tacit knowledge. Both these conceptualisations allow for the unknown that may become known and then unknown again. Knowledge is situated in structures and in agents and in the complex relationships between them; it may be

ephemeral or it may be more permanent. This view of knowledge contrasts with a positivist paradigm that works within closed systems, where strict controls over inputs and outputs will achieve a desired outcome, for example Mode 1 knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994, pp. 2-3), which becomes entrenched as fact. This distinction was helpful to my study because I found that assumptions being made about VET policy making in the EU space were not always borne out by the actual policy making that occurred nationally and this knowledge was not only ephemeral over time but also across space (Chapter 8), thus desired policy outcomes were not always predictable. As an example, EU policy recommendations about apprenticeships did not take into account the very different types of knowledge held within the concept of apprenticeships in each country within the study (Chapter 6) and thus the changes (or lack of changes in the English case) to the systems were not as might have been expected.

Bhaskar's third element of critical realism was 'judgemental rationality'. This expanded the critical aspect of the term 'critical realism' and recognised that the comparison of theories and judgements about these comparisons should ideally be made on the basis of pragmatism, intelligibility or sufficiency of evidence (Scott, 2010). Bhaskar, in a number of lectures recorded by Hawke (2017), viewed this rationality as the ability to distinguish one set of beliefs or theories over another in a particular context, despite both knowledge and language being fallible. In applying judgemental rationality, critical realists believe that society or systems (structures) can be improved and that critique of existing structures will help to bring about that improvement. However, it is fair to say that this aspect of critical realism is the least well-developed part of the philosophy and Bhaskar's main commentators (for example, Collier (1994); Scott (2010)), did not explore this deeply. Nor did other researchers who attempted explanations of critical realism. Al-Amoudi and Willmott (2011) viewed judgemental rationality as contingent upon the acceptance of differing dimensions of ontology and epistemology, as outlined above. This then enables a rational choice between theories that may otherwise appear to have no common standard of measurement (incommensurable theories). This view coincides with the preservation of a distinction between structure and agency (below) advocated by Archer as analytical dualism (Archer et al., 1999). My study drew on the relationships between structure and agency when I

developed the policy gyre concept (section 4.7) and also when I evaluated the relationships between the EU, sub-EU and national spaces in terms of the influences on VET policy being made (Research question 1).

On the other hand, Curtis (2014), in critiquing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (Chapter 4) in terms of Foucauldian thinking, drew out the suggestion that it had been proposed that judgemental rationality would be exercised by a wider community of experts to select particular explanations and noted this adoption of a transcendental rather than an immanent approach, which might restrict the transformative effects that would emerge from within the system. The critique of this aspect of the model is discussed below in section 3.8, where interrogation of the role of the researcher in defining forms of knowledge then supports the approach outlined for the exercise of judgemental rationality (Curtis, 2014). After detailed analysis of my findings about VET policy making discourses (Chapters 5 and 6), I put forward possible explanations about VET policy making, whilst acknowledging that there may be other and better explanations, both now and in the future.

3.3 Structure, culture and agency and social theory

Since it was developed, critical realism has spawned many theories and models, often drawing on broader social theories, especially those around the relationships between structure and agency. This section expands on the linkage made between critical realism and social theories relating to structure and agency and describes two key models that have been developed, firstly by Bhaskar and then by Archer.

In brief, structure is viewed as the mechanisms that constitute society, from social institutions such as colleges, universities and schools to governments and corporations. Agents are the individuals (or groups of individuals such as communities) that operate within social structures and through their interactions create societal stasis or change. I

have discussed the positioning of policies in relation to structure/agency theory in Chapter 1.

Bhaskar’s transformational model of the society/individual connection (TMSA) (Bhaskar, 2015; Collier, 1994) illustrated his envisaged relationship between structures (society) and agents (individuals).

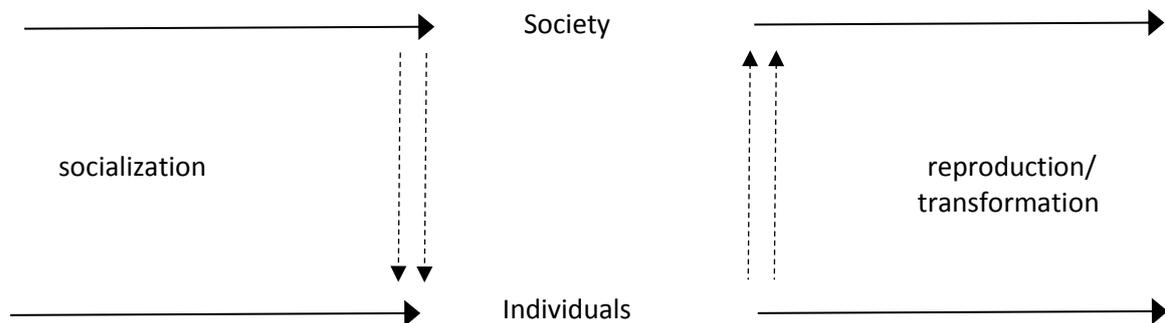


Figure 3-1 The Transformational Model of the Society/Person Connection

(Source: Bhaskar, 2015, p. 36)

This was modified by Archer (Archer, 2017c) who developed an explanatory framework that complemented critical realism, arising from early work with Bourdieu in which she compared national educational systems in Denmark, France, Russia and England (Archer, 1979). From that study she developed and refined a ‘morphogenetic approach’ to explain changes in societal structures, recognising both agential and cultural influences. This complemented Bhaskar’s TMSA by proposing a relationship between time and structural changes, whilst highlighting a cyclical nature of such societal changes.

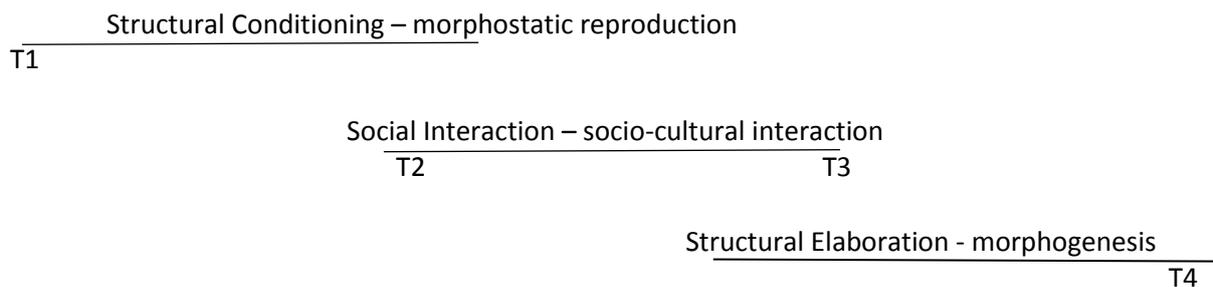


Figure 3-2 The basic morphogenetic approach

(Source: Brock, et al, 2017, p. 4)

As discussed in section 3.2, both of these models incorporated epistemological relativity by recognising that not only is knowledge fallible but that knowledge (as held within societal structures and by agents) changes over time. In other words: ‘...yesterday’s explanation becomes what is to be explained’ (Collier, 1994).

Subsequently, Archer revisited the analytical dualism of structure and agency to embed a further dimension, that of culture, particularly in relation to structure. Archer acknowledged the ‘vagueness’ of the term culture (Archer, 2017a), but was clear that it was more than a ‘community of shared meanings’. She identified a distinction between cultural systemic integration and socio-cultural integration, favouring the latter in her morphogenetic theory. This is relevant for VET policy making because different assumptions about top down change (as might arise from cultural systemic integration) were visible within EU VET policy making (Chapter 8). In a recent paper (Archer, 2019a), she observed that conditions for cultural stability (reproduction) or change (transformation) were akin to the structural changes indicated within the original morphogenesis model. She then recognised the possibility of a double or even triple morphogenetic sequence as discussed further in section 4.7. The evolution of Archer’s model indicates the dynamic nature of critical realism thinking and the incorporation of culture, an explicit recognition that values form part of the interplay between structure and agency, which underpins the approach taken in the political discourse analysis in Chapter 5.

A further enhancement to the concept of agency was made by Karlsson (2019). His exploration of worker collectivity in a Nordic pulp and paper mill led to the identification of additional groups of agents, neither corporate (those who have stated aims and are organising structural changes) nor primary agents (those who live within the structures but are not collectively organised) but latent agents, who have either previously had stated aims and purposes but have now withdrawn from structural activity or informal corporate agents

who effect structural change without necessarily having stated aims. In relation to policy making models, these additional classifications assisted in the development of explanations about why policy making did not always result in expected change as originally planned by the corporate agents (Chapter 8).

As an example of the morphogenetic approach, I considered the development of Danish VET qualifications. Structural conditions for changes in Danish qualifications (such as the introduction of a new, hybrid vocational programme, the EUX) were present and there was European encouragement to reduce youth unemployment and to promote lifelong learning (European Council, 2000). The Danish government had identified a gap between vocational courses, employability and academic progression; and Danish VET institutions were in place to put newly developed programmes into place (Jørgensen, 2015). After social interactions between employers, trade unions, educators and policy makers (involving transformation rather than reproduction), new laws (structures) were enacted that redesigned the curriculum and promoted the EUX. This represented a process of structural elaboration. However, the application of Archer's morphogenetic approach identified that Danish vocational qualifications are also now within the structural conditioning phase of the next morphogenetic cycle and so it is likely that future versions of the EUX will be shaped by both original conditions and subsequent interactions with policy making agents into yet another structural form, that may not operate as originally envisaged and which may then develop further after formal review (Jørgensen, 2015). Delineating these processes contributed to my understanding of VET policy convergence and divergence between the four countries (Chapter 6 – Research question 2) and the influence of the Lisbon strategy on national VET policy in Denmark (Chapter 7 – Research question 3).

The critical realism framework with the related models outlined above provided me with a balanced position between the perceived polarities of positivism and constructivism (Chapter 4). Researching the messy and complex problems of vocational education and training (VET) policies in relation to social justice (one of the possible underpinning rationales for VET policies) required a critical framework, in order to look at not only how

current policy impacts occurred but also what may be improved in the setting of future policies in VET (Gerrits & Verweij, 2013). Critical realism allows for an acceptance that structures (and agents) change and therefore what was known previously may be different now and also different in the future, which is important in the VET policy context, particularly in England in the face of increasing policy exceptionalism (Keep, 2017) and fragmentation (Lingard, 2019). It does not focus on a particular aspect of social justice, for example, inequalities relating to gender, class or race, but allows for criticism of the whole. In undertaking research from a social justice viewpoint, criticality is important. As Popper (quoted in Pring (2015, p. 141)) says 'there cannot be growth of society without criticism'. This is relevant to my study because I have put forward a view that VET policies form part of wider social policies rather than being more narrowly defined as economic policy (Chapter 8).

3.4 Critical realism and policy theory

In Chapters 1 and 2, I reviewed relevant literature related to education policy making and related this to the EU and national VET policy making systems. From this review and the research questions that I derived (Chapter 1), I distilled the principal policy making theories that I have considered within a critical realism framework. I have described these as policy change theories as they seek to describe, interpret and explain comparative changes in policies over time. These theories were policy borrowing and learning (Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012); policy convergence and divergence (Aarkrog & Jørgensen, 2008; Ball, 2017; Brøgger, 2018; Raffe, 2005) and the European policy harmonisation variants of Europeanisation and Europeification: (Alexiadou & Lange, 2014; Antunes, 2016); policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) and policy diffusion (Carney, 2012; Jakobi, 2012). The theoretical relationship that I have constructed between these and critical realism is set out in the table below (Table 3-1).

Table 3-1 Critical realism elements mapped to policy theories

Critical realism element	Relationship to policy change theory
Ontological – empirical observation of policy making	Theories considered: Convergence & divergence, Europeanisation & Europeification
Ontological – actual policy making	Theories considered: Borrowing and learning
Ontological – real policy making (causal mechanisms)	Theories considered: Drift and diffusion
Epistemological	All policy theories provide partial explanations of policy making and understanding more about them increases knowledge about policy making, whilst recognising that this knowledge will change as time elapses
Judgemental	The relative claims made to explain policy making by these theories are set alongside each other in the exercising of judgemental rationality

This may be further explored through the morphogenetic approach by identifying the conditions for structural conditioning (reproduction) or structural elaboration (transformation) dependent on the predominance or otherwise of the socio-cultural interactions of VET policy making, as outlined in the example of Danish VET qualifications (section 3.3). This aided me to draw out the relationships between policy change theories (Chapter 1) and my findings within the different critical realism domains. In this instance, the ‘real’ policy making may have occurred through policy drift and diffusion rather than the apparent mechanisms of convergence or divergence. Using this theorisation also enabled me to evaluate the relationship between VET policies and the discourse about the purpose of VET, which was on a deeper ontological level than the empirical observations about Europeanisation and Europeification. This is considered further in Chapter 8.

3.5 Critical realism and research methodology

The selection of a research methodology as part of my research design is outlined in Chapter 4. Within this section I have summarised the application of critical realism to a selection of

relevant research methodologies based on my review of the literature in order to demonstrate its application to empirical research and thus to illustrate some of the opportunities presented by this framework. This summary helped to develop my selection of methodologies.

Archer et al. (1999) noted that critical realism provided a framework for practical social analysis, following its initial 'under-labouring' of social theory and discussed the methodological pluralism that they recognised as arising from this development. This was evident from reviewing the methodologies now associated with critical realism, ranging from a critical realism synthesis (Brannan, Fleetwood, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2016) to critical realism ethnography (Barron, 2013), and even critical realism action research (Ryan, 2019). In these three particular cases the first was a theorisation that had not yet been applied, the second was admitted by the author to be an unsuccessful application of critical realism and the third attempted to reduce critical realism to practical applications, with the risk that the full benefits of a critical realism approach were not realised. On the other hand, Bergene (2007) made a strong case for critical realism as a basis for comparative methodology and Dobson (2001) and Steinmetz (2004) provided successful defences of critical realism in case study research; Steinmetz, in particular, acknowledging that critical realism perspectives supported both comparative cases and small numbers of cases because of the depth realism approach that enabled comparisons both between empirical events and underlying causal mechanisms.

Other researchers chose to provide critiques using critical realism, in order to illustrate its potential (Clegg, 2005) or made cases for a literature based critical realism review (Edgley et al., 2014). Gerrits and Verweij (2013) linked critical realism as a framework for complexity with qualitative comparative analysis, recognising that its framework (realist ontology, epistemological relativity and judgemental rationality) suited complex situations where variables can neither be controlled nor viewed as completely subjective. Critical realism's suitability for methodologies supporting explanations of complex phenomena was also noted by Dobson (2001). In short, most qualitative methodologies have been linked with

critical realism and some researchers even argued that some quantitative studies may be carried out within this framework. However, this is most likely to reflect a mixed methods approach as it is unlikely that a large survey would be designed with sufficient nuance to satisfactorily address the question why? in a way that would either reveal underlying causal mechanisms or serve to develop existing theory.

It became apparent from this brief review that critical realism aligns well where theory is drawn into empirical findings to provide explanations of complexity that go below the surface and to further advance that theory as a result, without, of course, fixing it immutably in amber. O'Mahoney et al. (2016) illustrated this with a sophisticated deployment of actor network theory within a critical realism framework in the field of sea turtle conservation. Although this is some way removed from VET policy making it demonstrates a further point, namely that critical realism based studies have been carried out in fields as diverse as health and social care, marketing, management and organisation studies and ecology. However, this is less the case in education and particularly in VET (section 3.7) but I concluded that critical realism will significantly enhance my education policy research because it provides a multi layered framework to address complex issues of policy making relationships. Through this I demonstrated that critical realism is as applicable to educational research as it has been in other social sciences (Chapter 8).

3.6 Critical realism and research methods

I set out in this section a brief review of literature linking critical realism to research methods. This is included because it demonstrates empirical applications of critical realism as a complement to the earlier sections that have outlined its theoretical benefits and also sets the scene for the selection of research methods within the research design (section 4.5). In reviewing the literature, I became aware of occasions where a critical realism framework did not align with the selected research methods and made brief observations about this, to ensure that this did not happen in my research design.

As with research methodologies, critical realism frameworks have been associated with a number of research methods. Al-Amoudi and Willmott (2011, p. 41) noted that the:

range of methods permitted by the meta-theoretical stance of CR (sic) is perhaps larger than commonly believed.

Although these methods are chiefly qualitative in origin, this does not have to be the case, as illustrated by Fletcher's mixed methods approach, combining secondary data analysis from census data with data from interviews. Fletcher (2017) provided an excellent exemplar of the application of critical realism frameworks to research, which clearly integrates philosophical underpinnings into methodology and through to method, guiding the reader through the entire process not only of data selection and collection but also of data analysis, including the coding approach (coding derived from theory rather than grounded in the data). She gave a practical and pragmatic example of both abduction and retroduction (section 4.5), considered by many writers to be key data analysis techniques within critical realism as they serve to provide explanations across the diverse layers of reality through systematic data analysis.

In a conflation of methodology and method, Livock and Richmond (2019) used a framework developed by Bhaskar for explanatory analysis. However, there was little detail about their methods of data selection and collection in the paper, so that what remained presented as a critique of historical events but with little information about the choice of these events rather than other events. The researchers' position on knowledge was not clear and their findings inconclusive from a critical realism perspective. This example demonstrated the dangers of omitting research design from the study.

Faure Walker (2019) engaged in critical discourse analysis, a technique rooted in critical realism (section 4.5), of documents relating to the Prevent Strategy in East London and provided a critique of this method, as did Curtis (2014). Curtis's objections to critical discourse analysis (CDA) referred to his views on Foucault's work on discourse and where

discourse as agency is positioned within social theories, in other words, this was critique from a theoretical standpoint, rather than a practical one. Faure Walker, on the other hand, was concerned with the mechanisms of CDA from a semiotic perspective. The extent of critique on CDA and the different variants that have been developed from the backdrop of critical realism provided valuable insight into how researchers approached the relationship between method and theoretical framework (section 4.5).

Herepath (2014) used documentary analysis, meeting observations and semi structured interviews within her case study of strategy in practice in the Welsh NHS. I compared this successful approach with that of Barron (2013), who used mixed methods unsuccessfully within a critical realism framework and provided a self-critical analysis of his approach and the place of critical realism in his study. Herepath, by contrast had made an appropriate location of theory (structure and agency) within her study, and this guided me to ensure that there was clarity about the theories I advanced. Fletcher (2017), also made this point, when she advocated that clarity of theory, rather than developing theory from the ground, was more aligned to the philosophy of critical realism.

From this brief review, I confirmed that a variety of methods were indeed appropriate to consider within my critical realism framework and that it was, however, important to recognise both theoretical and practical limitations (Chapter 8). Overall, I recognised the significance of discourse analysis based on critical realism in addressing my research questions because of the multi layered approach within the questions. The rationale for the selection of methods within my research design is outlined in section 4.5.

3.7 Critical realism and educational research

As already recognised, VET policy making is complex, especially when viewed through the perspective of the European Semester. This complexity led me to critical realism as a framework within which to conduct my research. However, there is little literature

specifically based on research on VET policy making (or indeed VET) from a critical realism perspective. There is rather more about broader educational issues, especially from critical realism theorists, rather than educational researchers. Archer's initial work was based on patterns of change in education systems (Archer, 1979) (section 3.3.) and she set the scene for further studies of this type, arguing more recently that 'society is a relationally contested organisation' and that state education systems developed 'because of the relational contestation between interested parties' (Archer, 2019a).

Many educational researchers appeared to have advocated a partial use of critical realism. For example, Scott (2010) and Robertson and Dale (2014) endorsed the use of critical realism ontologies in research about education because they argued that depth realism enabled a way of understanding the complexity of education's relationship with broader society. Moore (2013) related critical realism theory specifically to education through an epistemological perspective by taking part of the theory and redefining it as social realism. This led me to consider the way in which critical realism was being used in such studies so that some researchers were engaging with critical realism in theory recombination processes rather than viewing critical realism from a meta theoretical perspective. For example, Wheelahan (2007) combined Bernstein's views on knowledge structures as discourses with the epistemic argument from critical realism. In exploring competency-based training in Australian VET (the only example of critical realism being used to any significant degree in VET research that I was able to find), she produced findings about the positioning of class in relation to VET and academic knowledge. This might have been further enhanced by adding in critical realism ontology to support an explanation of causal mechanisms.

Other researchers made recommendations about critical realism as an appropriate framework within certain types of educational research, for example within education policy studies by Robertson and Dale (2014) and within evidence based practice studies (Clegg, 2005). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) considered new theoretical frameworks for global policy analysis, recommending developing this from a critical realism perspective. Cochran-Smith and Maria Villegas (2015) combined complexity theory and critical realism to build a platform for research on initial teacher education, commenting that the explanatory social

critique afforded by critical realism was very appropriate for the education of teachers. Leibowitz, Bozalek, van Schalkwyk, and Winberg (2014) determined that higher education teaching in South Africa was thought likely to benefit from an understanding of the contexts of the higher education institutions when informing national policy. In other words, socio-cultural integration should be recognised as part of structural change processes.

There was less empirical education policy research, although De Souza (2017) outlined the role that critical realism can occupy within studies of education policy complexity. De Souza described a body of critical realism research based on changes to the Singapore education system. This included reviews of the influence of external researchers from both North America and Australia as well as an assessment of the importance of historical context and demonstrated the value of critical realism in studying policy influences and historical contexts. Two recent studies, Skinningsrud (2019) and Restad (2019) have both critiqued the Norwegian education system, using a critical realism framework. Skinningsrud began with Archer's theory of centralised and decentralised education systems to further explain the complexity of the Norwegian system whereas Restad reconciled two educational concepts to develop a further theory for learning. In both cases, critical realism provided the framework from which to develop explanatory critique and recontextualise theory. Despite an absence of much previous research engaging critical realism with VET policy making, there was sufficient precedent within the literature on education policy that a design incorporating critical realism would support the type of research questions I asked (Chapter 1).

3.8 Critiques of critical realism in theory and research practice

No philosophy is perfectly crafted or finished; evolution of thought is to be expected and critical realism is no exception to this. The nature of critical realism would suggest that one should maintain a sceptical approach to claims about it. Accordingly, in my review of critical realism, I considered critiques as well as accounts of its benefits. This had the effect of

strengthening my understanding of it as well as becoming more aware of nebulous areas in the argumentation.

These critiques of critical realism have either been based on its applicability as a philosophy and/or theory or on its application within research. From the philosophical/theoretical perspective, in a debate published in 2003, Bhaskar and Callinicos (2003) presented a critique at the theoretical level of critical realism, although this focussed on the spiritual aspects of critical realism as presented in Bhaskar's later works (Hawke, 2017). There was, however, broad acceptance of the main concepts of critical realism: namely, the complex and stratified nature of reality, the appearance of powers within structures being dependent on agents' activities and the diverse interplay between structural powers and agents in open systems (Bhaskar & Callinicos, 2003), despite the more esoteric spiritual points. I concurred with the critique of the later developments of critical realism and consequently selected an earlier theorisation, based on transcendental realism and critical naturalism as the basis of my research design because it had more pragmatic roots against which I wanted to set my findings because they drew from both intangible knowledge production through VET policy making and interpretations from the tangibility of VET policy texts.

Archer (2017b) observed that critical realism, whilst appropriately distinguishing between structure and agency, tended to favour structure over agency so that the human context is not fully explored. I have countered this by incorporating Archer's morphogenetic approach into my study because this theory provides distinction between structure, agency and culture (Archer, 2017a). This configuration then supported research about policy making from different perspectives, not just that of the top down, so that the influence of existing structural mechanisms on policy making could be interpreted and explained alongside other influences from deeper agential and cultural mechanisms.

Bhaskar himself responded to critics of critical realism theory in a postscript to 'The Possibility of Naturalism' dated 1989 (Bhaskar, 2015). According to Bhaskar, his critics appeared to have objected to his descriptions of natural sciences although he consistently claimed that his theories are transient, in keeping with epistemological relativism. He felt that there was also a general objection to studies of 'society, social structure, human needs, ideology and emancipation' (Bhaskar, 2015, p. 172), although since 1989 there have been many more such studies.

Critiques about critical realism's application within research were divided between general observations and self-critique arising from a research study. As an example of the former, A. Brown (2013) observed that critical realism theories were unsuitable for observations about an entire system, such as capitalism, because they identified parts of a system in isolation, rather than looking at the whole. This seems, therefore, to be a partial critique, because he did not say that it is unsuitable in cases that are not system wide. Additionally, the extension of critical realism by Archer's morphogenetic approach (section 3.3) provides a convincing argument for the application of critical realism theory to open systems such as education systems and its role in explaining their contexts and advancing knowledge about them without necessarily prescribing a set of outcomes. Indeed, in my study of European and national VET policies, VET policy was identified as forming part of several wider systems, (including education, economic and, indeed, political systems including capitalism), which accorded with both A. Brown's and Archer's viewpoints. It is generally accepted that critical realism acknowledges both open systems and the existence of partial knowledge (Collier, 1994) and thus it may be that it is not possible to derive definitive solutions to every question raised but on the other hand this positivist claim has never been advocated for it. The epistemological relativity aspect alone refutes this argument (Bhaskar, 2015).

Continuing with this line of critique, Curtis (2014) presented a critique of transcendentalism positioned within N. Fairclough (2015)'s critical discourse analysis, as applied to organisational studies, and made an adverse comparison with Foucault's work on immanence. He questioned whether N. Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis

resulted in a lack of distinction between the organisational analyst and agents within the organisation, resulting in the 'reproduction of a hierarchy of discursive practice' that favoured the norm over a critique of the norm. As with other comparisons of critical realism theorisation and Foucauldian theory (for example, Hardy (2019), refuted by Archer (2019b)), it was an example of the importance of considering different perspectives without necessarily being persuaded by the argument.

An additional, research-based critique was presented by Faure Walker (2019). This was also a critique of critical discourse analysis (CDA), but, unlike the work of Curtis, was based on empirical research. Based on documentary research about the UK Prevent Strategy, Faure Walker observed that the concept of time was not recognised in critical discourse analysis, leading to a consideration of structure and event rather than structure and agency. However, both Bhaskar in his TMSA (section 3.3) and Archer in her morphogenetic approach (section 3.3) did, in fact, consider time. This appeared to be a potential dissonance between philosophy and research method, which was overcome by Faure Walker's adaptation of the CDA method so that relationships between discourses over time became apparent. This consideration was important to my study, in particular to the analysis relating to the second research question (Chapter 6).

Finally, in evaluating her study of strategy as practice in the Welsh NHS, Herepath (2014) observed that Archer's approach (and more widely that of critical realism) does not allow for agents' irrationality and inconsistency. The impact of individuals acting in this way within policy making may be less significant than collective actions but, as I discussed further in Chapter 5, there were greater possibilities for an individual to have influence over EU or national VET policy making than might have been expected.

Notwithstanding these critiques, there was nothing that led me to reconsider my decision to choose critical realism as my research framework, although these different perspectives were valuable both when designing my study (Chapter 4) and when considering its

limitations (Chapter 8). On balance, I found that the critical realism framework provided structure for my thinking, in particular during the development of the policy gyre (section 4.7).

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion:

It is more coherent to represent CR (sic) as “one of the possibilities for discursively constructing the real” (Laclau 2002 in Bhaskar 2002:84). (Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011, p. 39).

However, it seemed more fitting, after a discussion about critical realism, to return to its originator. Bhaskar commented:

Yet a perusal of say, the debates in Britain around Thatcherism and the Welfare State or the nature of socialism (or even, say, the state of higher education) reveal that they revolve around precisely such issues and take place at precisely this level of abstraction (which then feeds down into and informs the most mundane political actions and the most prosaic practices) (Bhaskar, 2015, p. 172).

This summarised for me the appropriateness of critical realism theory, which I considered as a philosophy, to my study of VET policy making. As I was studying the evolving relationships between national and EU VET policies from 2000-2019, both historical context and international influences on policy, particularly when reviewing the trajectories of VET purpose (Research questions 1 and 3), were integral parts of my research. This chapter has demonstrated how a critical realism perspective was influential in developing a theoretical framework for the study in order to support the development of clarity from complexity. The next chapter (Chapter 4) covers the research design within the parameters of a critical realism framework and outlines the process of the selection of the design within it.

4. Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the rationale for my chosen methodology and methods and describe how this has been woven into my research design. The rationale is followed by an outline conceptualisation of a gyre as a representation of policy making which has then been used to support the analysis of findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The chapter has been structured to demonstrate the route of the research design, underpinned by the philosophy of critical realism.

A study of policy making is, in itself, a study of complexity because policies are a human construct and may be described in social theory terms either as structures or as agents (Chapter 1). Considering policies as structures or agents therefore presented me with analytical options from a number of research approaches. These approaches ranged from a single, longitudinal, policy study that might extend beyond policy making into implementation and impact studies, through to comparative approaches that might compare policy making in different educational sectors or by geographies. As is clear from the research questions (Chapter 1), the study was framed as a comparative policy analysis in which policy making in four countries is compared with policy making in the European Union. These comparisons are not only made between different spaces and scales, as portrayed in Table 1-2, but also at different time periods between 2000 and 2019; in particular, there appeared to be a change in VET policy purpose between the periods pre- and post- the global financial recession of 2008-2009.

The critical realism philosophy that I have chosen as a theoretical framework enabled me to thread a pathway through the analytical options that both accommodates the complexity of studying policy making and also seeks to bring clarity to findings and conclusions. This choice of critical realism, described in more detail in Chapter 3, was aligned with comparative policy analysis because critical realism supports an analysis of layers of

meaning within statements of policy. The comparison was then deepened to become one of underlying purposes of VET as illustrated by different approaches to policy making. Such comparisons also enabled me to deepen my understanding of the relationships between the EU and some of its member states and between the UK and one of its devolved nations in the context of VET policy making. I was interested in the dynamics of VET policy making between the EU and some of its member states as a means of gaining a broader understanding of how the EU worked to make policy with its member states, particularly in an area over which it has no jurisdiction, as well as how those member states selected have responded to these processes when making policy and what these responses indicated about perceptions of the purposes of VET. Through the use of critical techniques, the analysis developed helped me to contribute to knowledge about transformational VET policy making.

A further factor that has affected the research design is my stance as a reflexive researcher. I have heard the term 'reflexivity' used in different ways and consequently have found several definitions of it. After establishing that reflexivity is different from self-reflection, although often linked to it, I found that a frequently used definition is that reflexivity is a process of identifying where one's self, as a researcher, interacts with the research that you are carrying out (Scott & Morrison, 2007). A broader and deeper discussion of reflexivity, at three levels, is provided by Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2006). Within critical realism, Archer produced a significant body of work on reflexivity, for example as published in Brock et al. (2017, p. 181). In particular, her three processes of 'internal conversation' may be broadly equated with the processes of Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2006) as follows:

1. reflexivity within learning (engagement in a cyclical process of re-configuring knowledge as new knowledge is acquired) – Archer's Discernment;
2. reflexivity within research design (recognition that actions are coloured by the interpretations put upon them and so any research process inevitably presents a

distorted view of the reality of a system because the process has had an effect on the system it is investigating) – Archer’s Deliberation; and

3. reflexivity within scholarship (acceptance that a researcher’s life experiences will inform the research process which is an active, non-neutral experience, likely to result in change) – Archer’s Dedication.

Finally, I considered whether I am an outsider or an insider (Angrosino, 2012), as part of the reflexive process. The reflexivity of scholarship (Archer’s Dedication) is particularly relevant to a position as an insider because I have held a number of roles in English FE and have taken part in the making and implementation of policy, firstly as a manager within a number of FE colleges and latterly as a governor of a large college group. This implementation of policy was also, on occasion, influenced by EU VET policy in the shape of European Structural Funding. At group level, I am still responsible, with fellow governors, for making policy for our colleges, for example on Covid -19 safe working and studying environments and on sustainability. Working in or in support of FE colleges in the north of England for over twenty years has shaped my views about equity of educational opportunity, although I undertook a traditional (and fortunate) education myself (northern grammar school, Russell Group university). The determination of staff within FE colleges to provide well-rounded educational and training opportunities for students in spite of contradictory policies, public apathy, unfair funding regimes and, in some cases, poor leadership, has influenced me profoundly. The concept of social justice (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2006) resonates across English FE despite the best efforts of government to frustrate it. I acknowledge that this has an influence on my thinking and that I am an insider within the English FE context although an outsider for some other aspects of this research (Angrosino, 2012).

Archer’s Discernment (reflexivity as learning) is a concept that can be applied as an outsider in terms of Scottish, Danish and Finnish VET policy making. My interest in Danish VET policy stems from my son’s recent emigration to Denmark and his experiences within the Danish education system. My interest in Finnish VET arose from my frequent visits to Finland and

my study of the Finnish language. The interest in Scottish VET has developed both from an earlier dissertation as well as a fascination with the anomaly of divergence between 'home nations' (Raffe et al., 1999) and the counterbalance to the extreme positions adopted by English VET policy makers. On balance, there are elements of both outsider and insider in my research approach, which is congruent with a critical realism philosophy because it adopts aspects of both outsider and insider. The insider stance has assisted me to develop a critical approach to VET policy making, particularly from a historical perspective, whereas the outsider stance has enabled me to challenge my assumptions about VET as I have learned about different national VET systems and different methods of policy making.

Reflexivity as research design (Archer's Deliberation) is incorporated throughout this chapter as I considered the selection of methodologies and methods that align the research study to critical realism, in which there is a recognition that knowledge is changed by actions and thus my research process has provided insight into some perspectives of EU and national VET policy making but, even with the benefit of the three ontological domains of critical realism, will never grasp the totality of it. I designed my research to consider this factor of knowledge-known-in-part and so I have built on existing knowledge as well as signposting where future knowledge might be developed.

4.2 Paradigms

My overarching philosophy demonstrates an alignment to a form of post positivist paradigm (Burgess, Sieminski, & Arthur, 2006). However, when reading further about paradigms, I found the views of Brookfield on theory helpful:

reading theory helps us name or rename aspects of our experience that elude or puzzle us (Brookfield, 2005, p. 5);

and:

By offering unfamiliar interpretations of familiar events, theory can jar us in a productive way and suggest other ways of working. (Brookfield, 2005, p. 6);

as I questioned which was the key concept that might signal my position within a paradigm, either critical or realism. Critical realism as a philosophy (Chapter 3) is seen as consistent with alignment to an interpretivist paradigm, as defined by Waring (2012), because of the expressed beliefs about the nature of reality. On the other hand, critical theory (which has been linked to critical realism, albeit from a linguistic viewpoint) was identified by other researchers as an educational research theory within an overall interpretivist paradigm (Silverman, 2006). Is critical realism therefore located in a separate paradigm or does it occupy a niche within a wider paradigm? For the purposes of this study, I drew a simple distinction between critical theory and critical realism by recognising that critical theory is concerned with questioning claims and assumptions and the scrutiny of perceptions (Scott & Morrison, 2007) to arrive at a transformative perspective, which is likely to be politicised in some way (for example critical feminism); it defines knowledge through a political lens and attaches specific values and ethics to that knowledge. Critical realism as a social theory, also seeks to bring about transformation of society through questioning and scrutiny but from an ontological viewpoint as well as an epistemological perspective. Critical realism is less prescriptive about knowledge, proposing different views of knowledge and recognising that it is subject to interpretation and to change. Both approaches recognise that a researcher is not neutral in the research they are undertaking, in other words, that complete objectivity is not a possibility. As frameworks, critical theory and critical realism thus have much in common but critical realism is derived from philosophical roots whereas critical theory has arisen as a theoretical perspective on research. This distinction was important because I was exploring the purpose of VET from a broad standpoint of policy making and the philosophical framework of critical realism enabled me to achieve both breadth and depth within my research design.

If a paradigm is expected to signal an approach to reality, critical realism spans both objectivist and subjectivist domains (Apple, 2018). Indeed, Bhaskar (2015) envisaged this when he developed this approach. The beauty of critical realism to me is that it offers a balance between scientific and social scientific thinking, in a way that I equated with Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994). As a scientist turned social scientist, this was personally appealing. As an approach to enabling the deepening of understanding through

layered perspectives, critical realism provided me with an appropriate framework for the policy analysis that I have undertaken.

To summarise my consideration of paradigms, my approach drew from both interpretivist and critical traditions. Saunders et al. (2019) distinguished radical structuralism from interpretivism, linking yet another new paradigm to critical realism, and defining it as an approach to achieving change through the analysis of structures. This definition was aligned with my understanding of critical realism purposes within which I located my research but, in continuing to seek for a perfect paradigm, I was searching for the impossible. I therefore turned to a best fit approach, in line with the pragmatism of critical realism. I operate within the bounds of objectivity, with regard to realism, as I believe there are a number of truths but that we may not know them all, so that they are not all solely socially constructed. I also contend that knowledge is changeable and is capable of reinterpretation and cannot readily be compartmentalised (Gibbons et al., 1994), and that this is certainly the case in the knowledge held within policies (Van Zanten, 2006). I also identified with the critical tradition of questioning and scrutiny, without adopting an overtly political stance (Scott & Morrison, 2007).

4.3 Research strategy

My research philosophy and paradigmatic position led me to design a qualitative research study. This was because I sought an explanation of meanings from the analysis of the data collected, rather than approaching the data with a preformed hypothesis. I sought to understand how and why VET policy has been made and to ascertain what these understandings then reveal about the purpose of VET, rather than to confirm prior views about VET policy making. I also studied naturally occurring data in the form of the documents in which VET policy is outlined, rather than generating data through survey or interview.

Other features of qualitative research facilitate the use of a smaller sample size than is usual with quantitative research. A quantitative approach would have changed the nature of the research; for example, a survey-based study might have looked at data about the impact of policies on policy recipients, or the number of policies made. Whilst studies of this type would have been of interest, they would not have provided answers to my research questions about VET policy making, nor about the purposes of VET implicit in policy making (Chapter 1).

Considering an alternative, interview-based approach to policy making research might have resulted in gathering policy maker's views about the policies that have been made. Hammersley (2008) described a position with which I identify: namely that social phenomena (policies) are 'the product of "people acting together"' and hence a policy research study might include seeking people's views through interview or survey to understand multiple perspectives. However, as a single researcher, my stance was, despite this interpretation, that it was possible to develop knowledge in the form of an understanding of policies for comparative purposes through the capture of VET policy, considered as a separate construct (section 4.1), in a document which constituted such a social phenomenon. The document was a product of the policy makers and additional interpretive layers between me and the document would not sharpen the critical focus on policy making that I sought to make.

A document, as a representation of policy, is open to interpretation by whoever reads it, in whatever capacity they are operating. There is a significant difference between a single researcher reading and analysing a number of policy documents in order to draw out meaning and the analysis that might be derived from a group of policy makers reminiscing about a policy making process. The research focus would be less on the policy itself and more about the policy makers' interaction with it. As policy making is a social process, it is likely that the intentions, negotiations and struggles of the various agents would be more to the fore than what was finally captured in a document (Papanastasiou, 2019a). Whilst this is, no doubt, a very fruitful research area, this was not the focus of my study.

As such, my approach meant that there was no intermediary (in the shape of survey participant or interviewee) between me as a researcher and the collective authorship of the policy makers as represented in the documents. Any interpretation of the data was mine and any bias (section 4.5) was also mine. This yielded a consistency of approach in terms of coding although I accepted that another individual coding the data may have derived different findings. In this sense, it was therefore non-neutral research, but this was not inconsistent with my chosen theoretical stance. To build confidence in my research, I developed a transparent research process, to foreground how I undertook the study and I incorporated reflexivity as theorised by Archer's Deliberation and Dedication (section 4.1).

My research was designed as qualitative in order to capture meanings and understandings from the policies and to reflect these in a critical way. This is not to say that a quantitative study of the comparative VET policies of the four countries would not be possible; in fact, the ideal study might be a longitudinal study blending both approaches (sadly, this is not feasible as a lone researcher, constrained by both time and funds). However, as a contribution to knowledge about VET policy, my approach is of use because it is independent of government and because it critically assesses VET policy making and the relationship between the underlying purpose of VET and how this is manifested in policy by policy makers.

In drawing together my research strategy, I also considered how others developed their research strategies. Whilst advocating a different aspect of education policy research, 'policy as practice', Vulliamy and Webb (2009) also discussed the appropriateness of comparative analysis for education policy research, highlighting the benefits of comparison between different systems' responses to the global pressures influencing education policy as well as the practical difficulties of making policy comparisons, for example, language barriers (in English terminology as well as between English and Finnish). Raffe et al. (1999) found that comparative research across the four home nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) was more complex than might first appear because the education systems were diverging and previous assumptions about the UK as a semi-homogenous

education system no longer held true. Understanding the historical, economic and social implications of this provided me with useful knowledge for international comparisons.

Other methodologies aligned to my research design were described by Luke and Hogan (2006), who supported a critical realist approach to educational policy research, outlining a longitudinal study blending qualitative and quantitative methods that has provided evidence to inform education policy in Singapore. Their conclusion has been that a multi-level, multi-disciplinary and longitudinal approach is the best way to approach the complexity of educational policy making. Whilst not on the scale of their study, my study does reflect a multi-level and longitudinal approach.

From a different perspective, Lingard et al. (2012) described an Australian example where a purely quantitative approach to policy making, 'policy as numbers', resulted in misrepresentations of knowledge about language needs. They made a strong case for policy research methodologies that constructed social meanings in support of the data to arrive at a more informed policy making position. I decided that comparative case study methodology within a critical realism framework was consistent with their suggested approach.

Taking the paradigms, educational policy research commentary and research and policy theories into consideration, I have designed the research as qualitative comparative policy analysis (Coffield et al., 2008) within a critical realism framework, using a comparative case study methodology, because of the scope of the study, as case studies offer a way of organising data structures to facilitate comparisons. This forms a multi-dimensional analysis (Ozga, 2000) in which parallels may be drawn between the layers of realism proposed within critical realism (Chapter 3) and the levels of policy making in the study.

As previously stated (section 4.1), the way in which the research questions are framed sets the ground for comparative policy analysis in a number of dimensions. The comparisons are

temporal, spatial/scalar and dynamic and the data from the analysis was compared in these different dimensions (Table 4-1). Although the term hierarchical was sometimes used as a descriptor for convenience within aspects of the scalar dimension because there are different governance levels of policy making in the study, I approached the scalar aspects of the study with an open mind and my intention was not to reinforce hierarchical perceptions (Papanastasiou, 2019b) if they proved to place restrictions on the analysis.

Table 4-1 Dimensions of analysis

Dimension	Unit of analysis
Temporal	Individual years from 2000 to 2019
Dynamic	Trajectories from 2000 to 2019
Spatial	Denmark, European Union, Finland, Scotland, United Kingdom (England)
Scalar	European Union governance, European VET ministers, National governance

The comparisons operated across VET policy making in the four geographic spaces which represent major cases (Danish, English, Finnish and Scottish VET policy) as well as the additional policy making spaces of the EU, EU VET ministers and the UK. Illustrative cases (Stake, 1995), for example apprenticeship policies, are nested within these major cases to facilitate comparison. The data for comparison was derived from the coding of official policy documents, using documentary analysis methods (McCulloch, 2004; Saarinen, 2008). The codes used for the analyses were derived from the documents themselves (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). This data was then analysed using three different methods of analysis, depending on the research question and the dimensions being compared (Table 4-2). These data analysis processes are explained further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Table 4-2 Data analysis by dimension and research question.

Data analysis method	Research question	Dimension	Findings chapter
Political discourse analysis	How has the evolving relationship between national VET policies and EU VET policy shaped discourse about the purpose of VET	Scalar	5
Critical discourse analysis	To what extent and for what reasons have VET policies in the four countries converged or diverged in the period between 2011 and 2019	Dynamic Spatial	6
Thematic analysis	In what aspects has the Lisbon strategy (and subsequent declarations) influenced national vocational education and training (VET) policy in Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland in the period between 2000 and 2019	Dynamic Temporal Spatial	7

In the next two sections I explore methodology and method in more detail.

4.4 Methodology

The research design incorporated a comparative case study methodology. The research questions that I asked were framed in an explanatory and evaluative manner which is consistent with both a case study methodology and a critical realism framework (Easton, 2010). In case studies, the data is naturally occurring, as are the documents obtained for this study. Stake (1995, p. 2) argued that a case was an ‘integrated system’ and that ‘processes fit the definition less well’, although Denscombe (2003) redefined this when he observed that case study research explores relationships and processes within phenomena. Whilst VET policy making might be considered a process, the VET policies themselves may be viewed as integrated systems, given the earlier contention that policies may be both structures and agents (Chapter 1). It was possible, therefore, for the purposes of defining each case, to draw boundaries around the cases studied (Denscombe, 2003). This is seen as a necessary starting point for comparison, although as discussed by Bergene (2007), the search for similarities and differences between and within cases and the theoretical framework in which they are studied may alter these boundaries as recontextualisation occurs.

The benefits of a comparative case study methodology in a critical realism framework have been discussed by Easton (2010); Steinmetz (2004) and Dobson (2001), among others. Although these writers presented different standpoints and operated within different disciplines, they all recognised that the explanatory aims of critical realism are congruent with a comparative case study methodology. My aim was therefore to develop an understanding of the purposes of VET as revealed by approaches to VET policy making by comparing different cases in terms of deeper structures and the policy theories that may link them (Steinmetz, 2004).

In selecting cases for study within a critical realism framework, Bergene (2007) made the point that the context of each case is important for comparison and that the selection is therefore unlikely to be random. She also observed that, within critical realism, theory is a resource rather than an obstacle and that the comparative process between cases may either involve theory in relation to the deeper levels of structure or may compare the cases in the light of a group of theories. In her view, either of these options necessitated both an external comparative analysis of the cases and an internal examination of each case. This process has been adopted in my use of illustrative case studies in Chapters 6 and 7.

Given these considerations, as I was seeking, through policy research, to develop a holistic view of VET policy making through comparison, comparative case study methodology was deemed appropriate. This methodology enabled the comparison of the different dimensions being explored in my development of an understanding of VET policy making in the EU and some of its member states. The cases for comparison were VET policy in the EU, three member states and one devolved nation. The selection of these cases was outlined in terms of a personal interest in section 4.1.

However, an underlying rationale for the choice of case had been the effect that Brexit might have on English VET policy. This led to a need to understand what had shaped EU VET policy; the Lisbon strategy being perceived as a key moment in this history (Chapter 2). In

order to understand EU VET policy, it was also necessary to study VET policy in some member states other than the UK and the two selected (Denmark and Finland) have different systemic attributes but were considered to be suitable (Denscombe, 2003) for reasons of contrast and for their established position within the EU. Similarly, the case of Scotland was also chosen as a contrast with England, to further understand VET policy making within the home nations (Chapter 2). However, as the study progressed, Brexit became an addendum, rather than a central part of the research because the time scale for the UK exit lengthened beyond the period of data collection (Chapter 8).

Although some researchers suggested that case studies involved multiple methods of data collection (Day Ashley, 2012), in this study I relied on documentary analysis as a single method of data collection but then deployed multiple methods of data analysis. The multiple methods of data collection may be more suitable for a single case study. As this was a comparative study within a critical realism framework, multiple levels of analysis including reinterpretation and recontextualisation were key to understanding meaning at different ontological levels. Other education policy researchers deploying a comparative case study methodology included Raffe (2011), who demonstrated a comparative case study approach to his 'science of cross-national policy learning' when reviewing the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, as part of a wider study of National Qualifications Frameworks. The distinction, however, is that Raffe was identifying policy lessons from other countries, rather than cross-national influences on policy making behaviour.

Whilst Vulliamy and Webb (2009) outlined cultural and linguistic differences in an English/Finnish study, which was of relevance to my study, their methodology as a cross national comparative policy ethnography illustrated another approach to policy research, although it was based on policy implementation and impact rather than policy making. It was a longitudinal study but on a larger scale as there were two teams involved, rather than a single researcher. There were thus standardisation issues between the teams, exacerbated by cultural differences, which I have not experienced. I did not agree with the viewpoint from others, noted by Vulliamy & Webb, that carrying out qualitative research

makes cross cultural comparative studies more difficult. As Vulliamy & Webb did, I framed this challenge as an opportunity for knowledge exchange, for looking at one's own policies from a different perspective; in short, for policy learning.

4.5 Methods

Methods can broadly be categorised into data collection, data analysis and presentation of the findings. The methods of data analysis are further described in the individual findings chapters but are summarised here and the focus of this section is on the data collection and the presentation methods. I employed four stages of methods and research techniques within this study. These four were data collection, coding, analysis and data presentation as discussed below.

Data collection

As I was undertaking qualitative research about policy making, I had the option of studying policy documents or interviewing policy makers. As a single researcher studying comparative VET policy making between 2000 and 2019, I chose to collect documents to provide the breadth and depth that I needed to conduct a comparative case study methodology. In view of the subsequent pandemic that rendered interviews more challenging, this was a fortunate choice. My stance on studying documents is discussed earlier in the research strategy (section 4.3). The data subjects were therefore EU and national documents representing VET policies or referring to VET policies within the EU, Denmark, England, Finland, Scotland and the United Kingdom. I applied criteria that these were publicly available documents, from the internet and were obtained from official sources, for example, the European Union website or national government websites. In some instances, particularly those of legislation, there were a number of drafts of the document available as was found with EU CSRs which were produced over a number of iterations (Chapter 2), all of which were placed on the record. In this instance I chose the final version. Where there had been subsequent amendments to a document, rather than

the production of several versions (as regularly happens on the gov.uk website when policy changes), I retained the document that I had originally sourced.

As McCulloch (2012) noted, internet history can readily be rewritten. He also observed that online documents present their own analytic challenges, as the presence or absence of a document on a website is a political act. Some websites presented as repositories (ec.europa.eu) rather than carefully curated versions of reality (gov.uk), but even in these instances, earlier records can be erased. As an example, I wanted to locate the first Finnish NRP from 2005, but despite a lengthy search, following up out of date references from papers and writing directly to the Finnish Ministry of Finance, I was unable to obtain it. It was not an essential part of the study, but this absence was surprising, given the detailed records of national government strategic plans available on the Finnish government website. This was the first document of its type detailing relationships between Finland and the EU after the Lisbon strategy and it is possible that it was deleted from the official record because there was a subsequent significant policy shift in how these records were to be preserved and consequently what representations of Finland's relationship with the EU were to be recorded. The full list of documents selected and their origins is contained in Appendix B.

I was mindful of the need for meticulous documentary analysis, as detailed by McCulloch (2004), in terms of authenticity, reliability, relevance and bias. The use of official websites ensured that the documents were authentic. Their reliability, as a record of policy making, depends on their availability. These documents were not produced to record the processes of policy making, but to record the decisions about policies. They were not necessarily produced by similar cohorts of policy makers acting as agents, for example the Lisbon strategy was produced within a structure for document production by EU civil servants after discussion by EU leaders. Papanastasiou (2019a) has illustrated the processes of education policy making by EU committees, where key points are agreed outside the formal parts of the meeting so that predominant views may dominate a final policy and the construction of documents produced by the VET ministers reflected this approach. Relying on the

documents to shed light on policy making and from thence to delve into meanings about the purpose of VET might be considered tenuous but I found this not to be the case because these documents were from authentic sources. Since the language of the documents was a key part of analysis (N. Fairclough, 2015), the reason for producing the document was considered to be less significant than what the document said and did not say about VET policy and the interpretations that were made from this. Using a number of documents and analysing the data from them with different lenses enabled me to develop a variety of perspectives about the meanings contained within them (McCulloch, 2004). Documents were selected because they contained references to VET policy in the spaces and periods that I was studying and were therefore relevant for the study. As I proceeded through the detailed reading (Scott & Morrison, 2007) and coding, a few documents were rejected as I did not deem them relevant to the study. These were documents that described VET policy implementation or impact rather than providing insights into VET policy making.

I selected all the documents, so it is likely that researcher bias is consistent and can be discounted. However, this may only refer to selection bias, which might manifest itself through choosing documents that present a particular viewpoint. However, in some cases, where the documents were in Danish or Finnish, I did not know what the viewpoint was until after translation. In the case of documents available in English, the selection of all CRs, NRPs and CSRs meant that I had selected the total population. At national level, I was guided by extensive prior reading about the history of VET policy in each country (Chapter 2) and also by documents that were available on official websites. Researcher bias was thus less likely to be operating at the point of data collection. I have considered bias arising from national and supranational manipulation of public information, but the search for deeper meanings in the language of the documents would suggest that conscious bias will not affect the findings. There was an overall greater chance of bias in the analysis phases but this has been mitigated against by the choice of three different analytical methods.

Coding

Coding the documents was important to reduce extensive texts into units of analysis that were then scrutinised for meaning, pattern or trend in a process of interpretation and reinterpretation (Scott & Morrison, 2007). There was a balance of inductive and deductive coding, depending on the method of analysis, although inductive coding predominated, where the coding arose from the texts (critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis, Chapters 6 and 7 respectively). The framework of political discourse analysis (PDA) (Chapter 5) supported a more deductive approach to coding because PDA predetermined the type of category for analysis although subsequent coding followed a more inductive route and analysis (as discussed below) was based on abduction and retroduction.

nVivo is a recognised software package that allows a researcher to store sources of data and to code the data into groups of themes against any parameters specified by the researcher. These codes can then be checked, redefined and presented in different ways to facilitate further analysis. All documents were coded using nVivo, based initially on codes derived from reading the documents, rather than from pre-determined theory. Secondary coding which grouped the first themes according to analysis type was then carried out. Further details about the nature of coding undertaken in each analysis are contained in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Coding structures are listed in Appendix C.

Data analysis

Abduction and retroduction (Fletcher, 2017) are analytic approaches associated with critical realism and with qualitative research. There is debate about the distinction between these two techniques, both of which reflect stratification within research design and both of which in practice attempt to make sense of data in relation to literature and to draw out meaning from this sense making. As not only is critical realism a stratified framework but the dimensions of my study may also be viewed as stratified in terms of scale, from a supra-governmental institution (the EU) to a pan-EU group of VET ministers to the national VET

policy making structures in Denmark, England, Finland, Scotland and the UK, an approach that recognised stratification seemed appropriate.

Abduction involves collecting and analysing data and then reinterpreting or recontextualising theory about the actions of agents from the findings (Bergene, 2007). Retroductive processes, on the other hand, also involve the gathering of data but then drawing subsequent inferences about structures and mechanisms not readily observed (the deeper levels of ontological realism) to provide explanations for the findings from the data (Scott & Morrison, 2007). As outlined in Chapter 3, my approach to critical realism followed Archer's morphogenetic approach which recognised an interplay between both structures and agents. Consequently, in this case, my approach in developing an understanding of what may have happened at structural and agent level in order to inform VET policy making is a combination of both retroduction and abduction.

Table 4.1 shows three types of data analysis, chosen to address specific research questions and to address different levels of meaning. Specific detail about the type of analysis and how it was carried out is covered in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I sought to present the linkage from philosophical framework to research findings within this chapter, as modelled by Fletcher (2017) in a key paper relating critical realism to analytic methods. Following her model, herein follows a brief account of the role that the different types of analysis play in this research. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is an established technique for finding out what themes are present within data codes. It supported a surface level analysis through interpretative findings, in keeping with Research question 3, in which I considered temporal and spatial geographic dimensions, albeit through a dynamic comparison and was also carried out on the largest sample of documents, because it is a less complex method of analysis. The data presentation from these findings was considered in an abductive manner, in relation to policy theories and in line with a critical realism approach (Chapter 7). The two types of discourse analysis were used to delve into the language within the documents, rather than themes arising from the documents, enabling me to develop an understanding of the relationships between the spatial and temporal sequences of VET policies as well as

the purposes of VET (Research questions 1 and 2). These analyses were carried out on smaller groups of documents and, in considering discourse rather than theme, were used to unpick deeper levels of meaning and explanations. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has many variants; the form used here is that of N. Fairclough (2015), because it is consistent with critical realism in its recognition of layers of meaning (Chapter 6). PDA (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) whilst considered by some to be a type of CDA, was thought to be particularly appropriate for the deepest level of analysis to uncover purposes of VET from the EU and sub-EU documents, in other words, to unpick political nuances in relation to VET policy making from the supranational organisation. Because of its depth and complexity, it was carried out on the smallest number of documents, and like CDA, is consistent with a critical realism framework (Chapter 3).

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) drew attention to different layers of policy (local, regional, national, international, transnational and global) and, in common with Shore et al. (2011), concluded that education policy analysis is best carried out in a critically reflexive manner by the mapping of layers of policy processes across space and time. Their approach suggested that such analysis should include an examination of how the problem is historically constituted (in other words, what is the problem represented to be, (Bacchi, 2009)) which interfaces with the critical and political discourse analysis methods that I am using. There were differences in how historical mapping should be approached (from an archaeological, genealogical or anthropological stance, Chapter 1) but an overall mapping approach provided a framework for the trajectory studies that form part of my analysis, because it reflected the stratification that is part of the critical realism theoretical underpinning of my research. Policy mapping is undertaken to set a policy in its context (historical and geographic, in these instances) and to demonstrate the relationships between policies in order to understand what is influencing policy making.

Data presentation

I was keen to find ways to illustrate the research outcomes that demonstrated both the complexity of the issues and the relationship between the macro structural and the micro agency factors (Dobson, 2001) as well as my explanations of them. The findings were

presented by case but I also made use of sub-cases for illustrative purposes, based on selected themes within the cases (Bergene, 2007). The mapping that I developed was presented as graphical trajectories in support of the multi-layered analyses.

Trajectory can be likened to impact in that there are different axes of trajectory, for example the social dimension (between exclusion and inclusion), or the economic dimension (state or individual, capitalism or welfare state) or the political dimension (public or private) (Hodgson & Spours, 2019). Unlike impact, however, there is both a longer time frame and a direction. A trajectory may represent the overall direction of a gyre, in an illustration of the variety of ways in which policy making and development can be viewed as a series of currents spinning within a gyre, as explained further in section 4.7. Hodgson and Spours (2019), among others, have made use of policy trajectories to show the dynamic nature of policy. Scrutiny of the findings, in particular of the purposes of VET, helped to demonstrate the trajectory of policy making over time.

Ball (1993, p. 16) described trajectory studies as ‘cross sectional ... policy formulation, struggle and response from within the state itself to the various recipients of policy’. In this instance, I interpreted the state as EU VET policy and the recipients as national VET policies. This was because of the linkages between the EU and national VET policies, that the EU presumed to be hierarchical and top down. However, as raised in Chapter 2 and discussed in Chapter 8, this proved not to be the case as I analysed the policy trajectories. For example, the Lisbon strategy had an aim that young people not engaged in employment, education or training would be reengaged through VET with society and the labour market. The intent of this can be traced into national VET policies and measured, for example, through a longitudinal study of youth unemployment statistics, as to whether it had a long-term impact or whether there were unintended consequences (Jørgensen, 2016). However, as Power, Whitty, Gewirtz, Halpin, and Dickson (2004) illustrated in their study of Education Action Zone policy, other factors should also be considered and the straightforward measure may not be the sole outcome of the policy. Indeed, Ball (1993) noted that trajectory studies will reveal ‘intentions embedded in, responses to and effects of policy’, an

important reference to the layered approach to analysis that my critical realism stance required.

This varied approach to presentation was based on the desire to interpret the discourse within the policy texts from different perspectives, to aid understanding and comparison. I have specifically adapted the trajectory presentation methods to look at the underlying purposes of VET (Research question 1) as revealed by the study of VET policy making as well as the longitudinal influence of the Lisbon strategy on national VET policy (Research question 3), and to aid the discussion of the relationship between my findings and policy theories (Research question 2), whether this be a reinterpretation or a recontextualisation (Bergene, 2007). Given my research design, the two outcomes from the research are in keeping with the abductive and retroductive approaches to theory and data in a critical realism framework replacing generalisation as a means of theorising from the findings. Generalisation from case studies (Stake, 1995) and, indeed, from documents (McCulloch, 2004), has long been open to critique and a critical realist approach presented an alternative way of addressing this dilemma.

The role of theory in relation to the findings has already been indicated. Linkages to the relevant key policy theories have been referred to in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and an overall summary is presented in Chapter 8.

4.6 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations associated with this study have been those concerned with producing good research and my behaviour as an early career researcher, joining an established community of scholars. The data that I have collected is not deemed as sensitive data as it is publicly available to all. Using it in the way that I have has not caused harm to any individual or institution. By careful documentation of my methods and intentions and by the keeping of research diaries, I have aimed for the consistency of approach and integrity of method that I believe are consistent with good research practice.

The presentation of findings has been open and transparent, so that perceived data anomalies are acknowledged and discussed, rather than ignored if they do not fit a point of view. Indeed, an advantage of a multi-dimensional approach is that all data is of value, whether or not it adds weight to a preferred theory. Although I have considered key theories, my approach to them has been agnostic, as I have aimed to enhance the knowledge about them, not to define the boundaries of the knowledge, in line with the epistemological relativity approach of critical realism.

4.7 The concept of a policy gyre

As discussed in section 4.5, because the dimensional study of policy making is complex, I wanted to represent this complexity clearly, if not necessarily simplistically. Drawn from my reading, I perceived that the phases of policy production, frequently conceptualised as a policy cycle, might be more readily represented by a gyre which would also align with representations of the dimensions within critical realism. I have developed this concept in the context of VET policy making. This section outlines the conceptualisation of policy cycles and contrasts them with the developing concept of a gyre. This concept has then been used to summarise some of the findings about VET policy making.

Policy cycles

Having theorised that the policy process is cyclical, both Rist (2000) and Ball (1993) referred to three stages within these cycles. In Rist's terminology the policy cycle consisted of processes of policy formulation, policy implementation and policy accountability. Ball (1993) suggested that the policy cycle operates through three contexts of influence, production and practice. Comparing these might suggest a four-stage process cycle in which Ball's influence and production can be equated with Rist's formulation stage, practice with implementation and accountability (in which Rist includes monitoring, impact and evaluation) as a final stage, which Ball did not separately identify. Both acknowledged that these were not easily identified stages in a set of policy processes and that iterations

between them are frequent and complex. Even within each purported phase, there are, in fact, iterative processes as borne out by this study of policy making, which may be notionally aligned to the Rist and Ball stages of formulation and influence.

Rist (2000) enhanced his description of a policy cycle in terms of varying, bounded stages, which he stated as representing the lifecycle of a particular policy. Despite Rist's recognition of the iterative nature of these stages and the inconclusive outcomes of some processes which may result in no decision being taken (in itself this is a policy outcome) the policy cycle may now be an over-simplified concept. As an example, relating policy cycles to the EU processes, a theoretical policy making cycle might thus be expected to begin with Lisbon objectives and be traced into national VET policy in an interlocking process. The presumption here is that supra-national VET policy (in particular, EU policy) will provide a starting point for a VET policy cycle (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) rather than national policies being drawn up into a European policy. This would require national civil servants to interpret objectives from the Lisbon strategy for their own national VET systems and to propose to ministers within the relevant departments what, if anything, would be changed in policy terms as a result of Lisbon, subject, of course, to national policy making processes.

As policies (whether structures or agents – Chapter 1) do not operate in isolation, cycles are more likely to overlap or interlink rather than to form a 'perfect' cycle. Indeed, the concept of a cycle originated as a device to simplify explanation of a very convoluted and messy set of processes. This was also recognised to some extent by Ball's (1993) conceptualisation, which acknowledged the non-linear processes of policy making within the contexts of influence, policy text production and implementation (or practice) (Bowe, Ball with Gold, 1992, as cited in Ball (1993, p. 16)). Hodgson and Spours (2006) subsequently expressed this set of processes as points of a triangle maintaining an equilibrium within a 'political space' and thereby described a model for policy analysis. However, this did not reflect the dynamic relationships between policy processes nor indeed the multi-dimensional spaces, scales and timings of policy.

Consequently, in my view, it seemed more realistic to think in terms of a policy gyre, which is spinning in policy processes and spinning off policies, gathering up evidence and spitting out rejected evidence along its way with no defined beginning or end. This view seemed to me to better capture the element of randomness that is frequently apparent in policy making. The gyre concept allows for shifting contexts that may affect the timing of the policy making process and changing themes that may lose traction within the process. If there are indeed recognisable individual policy cycles, they are likely to be more akin to a series of interlocking currents within a gyre as policy making does not occur in a vacuum.

This adapted approach may be linked to Archer's morphogenetic approach (Archer, 2017c), in that the stages of influence (initiation, input), implementation and impact (evaluation) can be equated to structural conditioning, societal interaction and structural elaboration. As with patterns of structural change, when the next interaction is likely to start before the previous one has finished, rather than a cycle the policy process may be likened to a gyre, with ever continuing changes and iterations. Policy trajectories (section 4.5) may then be related to the spinning of the gyre and what emerges as it develops, rather than forming a linear pattern.

Policy gyre

A policy gyre was theorised by Grimmett (2009) in relation to teacher education policy in Canada. His theorisation was based on W.B. Yeats' concept of a gyre in 'The Second Coming':

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world (Yeats, 1921).

In this a gyre is interpreted as an unpredictable force, out of control and inexorable. Grimmett reflected on the notion of 'things falling apart' at the end of defined (twenty-year periods, in this instance) phases of 'policy development and enabling' leading to a significant reframing of the rationale behind policies. In the context of research gyres, there is a small

pool of literature that refers to them, drawing from the framework developed by Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001), also in relation to teacher education policy. In this, a research gyre is used methodologically, rather than as a way of conceptualising the policy making process. Yeats is often quoted in this context, in order to illustrate a widening of scope or an anarchic state. Although I have been very mindful of Yeats' work, particularly in terms of the revolutionary context in which he wrote the poem, in forming my own concept of policy gyres, I have developed the model from ocean gyres, using them to illustrate the multidimensional complexity of policy making systems rather than methodologically.

Whilst there was little evidence for this type of model within VET policy, White and Heckenberg (2011) constructed a structured approach to transnational environmental crime horizon scanning, of relevance to this study because their analysis is akin to the phases of a gyre as I conceptualised it. Within their structuring, they described 'horizon issues', which in my case are dimensions, for example time, space and scale. This was useful because they thereby recognised the complexity of multiple layers of influence, in a way that I have attempted to do.

As a basis for considering education policy making in this way, recognition of the dynamic nature of complexity of education policy making was made by Appadurai (2001), who described a 'world of flows' as well as a world of structures, when discussing globalisation and the nation-state. He also observed that these flows were inconsistent and take different routes so that parallels may be drawn with the behaviour of a gyre, which is not entirely predictable. Milana, Klatt, and Tronca (2020) considered network relationships in education policy in the EU, recognising the diversity and complexity of these relationships such that a simple policy making route is difficult to discern. Instead, it seems fruitful to explore a representation of complexity and unpredictability.

I decided to use an ecological concept because I have found that reflecting on the natural world, even through a simplified lens, provides a fresh perspective on socially constructed

processes. There is, of course a very strong precedent for this in that Bhaskar's critical realism proposals stemmed from a reconciliation between natural and social sciences. Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Papper (2008, p. 389) described the use of ecological metaphors, commenting that they are:

congruent with the complexity and messiness of twenty-first-century meaning making,

as well as describing that within an ecological metaphor:

activities, actors, situations and phenomena are conceived as interdependent, diverse and fused through feedback.

which summarises VET policy making in the context of my study.

In oceanic terms, therefore, a gyre is defined as 'a circular ocean current formed by the earth's wind pattern and the forces created by the rotation of the planet' (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2020). Additionally, gyres are known to be influenced by many fluctuating factors including water salinity, oxygen content and temperature. In other words, gyres are variable and volatile, many layered and extremely complex. The analogy with EU VET policy making and development is clear, taking into consideration the many layers of bureaucracy and the informal and formal methods of operation (Papanastasiou, 2019a), the overt and covert methods of regulation and influence (government and governance) (Brøgger, 2018), the many agents at play as well as the complicated nature of the EU itself as both a supranational structure and an agent in policy change processes where the principle of subsidiarity (Cort, 2010) is expected to operate. Rather than the policy cycle advocated by Ball (1993) and Rist (2000), a policy gyre seems to represent how forces ebb and flow and interact at many levels so that policy emerges from a dynamic and multidimensional set of policy making processes (Figure 4-1).

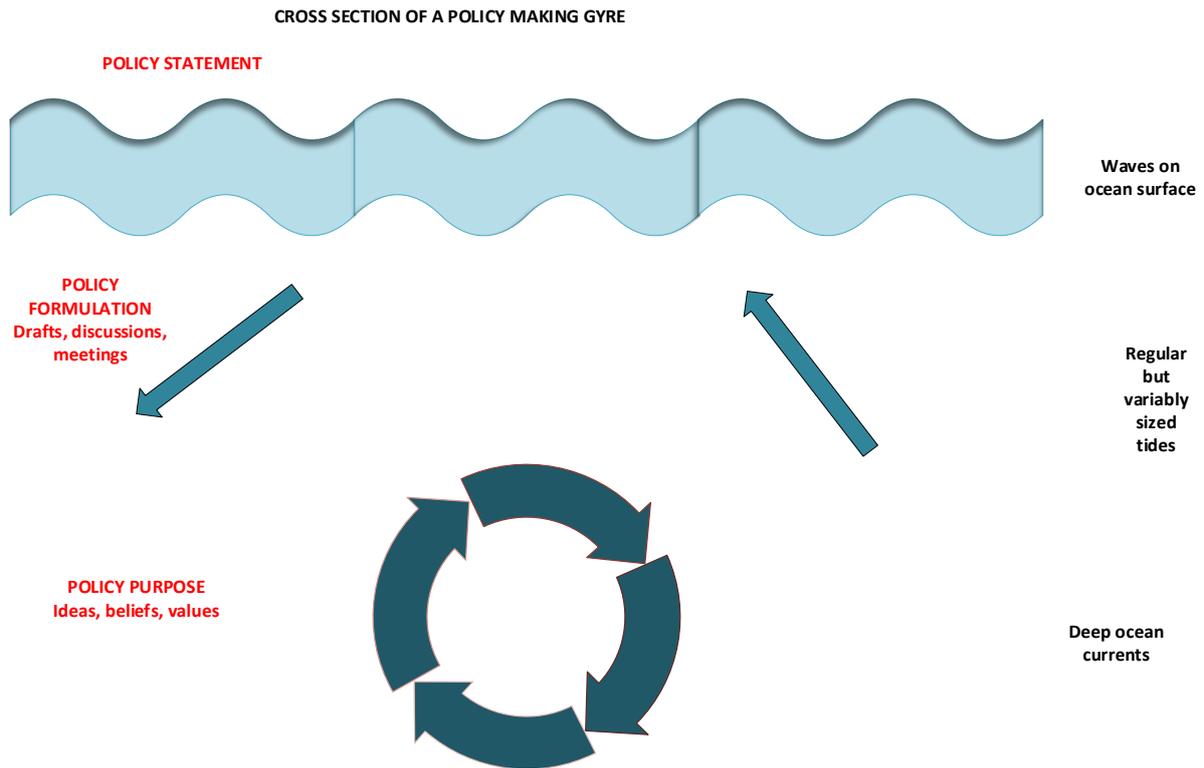


Figure 4-1 Cross section of an ocean gyre

As an example of a policy making gyre, I considered policies related to VET mobility, which was first highlighted by the Lisbon strategy (2000) (Chapter 7). Mobility was then referred to in later VET declarations such as Copenhagen (2002), Maastricht (2004) and Helsinki (2006) and also further referenced in Bruges (2010). It was subject to multiple interpretations, including social and educational mobility as well as labour mobility. One policy made during the period of study related to the European Erasmus Plus project, where VET students and teachers were encouraged to participate in exchanges across Europe, with the aim of encouraging personal learning and development as well as possibly supporting labour movement in the future, although this was not always made overt. For example, on VET mobility, the Scottish Government stated:

Vocational training and experience abroadit allows them to focus on their development, it also broadens their life experiences and horizons (The Scottish Government, 2012b, p. 17).

Erasmus Plus, which also includes higher education students, is thought to have benefited at least 1,000,000 students and 22,000 members of staff (European Commission, 2020) since its inception in 2014. This emerged from the waves of the Lisbon policy and, after iterations where mobility was confined to higher education, received funding from the EU to extend into national VET policies in the member states. The degree of participation was optional, since education is subject to the principle of subsidiarity and hence there was variable uptake by students and teachers. The VET mobility charter is held by 35 Finnish institutions, 19 Danish institutions and 14 UK institutions (including 2 in Scotland) (European Commission, 2021a). Given the relative size of the populations (5.6m, 5.5m, 66m, 5.5m respectively) this policy seems to have had more reach into Finland and Denmark. The policy, as formed, possibly has more resonance with the educational and social purposes of VET conceived in Finland and Denmark, and thus there is an alignment between the surface forces of policy making (akin to waves) and the deeper currents of meaning within the gyre.

Brexit has brought to an end the UK's participation in Erasmus plus and the proposal is to replace it with the Turing scheme, although to date the UK government has not yet finalised its policy for the new scheme. Thus, a concept encouraging the geographical mobility of VET students and teachers, which emerged for economic reasons but also has educational purposes, has been disseminated around the policy making gyre but is disappearing below the surface in the UK, tugged below by unseen currents, principally related to economy and isolationism.

A relationship between the gyre concept, critical realism levels and policy making is mapped below (Figure 4-2):

Gyre	Natural force	Critical realism domain	Policy change theories	Policy making
Waves/eddies	Wind	Empirical/surface	Policy convergence	Published policy statements
Tides	Rotation of planet	Actual	Policy learning	Policy formulation
Deep currents	Salinity, Water temperature, Oxygen levels	Real	Policy drift Policy diffusion	Policy purposes: Influences, Ideas, Beliefs, Values

Figure 4-2 Relationships between a gyre and policy making

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has related the overarching philosophical framework of critical realism into the chosen research design, drawing in theories from educational research and about policy. The design reflects both the nature of the research questions and the ambition to uncover layers of meaning whilst considering them. The concept of a gyre is put forward as a means of thinking about VET policy making as a perpetual, unbounded state, but with predominant influences and forces that may change over time and with varying levels of predictability depending on context. In other words, VET policy making is as complex as the deepest ocean currents and the surface representations of policies made do not capture the full essence of its process, nor its dynamic nature.

5. EU and sub-EU purposes of VET – 2000-2015

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyse EU VET policy making. I used a political discourse analysis (PDA) technique (I. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, pp. 54-56)) to extend my understanding of the purpose of VET as portrayed in two strategic EU documents, representing multifocal policy making within the EU space. These documents purported to establish (among other things) the broad thinking about and direction of EU VET policy. I also considered six sub-EU ministerial declarations specifically on VET, representing a single functional focus of policy making within the sub-EU space, details of which are tabulated below (Table 5-1). The document descriptor is used for ease of reference in the rest of this chapter, the full reference is contained in the table below.

Table 5-1 European strategy documents

Document descriptor	Full name and reference
Strategic EU documents	
Lisbon	Presidency Conclusions (European Council, 2000)
Europe 2020	Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (European Council., 2010)
Sub-EU ministerial declarations	
Copenhagen	The Copenhagen Declaration (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, 2002)
Maastricht	The Maastricht Communiqué (Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of 32 European countries, 2004)
Helsinki	The Helsinki Communiqué (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2006)
Bordeaux	The Bordeaux Communiqué (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2008)
Bruges	The Bruges Communiqué (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2010)

Document descriptor	Full name and reference
Riga	Riga Conclusions 2015 (Ministers in charge of vocational education and training – of EU Member States, 2015)

The interrelationships between different elements of EU policy making as represented within these texts demonstrate the complex influences on VET policy within the EU, even before national influences are considered (Chapter 2). These EU influences may also be viewed through the lens of structure/agent relationships, as defined in Chapter 1, which have been drawn out from the political discourse analysis; this secondary analysis serving to illustrate the intricacy of VET policy making within the EU. What these relationships indicate about VET purpose was further analysed to gain an understanding at a deep level of what underpinned EU VET policy between 2000 and 2015, identifying some of the fundamental values operating within the EU, conceptualised within the gyre of VET policy making (section 4.7). By initially exploring the lower levels of the gyre, I aimed to elicit some real purposes of VET for subsequent comparison with the more readily observed purposes explored in Chapters 6 and 7, as described by the three levels of critical realism ontology (Chapter 3).

The aim was to address the first research question:

How has the evolving relationship between national VET policy making and EU VET policy making shaped discourse about the purpose of VET?

This was discussed through firstly gaining an understanding of the discourse of EU VET policy from two perspectives: that of the European Commission/Council of Europe approved policy and that set forward in declarations about VET policy by the EU ministers. Identifying the discourses helped me to draw out purposes of VET within these two influential dimensions (EU and sub-EU), which was then compared in more detail with national VET policy making in subsequent chapters (Chapters 6 and 7). In analysing the EU dimensions, political influences on VET policy became clearer, and political purposes were thus added to the anticipated economic, educational and social purposes of VET.

5.2 Method

Political discourse analysis (PDA) (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) was selected as a method which both aligned with the aspects of critical realism chosen in this study (Chapter 3) and provided a tool for unpicking discourse from lengthy policy documents. This highly structured approach supported sensemaking from EU strategic texts, by providing the means to focus on a single thread of policy (VET policy), beginning with the expressed objectives for high-level VET policy and tracing these through to more detailed policy descriptions. This enabled me to achieve a depth of discourse analysis which was important to gain an understanding of the workings of the EU VET policy makers, that would not otherwise have been available to me (Chapter 4).

PDA is a form of critical discourse analysis, that provides a framework of analysis to uncover layers of meaning below the surface activities of those policymakers engaged in VET policy making, linking the discourses made visible as structures of 'social institutional reality' with the action of such agents (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 73). Fairclough & Fairclough's particular form of PDA is based on 'practical reasoning argumentation', justifying one action over another and leading to a choice of policy or policies (p. 244). The practical reasoning process is seen as a structured way of developing a practical solution to a problem, beginning with a judgement made about the problem that is framed as the solution to the problem and then developing actions of implementation to bring about the solution (p. 40). The PDA framework supports a critical analysis of this practical reasoning in the form of 'explanatory critique' (p. 241). This complements the approach of Bacchi (2009) who framed policy analysis within 'what is the problem represented to be?' (Chapter 4) and some aspects of Bacchi's analytical approach has also been used to support the development of this analysis (Chapter 6).

The analysis was carried out by identifying key parts of the argument from the texts, as set out in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2 PDA framework

PDA framework	Contextualisation for VET policy
Claims for agents' action	The solutions VET agents are seeking to find - why they are making policies - for example, the need to improve VET to reduce youth unemployment
Goals for a future state as a result of taking the actions	Better VET systems created by VET agents that contribute to the overarching purpose of VET (whether specified or unspecified) - for example, a European VET area or improvements in quality of VET teaching
Means of achieving the goals (and alternatives)	What VET agents will enact to achieve the goal (and what they might do as an alternative) - for example, policy convergence (or divergence)
Context of action	The situation VET agents are working in - for example, social structures such as colleges, institutional structures such as the EU and also as the context of stability (Lisbon) compared with the global financial recession
Values	Underpinning beliefs that agents hold or should hold that influence actions to deliver the goals - for example, parity of esteem between VET and other education sectors

Source: I. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, p. 91)

As this framework is drawn from the structure-agent relationship (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 244) outlined within the theories of critical realism that I have chosen to use (Chapter 3), the structures and agents referenced within the texts were also identified, both to draw out the complexity and to deepen the understanding of the 'practical reasoning' – who was doing what to whom through VET policy making (Appendix D shows a relationship diagram of the analysis framework). Elements from the text were coded against the constituent parts of the framework. These codes were then further analysed into key themes arising from the literature, for example, Europeanisation as a goal of VET policy, and the results were summarised in graphical format (Appendix E). These results were reviewed both as absolute numbers of themes and also relative proportions of themes in each text. Where appropriate, these were presented in the narrative. In some instances, the use of a relative measure made comparison clearer, because, for example, the Bruges text was significantly longer than all the other texts and thus it also contained more coding

references, potentially distorting some conclusions if the raw findings were used. The absolute numbers of themes were particularly useful for spatial dimension comparison, as described in Chapter 1, between the EU as a whole and the VET ministers and on the other hand, the comparison of relative emphasis proved helpful for temporal dimension comparisons of VET purpose (Chapter 1), for example the changes in purpose between 2000 and 2015.

By presenting a comparison between VET policy making described within two major EU strategies (Lisbon and Europe 2020) and the specific VET policy making reimaged within the sub-EU declarations, temporal, spatial and scalar dimensions of policy making were explored. These comparisons were used to explore what types of policy dynamic were occurring, with reference to the explanations of VET policy theorists. Thus, the findings from the coded texts were viewed in order to explain whether there was convergence of purpose, for example, Europeanisation as outlined by Alexiadou (2007), divergence of policy, as discussed by Aarkrog and Jørgensen (2008) or policy drift, as put forward by Kay and Baines (2017).

The data was then further analysed by trajectory mapping against four key purposes identified in VET literature: namely political, educational, social and economic (Chapter 2) and further consideration was given within these to significant political themes such as the prevalence of neo-liberal or social democratic ideologies (Donnelly & Evans, 2018; Harvey, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) and the centralisation/decentralisation debate put forward by Archer (1979), also described by Hodgson and Spours (2006) and more recently used in the form of a trajectory (Hodgson & Spours, 2019).

5.3 Literature

This chapter draws on the theories of policy convergence and divergence (Aarkrog & Jørgensen, 2008) as adapted to theories of Europeanisation (Alexiadou & Lange, 2014; Cort, 2010) and Europeification (Antunes, 2016), reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. As outlined in Chapter 2, globalisation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) and, in this instance, Europeanisation, have been considered a dominant force in recent education policy making and I explored these

powers that had operated to produce centralised education systems were now out of alignment with other structures at play (although, in the case of supra-national structures, centralised systems appeared to be replicated rather than replaced) and called for the construction of a further cycle, which she named cycle III. However, rather than a series of cycles, I suggested that a gyre of policy making is at play (section 5.5).

5.4 Key findings

After an outline of the nature of the texts, the findings are presented against each element of the PDA framework set out in section 5.2 and summarised against Research question 1 in section 5.5.

Although there were some broad similarities between the Lisbon conclusions and Europe 2020, arising from the fact that they were both official European documents, the presentation was quite different. The Lisbon strategy was an official set of conclusions from the Council of the EU, presented formally and written solely in the third person, whereas Europe 2020 was also presented in a brochure, authored by the European Commission. Europe 2020 read more like a sales prospectus, with the use of 'we' and 'I' (José Manuel Barroso) as attempts to personalise, perhaps to draw in a reader (although the presumed audience was unspecified, the document was, however, available in most EU languages of the time), as well as being formalised in the Council style in a later version (Chapter 6). This change of approach over the ten years may have arisen as the EU has enlarged (Chapter 2) and developed more varied styles of communication, potentially finding it necessary to sell its more recent strategy to its wider audience of member states. Despite these differences, the flavour of Europe was still prevalent in the English language of both documents (Seidlhofer, 2005), for example 'co-operation' (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2008), 'transparency' (p. 158) and 'mobility', (Chapter 7).

As previously noted, there was no defined audience for these documents, which were available on the EU's public webpages. The implication was that they were available to all EU citizens who can read and who have access to the Internet. The language and concepts

used might, however, suggest assumptions were made by the authors about the level of literacy and numeracy of the readers as well as their knowledge about the EU. However, the six sub-EU texts read differently, perhaps reflecting their country of origin, or, more precisely, the member state that was hosting the presidency at the time the communications were made. Not only did the style of English vary from a Danish form of English in Copenhagen to a French form of English in Bordeaux but the structure and content also reflected the host member state's perceptions of VET, despite these being branded as Europe wide documents. Cort (2010) referred specifically to the Danish ownership of the Copenhagen process as a result of Denmark hosting the meeting of the VET ministers. Similarly, some of the key ideas within the Helsinki communiqué were also observed within Finnish national VET policy. The re-iteration of lifelong learning is one example and this was traced through Finnish VET policy until 2018, whereas the concept was less visible in either Danish, Scottish or English policy (Chapter 7). This led to the question of whether the EU made these policies or whether the policy making was more heavily influenced than might be expected by individual member states. This challenged the notion of Europeanisation as put forward by Alexiadou (2007) and Cort (2008b) (Chapter 2).

A further point noted was the frequency of these declarations. After Lisbon, the ministers met every two years until Bruges to progress the VET policy agenda. Bruges post-dated the Europe 2020 strategy and therefore it could be presumed to be a key VET policy implementation text. Thereafter, either because of the lengthy Bruges agenda or more likely (although unsubstantiated) because of the replacement of the OMC with the annual burden of European Semester process, there was one further meeting of the ministers, in Riga, five years later. It was not apparent that a further meeting was scheduled at the date of writing. Europe 2020 has been replaced by Europe 2030 (European Commission, 2019c) and by EU strategic priorities for 2019-2024 (European Council, 2019) although, in addition to that strategy's sustainable and environmental focus there are now two major contextual factors to shape it – Covid 19 and the outcomes of the Brexit referendum. Since both of these factors: Brexit (2016 decision, 2020 transition, 2021 implementation) and Covid-19 (2020-2021) occurred after the period covered by the texts in this part of the study, the

impact of them, as well as that of the subsequent EU strategies, on VET policy making was considered briefly in Chapter 8.

Political discourse analysis techniques include a review of the context in which the discourse is being presented. The context is sub divided into natural, social and institutional factors; in this instance, the institutional predominated although, especially in the Lisbon strategy, the social context was also important. Thus:

The Union possesses a generally well-educated workforce as well as social protection systems able to provide, beyond their intrinsic value, the stable framework required for managing the structural changes involved in moving towards a knowledge-based society. Growth and job creation have resumed. (Lisbon, p. 1)

However, by 2010, Europe 2020 presented the following picture of society:

The last two years have left millions unemployed. It has brought a burden of debt that will last for many years. It has brought new pressures on our social cohesion. (preface).

VET policy was being made in two very different contexts. This was also illustrated by the ministerial declarations, where what was deemed to be important in VET policy making changed over the period:

co-operation at European level within education and training has come to play a decisive role in creating the future European society. (Copenhagen p. 1);

representing an idealistic view of centralised education and training in relatively untroubled, more stable times. However, concerns about ageing societies were raised in Helsinki and Bordeaux, leading to a different picture of change by 2010:

Not only labour markets but also societies as a whole are changing rapidly. We must empower people to adapt to new developments and manage change. This means enabling people to acquire knowledge, skills and competences that are not purely occupational. These broader competences – key competences – are important to succeed in life (Bruges p. 3).

Lisbon was anticipating the enlargement of the EU:

The European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy. These changes are affecting every aspect of people's lives and require a radical transformation of the European economy. The Union must shape these changes in a manner consistent with its values and concepts of society and also with a view to the forthcoming enlargement. (p. 1);

but the context (post enlargement) was very different in 2010:

Europe faces a moment of transformation. The crisis has wiped out years of economic and social progress and exposed structural weaknesses in Europe's economy. In the meantime, the world is moving fast and long-term challenges – globalisation, pressure on resources, ageing – intensify. (Europe 2020, p. 3).

Similarly, the Copenhagen process, referencing Bologna, was optimistic for the future of VET, developing through Europeanisation:

The enlargement of the European Union adds a new dimension and a number of challenges, opportunities and requirements to the work in the field of education and training. It is particularly important that acceding member states should be integrated as partners in future cooperation on education and training initiatives at European level from the very beginning. (p. 1).

However, by Riga, in 2015, the contextual discourse had shifted to a more economic one:

Given these challenges, a much more prominent role has been attributed to VET in the overall growth and jobs agenda. The contribution of VET, particularly work-based learning and apprenticeships, to fight youth unemployment, to ensure better match between training and labour market needs and to ease transitions to employment is now more widely recognised. As an indication of the urgency of reforms in this sector, a considerable number of country specific recommendations adopted within the European Semester are related to VET. (p. 5).

with references elsewhere in the text to high levels of unemployment, especially for young people, a low skilled adult workforce and the changing needs of the labour market. There

was an acknowledgement that the work of the ministerial declarations in relation to VET policy making was being superseded by the European Semester process (Chapter 2). This is discussed further in Chapter 6, in which I reviewed the role of the European Semester in VET policy making. The implications drawn from this were that the sub-EU ministerial committees had run their course, although there was no evidence that this had been formally communicated. For whatever reason, this role of this group in shaping VET policy was replaced by the European Semester process. This has resulted in differences between VET policy developed by a sub-EU and pan-European group of ministers with a single focus on VET policy making and VET policy developed from the evolving direct and singular relationship between the EU and member state. At this stage, it is suggested that the VET policy developed by the ministers was no longer aligned with EU thinking about VET policy; in other words, there was a divergence of policy making. These implications of change from a single themed, boundary spanning approach of policy making to a deeper approach set within national boundaries is discussed in Chapter 8.

5.4.1 Claims

After these changes to context had been identified, claims about VET policy within these contexts were considered, as these claims shed light on why certain policies were being established. Few of the claims in the texts related specifically to VET, although claims were made for the future of education and training systems as a whole. Generally, the claims for which VET policy would offer a solution were couched in social or economic terms.

Lisbon claims began with:

Every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in this new information society (p. 2)

and:

Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. They will have to offer learning and training opportunities tailored to target groups at different stages of their lives: young people, unemployed adults and those in employment who are at risk of seeing their skills overtaken by rapid change (p. 5).

In other words, everyone should have the capacity and capability to acquire the (unspecified) skills for the future information society. However, the education and training systems (VET in this context) were expected to offer the opportunities for certain groups of individuals to develop these capacities and capabilities in order to support both a new type of society and the growth of a new form of economy. This was not, therefore, a universal approach, instead, the targeting of certain groups may have reflected perceived educational or social inequalities. This strategy was agreed by all countries who were member states at the time, signifying their public acknowledgement of the need for changes to both society and the economy as well as specific support for young people, unemployed and the less well skilled or adaptable. By implication, therefore, the member states had not specifically addressed their own national policy requirements, nor agreed on a shared perspective of the information, or knowledge society, for which new skills were to be developed and made available to all citizens. In fact, the targeted approach suggested that every citizen would not be included. Nor, indeed, had the member states signed up to a full lifelong learning policy.

By contrast, rather than a VET related rhetoric, the claim in Europe 2020 arose through the setting of a target for education, with VET at the centre of this target:

The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree¹. (Europe 2020, p. 3).

The use of 'school' illustrated different terminology used to describe VET in different countries. In the UK, 'school' was used to refer to places of compulsory education, i.e. pre-VET, although during the period of study the school leaving age was raised first to 17 in 2013

¹ See Glossary for definition of tertiary education

and then to 18 in 2015, although the legislation was passed in 2008 (HM Government, 2008), which also encompassed iVET in colleges and apprenticeships. In fact, 'school leaving age' was a misnomer, post 16 young people were expected to participate in full time further education, apprenticeships or traineeships or employment or volunteering with part time education or training. In Denmark, which had a preoccupation with early school leavers (Chapter 6), 'school' included the gymnasias, sites of general post 16 upper secondary education, as well as the VET institutions and training frameworks. In Finland, 'school' also included VET institutions (again, the age of compulsory education and training was reviewed in Finland during the period of the study and was currently scheduled to rise to 18 in 2021, extending compulsory education into both general and vocational upper secondary education).

There was thus an imprecision around this term, which may stem from an assumed homogeneity of VET systems, which is far from the case, leading to a lack of consistency of use. However, given that the education target was set in the 2010 context to reduce the number of unemployed young people by keeping them in education and training for longer, (rather than supporting the development and future of young people by securing the appropriate educational or training opportunity for them), VET policies were developed from this perspective, in order to produce a supply of better skilled workers rather than necessarily to meet the demand of jobs (either current or future demands). The tertiary education target, of course, includes hVET within its remit and was not a challenging target for the four countries of the study; all had, in fact, exceeded this part of the target before the beginning of the European Semester process. This part of the target was set for member states that had not developed significant tertiary education provision and clearly aimed to achieve a similar standard across the EU, rather than encouraging further development of tertiary systems by all member states. The use of targets as a lever in VET policy making evolved during the development of the European Semester processes (Chapter 2) and, on this evidence, as well as evidence from the literature, was found to be of limited value (Chapter 8).

VET policy was thus steered towards policies for iVET, potentially at the expense of cVET, thereby signalling a greater change of emphasis than that expressed in the Lisbon strategy.

However, hVET policies were also entwined with the well-established Bologna process (Brøgger, 2018) rather than the Copenhagen process and subsequent declarations, creating an artificial separation in VET terms. This may have been one of the original reasons for the calls for a European VET area to mirror the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as discussed in Chapter 2, which was still being referenced in the texts in 2010 (p. 62) although it is probable that the EHEA, rather than an EU VET area, was uppermost in the EU policymakers' considerations when setting this target. The developing national interest in hVET as part of the Bologna process was ascribed by Jørgensen (2018c) to a mix of both employer (economic) and political interests, at least in Denmark and Finland. The relationship between EU and national priorities for VET is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The VET ministers' dimension amplified these claims with more specific aspirations for VET, which have been grouped against emerging purposes in Table 5-3 below:

Table 5-3 Claims and purposes for VET

Aspirational claim for VET	Purpose for VET
'Strengthening the European dimension in vocational education and training' (Copenhagen, p. 2)	Europeanisation (political)
'implement agreed objectives at national level, taking into account common European references and principles (Maastricht, p. 2)	Europeanisation (political)
'The development of common European tools' (Helsinki, p. 7)	Europeanisation (political)
Contributing to competitiveness and social cohesion (Helsinki, p. 3)	Economic/social
'To contribute to greater employability and employment security, to anticipate and manage transitions in the labour market and boost business competitiveness, VET policies must be geared to labour market needs (Bordeaux, p. 11)	Economic
VET should have high relevance for the labour market and people's careers (Bruges, p. 7)	Economic/political
Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality (Bruges, p. 10)	Educational/economic

Aspirational claim for VET	Purpose for VET
'we will continue contributing to raised quality and attractiveness of accessible and inclusive VET at all education levels' (Riga, p. 1)	Social/educational
'aiming to support employability and economic growth and help promote social cohesion and respond to broader societal challenges (Riga, p. 5)	Economic/social

As can be seen from Table 5-3, more of the claims discourse revolved around either Europeanisation: by 2015 the concept of Europeanisation appeared to be well established through the development of 'European VET systems' and 'European co-operation in VET' (Riga, p. 2), or economic growth through intensifying claims for investment in VET. There was also reference to educational improvement and social cohesion although the educational claims were less evident than might have been expected. By 2015, the Lisbon offer to all citizens had been reframed through less specific claims for 'growth and job creation' (Riga, p. 5). Greater detail about VET policy making was now to be found within the European Semester texts (Chapter 6) representing direct policy relationships between the EU bodies and member states, rather than via the mediating body of the VET ministers' committee. Indeed, the VET ministers may have been swayed by political and administrative influence from the country hosting the meeting, which also held the rolling six-month Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as suggested by Cort (2008b). This national influence from a single member state over the whole VET policy making agenda became less possible within the Semester process. However, although the Semester was viewed as a hierarchical process exerting more 'top down' control over member states (Stevenson, 2019), the residual impacts of Bruges, Riga and even Copenhagen were still present in some VET policies emerging during the period between 2010 and 2019.

5.4.2 Goals

The desired outcomes envisaged to arise from the VET policies adopted ('goals') ranged from generic: a new, more equal society (specifically in gender terms) (Lisbon) to a reduction in poverty (Europe 2020) to more specific in the case of VET ministerial

declarations, for example, reducing early leavers from VET (Bruges), constructing a European education area (Bruges) and achieving consistency between VET and other sectors of education and training (Riga). The goals coded (using PDA) were grouped under the themes of economy, education and skills, Europeanisation and society to examine changes over time and between spaces.

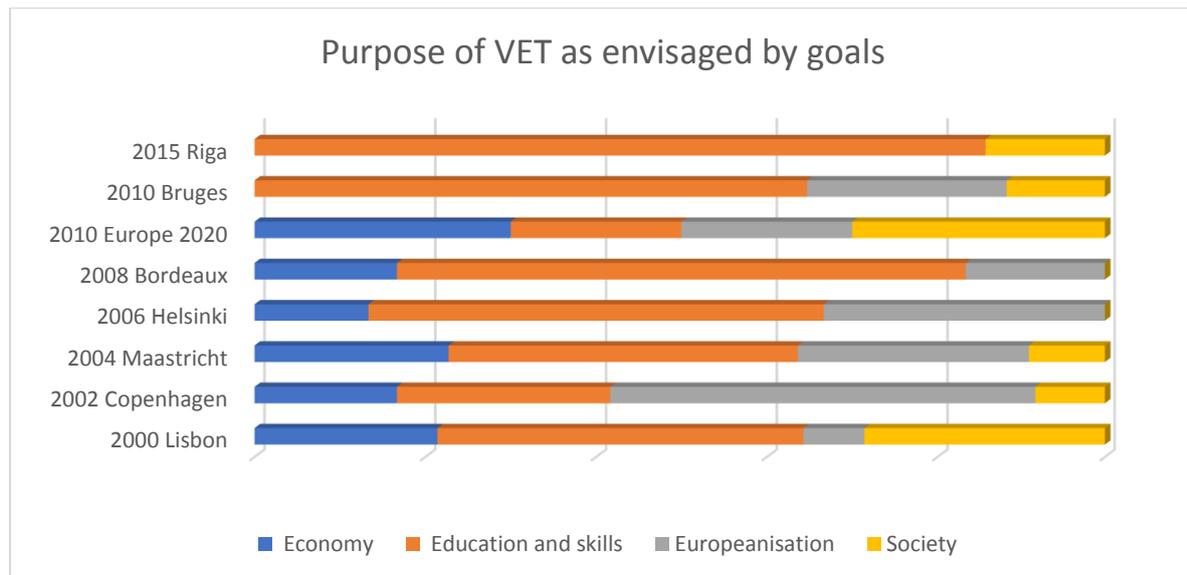


Figure 5-2 Purpose of VET as envisaged by goals

The chart (figure 5-2) illustrates a grouping of the discourse identified from the coding of the goals using PDA against the presumptions of VET purpose within that discourse. Thus, a goal for VET policy with a predominantly social purpose, such as:

which enable European citizens to take sound decisions and to manage their learning and professional careers beyond traditional gender profiles (Bruges, 2010, p. 6)

was included in the society purpose. The chart presents the relative proportions of references to each purpose, in support of a temporal comparison as well as a spatial comparison.

Economic drivers were more frequently referenced in the goals set in Europe 2020 than in the Lisbon strategy, reflecting the changed global context of a post-recession recovery

strategy. However, although economic drivers were also featured in the ministerial declarations before 2010, the emphasis was then heavily weighted towards education and skills, indicating a changed focus from VET ministers after 2010, perhaps because economic matters were prioritised within the European Semester (Chapter 6). Following a modest introduction of Europeanisation in VET policy terms in the Lisbon strategy, the chart above (figure 5-2) demonstrates a marked increase in this goal until 2010. This is illustrated by the following:

European education and training to become a world quality reference by 2010.
(Copenhagen, p. 1)

and:

By 2020, European VET systems should be more attractive, relevant, career-oriented, innovative, accessible and flexible than in 2010, (Bruges, p. 6).

However, in the Riga text, there was no mention of the Europeanisation of VET as a goal for the future. The implication from its absence in these later goals might be that it was considered that Europeanisation was now an established policy, that a European VET space had been established and that there was thus no need to include this as a future objective (Chapter 8).

Instead the Riga text set more educational goals, for example, the following:

to raise the overall quality and efficiency of VET (Riga, p. 4)

and:

consistency between VET and other sectors of education and training (Riga, p. 6).

The goals did not directly align with the claims (Table 5-2), as educational claims were made more sparingly, even within the ministerial texts. This supported the argument that VET policy making was in response to a purpose or purposes other than purely educational (Chapter 8).

5.4.3 Means

A comparison of the VET policy actions recommended to achieve the VET policy goals outlined above revealed different emphases between the EU space and the sub-EU space although most types of actions (i.e. relating to the four overarching purposes of economic, social, educational and political) were represented in every text. An anomaly was 'roles envisaged for teachers', a surprising level of detail, cited in the Lisbon strategy and, rather less surprisingly, also detailed in the ministerial texts. However, teachers' agency did not appear separately in the Europe 2020 strategy (figure 5-3), although there were references to VET agency.

The number of actions rose steadily across the period until 2010, when the Bruges communiqué put forward the greatest number of actions, closely aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy and consequently anticipating major changes in VET policy over the next five years. This was largely due to both the EU and VET ministers drawing up plans for economic recovery after the global financial recession of 2008. However, by 2015, the number of actions advocated in the Riga communiqué were of a similar order to those in earlier documents. The changes to VET policy making made by the European Semester formed part of the reason for this, a further factor being a perceived economic recovery. This implied that the purpose of VET policy was, at this time and in this space, largely perceived as economic.

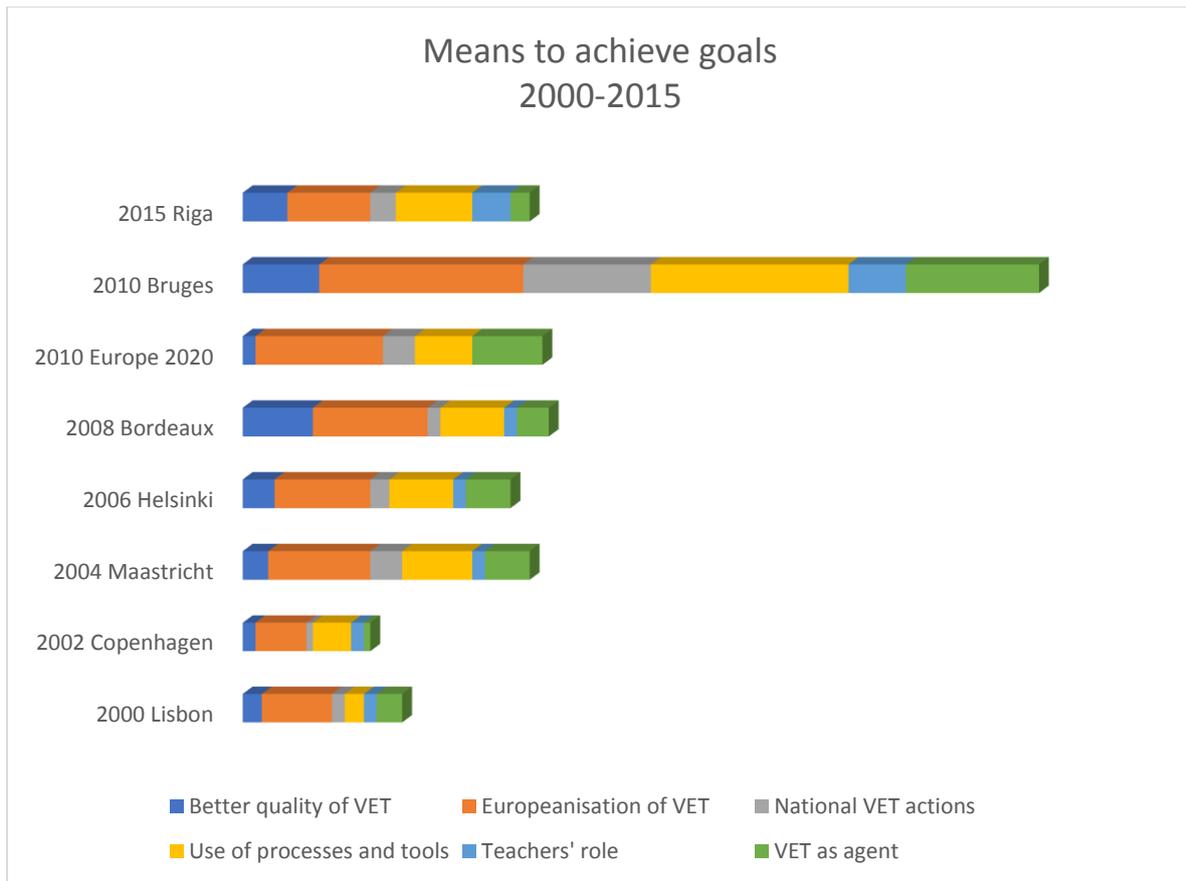


Figure 5-3 Means to achieve goals

The relative emphasis on Europeanisation in the Bruges text was slightly less and the emphasis on national actions was slightly more than in the Riga text (figure 5-4). The Riga text placed a relatively greater focus on achieving a better-quality VET and on using (mainly) educational and organisational processes to achieve this. These processes were developed from the original Copenhagen ideas (which also, of course, encompassed Europeanisation), for example:

Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training (Copenhagen, p. 2)

into:

continue work on implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks, linked to EQF, by embedding also qualifications obtained outside formal education and training systems; (Riga, p. 9).

The role of VET as an agent contributing either to social cohesion, economic growth, educational improvement or political change was also less prominent by 2015.

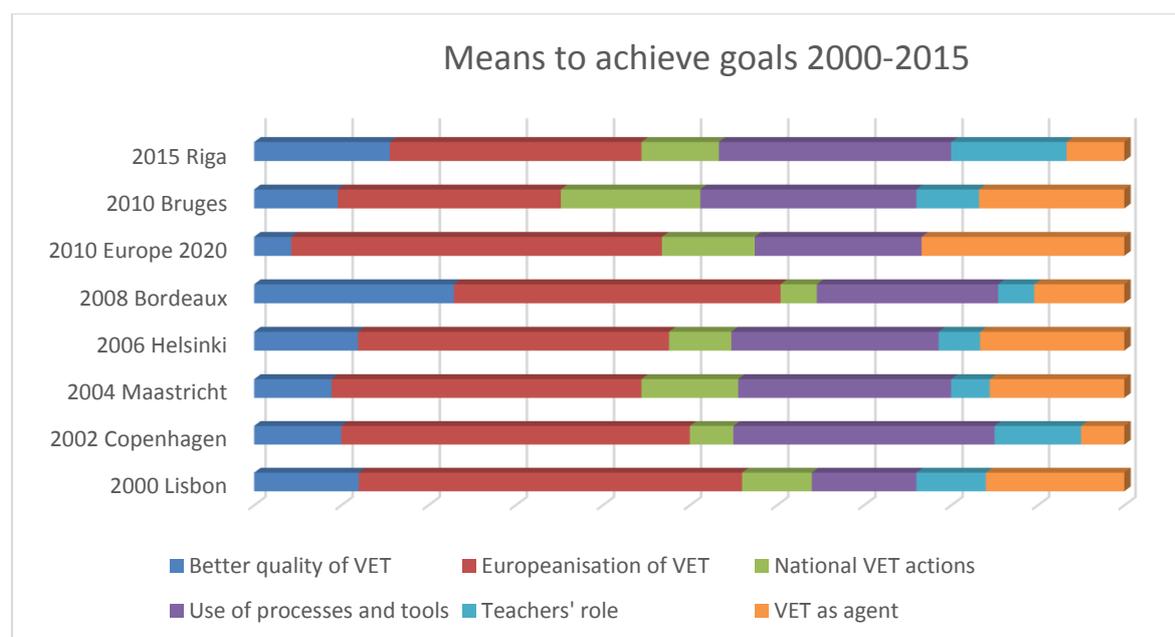


Figure 5-4 Relative presentation of means to achieve goals

Whilst this conceptualisation of VET was first put forward in 2000 in the Lisbon strategy the greatest emphasis was placed on this in the Europe 2020 strategy. In their declarations, ministers have shown relatively less interest in actions portraying VET as a means to a further end and more in improving the educational quality of VET itself. This is consistent with the different foci portrayed by the purposes envisaged by the goals (figure 5-2); education and skills are relatively more emphasised by the VET ministers. It is increasingly clear that there was a different perspective between the two spaces and that there were also many different priorities that emerged and disappeared between 2000 and 2015, either in one or both spaces. This perspective that VET policy was being developed in support of further purposes was also observed in the study of the claims (section 5.4.2). It is clear that there was no dominant discourse in relation to VET, but rather, from the findings so far, that

there were two competing trajectories, that of the EU strategists and that of the EU VET ministers and that the interplay between these trajectories shaped the discourse (RESEARCH QUESTION1). This interplay of the deepest levels of VET policy making was consistent with the policy gyre conceptualised in Chapter 4, whereby different policy priorities emerge through currents and eddies at different times and in different spaces.

The PDA framework enabled examination of the alternatives to the proposed means of delivery, in a similar way to asking what does the representation of the problem omit (Bacchi, 2009). However, within these texts, few alternatives were presented, although in some cases policy omissions were observed. The alternatives that emerged appeared in the Bordeaux text (2008), recognising that more could be done to promote lifelong learning strategies, in the Bruges text (2010), which was concerned with the mobility of VET learners and in the Riga text (2015):

less attention has been paid to promoting VET excellence through creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship – which could aid enterprise performance and job creation (Riga, p. 6).

The promotion of lifelong learning strategies is discussed further in Chapter 7. Policies relating to the mobility of VET learners (as developed through pan-European projects such as Erasmus (Chapter 4), have had some success but by contrast with the mobility of workers, policy makers probably viewed them as of a lower priority because the mobility of students and teachers has less economic impact than the creation of a mobile workforce (Chapter 7). Although it can be argued that increasing the mobility of VET learners would lead to the mobility of the future workforce it was not at all clear that, on the ground, all policy makers (especially those in England) concerned themselves with future strategy, particularly in the VET arena (Chapter 8). The alternative put forward in the Riga text was almost an ideal, which, given the more pragmatic focus of the Riga text, was unusual, even though there was an economic slant towards job creation. I speculated that, at drafting level, an individual's or small group's particular interest might have been introduced because of their strength of feeling about it, as Cort (2008b) suggested with regard to the Copenhagen process and as Papanastasiou (2019a) observed in her study of EU educational

policy formation. If this particular interest appeared relatively uncontroversial, this might then have been carried through to the final report, resulting in a change to policy without conscious deliberation of the implications. This unconscious development of policy may be related to policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) and is considered further in this context in section 5.5.

5.4.4 Values

Agents (Chapter 1) carrying out the actions are presumed, within the framework of practical reasoning argumentation, to hold or aspire to hold certain values. 'Values' is, of course, a contested term. In this context, the coding of values, whilst derived from the texts, may have been influenced by my research beliefs; in other words, that any aims for VET policy should be supported by values that reflect to a greater extent educational and social purposes (Pring, 2015) rather than political or economic purposes. However, as is shown below, even with a potential selective coding bias, the values-based discourse within the texts was complex and multifaceted.

Values based discourse relating to VET derived in the text was grouped according to questions about the purpose of VET arising from the literature, for example, VET as a driver for economic growth or VET's role in addressing disadvantage (figure 5-5).

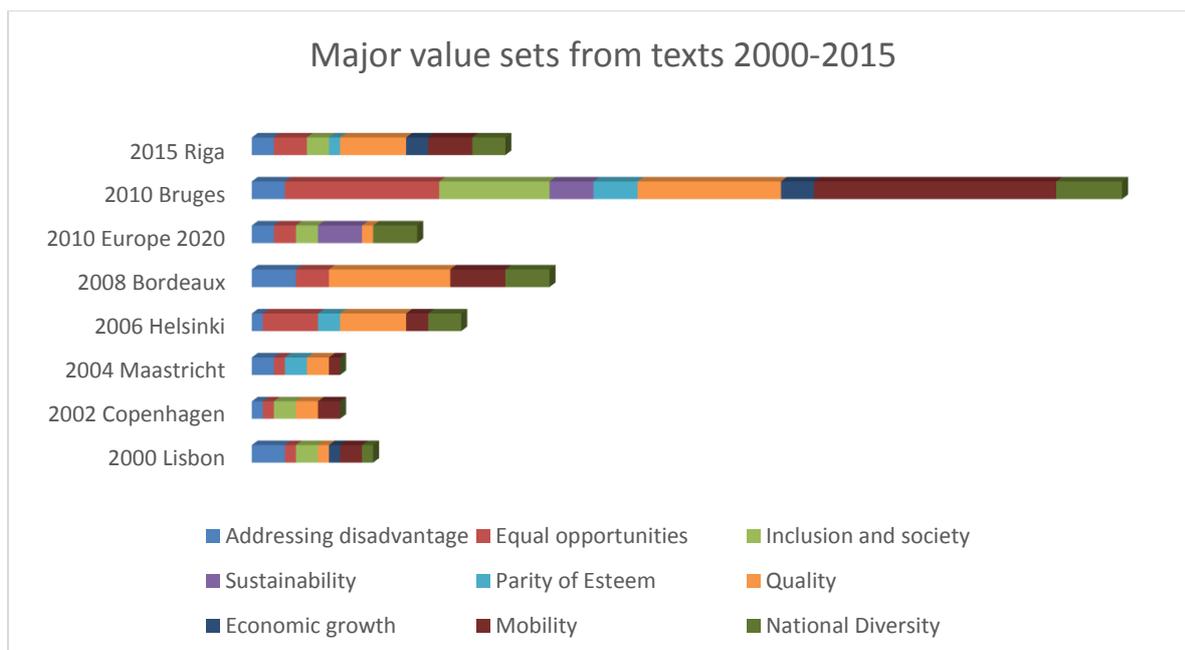


Figure 5-5 Major value sets from documents

A significant value that was drawn out in this way is that of ‘parity of esteem’, both in its presence and its absence in the discourse. The relative value placed by different societies on VET (Jørgensen, 2018a) is frequently framed in terms of inequality, for example in England, where VET has been something that ‘other people’s children’ entered (Lenon, 2018). The presence of ‘parity of esteem’ in the discourse in 2004 -2006 and then again post 2010 suggests a pre-recession idealism on the one hand, resurrected, perhaps with a different opportunism during post-recession recovery strategies. The pre-recession policy may be linked to social cohesion (if not to social justice) whereas a more pragmatic policy post-recession might be expected to serve to raise the profile of VET systems, or, to employ a European phrase, to ‘improve the attractiveness of VET’. This then might reduce unemployment by encouraging a greater uptake of VET: an economic rather than an equity perspective. Having said this, the general tenor of the parity of esteem discourse both pre and post 2010 was not expressly economic:

initial VET (I-VET) which learners, parents and society at large may regard as an appealing option, of the same value as general education (Bruges, p. 6)

suggesting that this value was consistently applied from an equitable belief system:

In the knowledge society vocational skills and competences are just as important as academic skills and competences. (Bruges, p. 3).

The presence of multi-purposes ascribed to VET policy was clearly demonstrated by this analysis which illustrated the complexities of ascribing values within these texts.

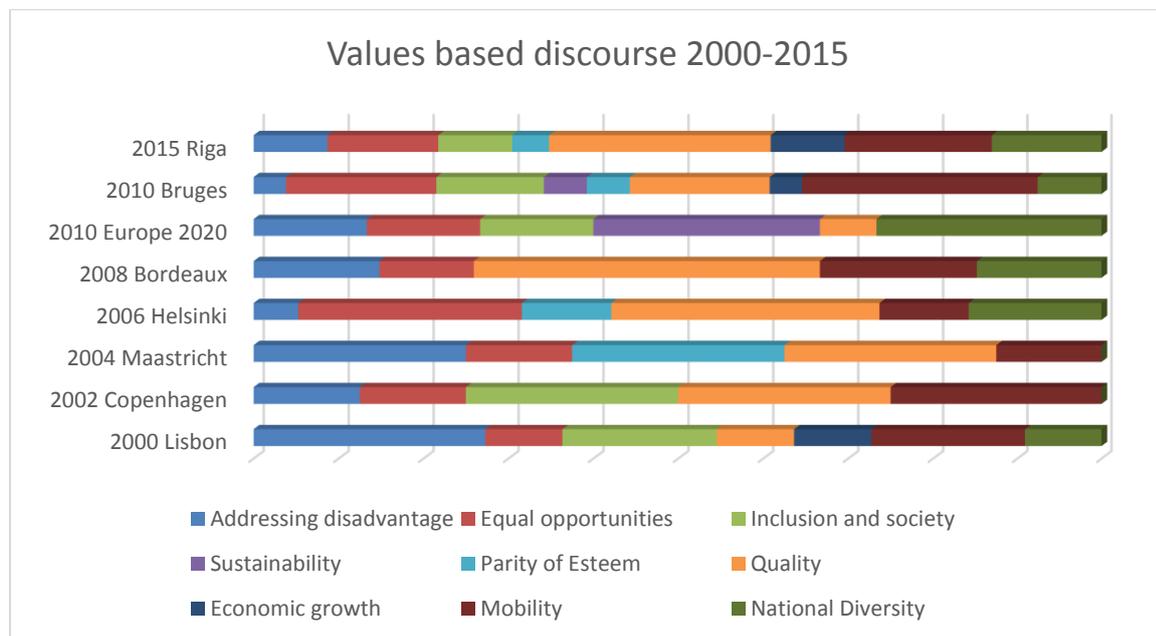


Figure 5-6 Values based discourse

On the other hand, references to socially based values such as addressing disadvantage, equal opportunities and inclusion have decreased relatively over the period (figure 5-6). To some extent they were replaced by educational quality, representing a specific focus on VET in itself. Sustainability, in a broad sense, including the climate emergency, circular economies and the green agenda, although a major theme in Europe 2020 (and looking ahead, the dominant theme in Europe 2030 (European Commission, 2019c), was not translated into VET policy by the Riga declaration, although there were some references in the Bruges communiqué, possibly drawn from policy overlaps, in a temporal sense, with Europe 2020. It was perhaps, unusual that sustainability was not more clearly linked to vocational education and training, which, by its nature, would support changes to bring

about a more sustainable society and economy. This may indicate resistance to the sustainability agenda at the time, or, alternatively, a narrow interpretation of VET. Both approaches are further considered in Chapter 8.

Certain generic values, although featuring in the ministerial declarations, were not included in the above analysis, which was restricted to VET-specific values. These related to terms such as 'mutual trust' and 'transparency' and were viewed as European concepts. Mutual trust was referenced in all the ministerial declarations from Copenhagen to Bruges (but not in Riga) and was often linked to transparency, for example:

to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, (Copenhagen, p. 2)

and:

better transparency and mutual trust between education systems. (Bordeaux, p. 2).

It was noted that mutual trust was not a value expressed in the European space and that it was no longer referenced by ministers in 2015. As considered elsewhere in this chapter, there was a sense from this analysis of the texts that the project of Europeanisation was on the wane by 2015, at least in terms of VET policy making, and the omission of this significant value was perhaps a further sign of this.

Where transparency (referenced in all texts) was not specifically linked to mutual trust, it was linked to qualification systems:

through greater transparency in the recognition of qualifications and periods of study and training; (Lisbon, p. 5)

and:

making access to lifelong learning easier through: more transparency and easier recognition of qualifications and competences, (Riga, p. 5).

There was a series of actions to promote a single European Qualification Framework, increasingly articulated to National Qualification Frameworks, in order to aid recognition of national qualifications in other countries in Europe so that worker mobility would be facilitated. Although by Riga in 2015 transparency was also linked to accessibility, the predominant driver behind the value of transparency would appear to be economic. However, these values appeared to be aspirational, almost exhortational, rather than shared and it was not always clear that there was a common understanding of the meaning of transparency, nor indeed, mutual trust. As noted earlier, what this illustrated was the volatility of the values base for VET policy making, both over time and between spaces.

Moving forward in time from the Copenhagen declaration of 2002, very much seen as the overarching template for VET policy within the EU (at least through the narrative of the ministerial declarations), through to the Riga declaration of 2015 illustrated that the purpose of VET as expressed in the values discourse of the texts shifted from a balance between social inclusion, educational quality and the potentially economic opportunities presented by VET in terms of greater mobility to a greater emphasis on educational quality and more economic drivers, seen through explicit references to economic growth in the post Europe 2020 communiqués (figure 5-7).

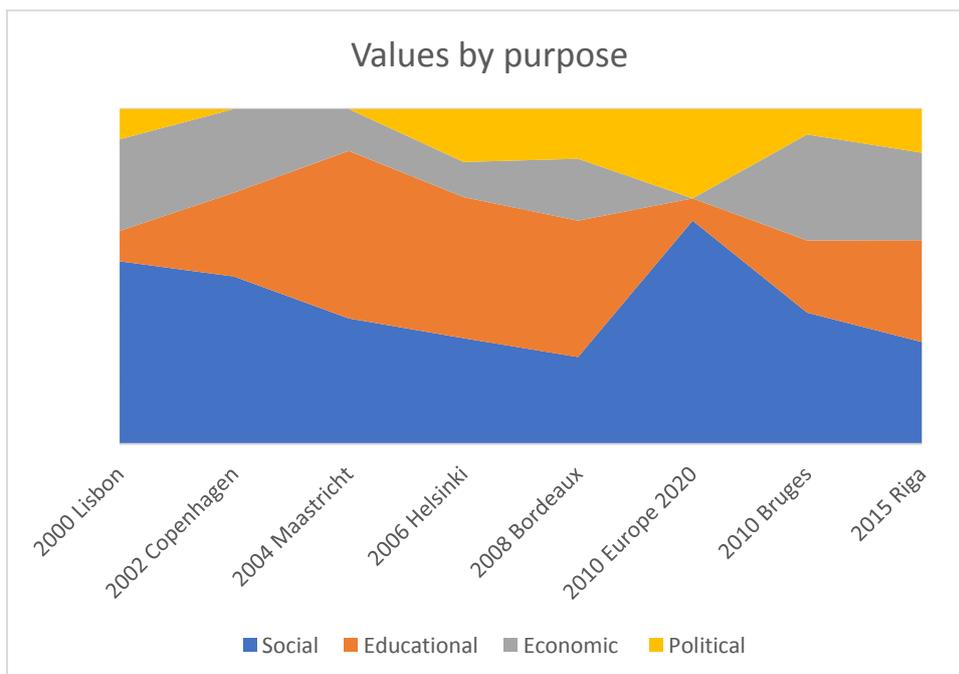


Figure 5-7 Values by purposes

5.4.5 Structures and agents

Figure 5-8 shows types of structures (Chapter 1) referenced in the texts, assigned to key purposes derived from the texts. Thus, for example, VET policy structures were viewed in a global context in all texts other than the Maastricht declaration and organisational structures were given increasingly more emphasis within the ministerial declarations.

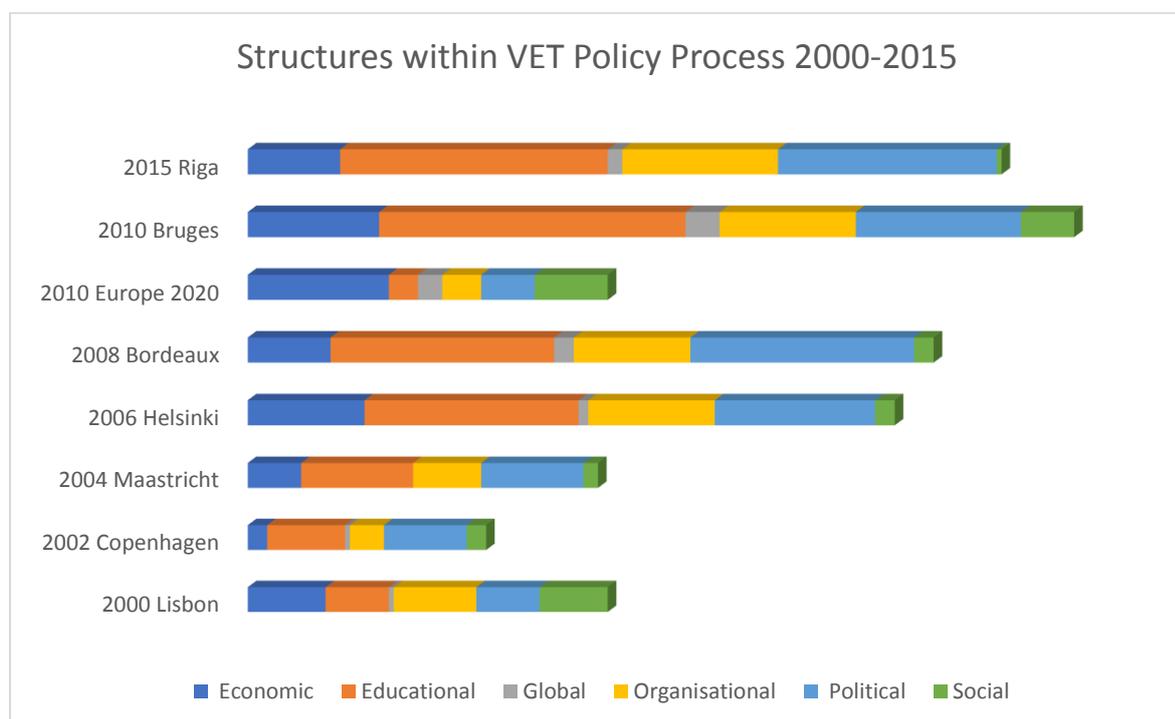


Figure 5-8 Structures within VET policy process

Economic structures, such as the labour market (referenced in all texts), became more emphasised over time, arguably at the expense of social structures (for example the welfare state and also society itself) although these were emphasised more within the European strategies than in the ministerial texts. Educational structures (education and training systems, VET institutions, VET policies) featured consistently within the ministerial communiqués and were emphasised more in the Lisbon strategy of 2000 than by the Europe 2020 strategy ten years later. Organisational structures such as databases, methods of coordination and communication and reporting mechanisms were developed over the

period, as the infrastructure for European VET policy became established. Politically, structures of the European Union (in particular) and member states were more prominent in the sub-European space, and gained more prominence over time. These included structures such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as well as committees and even the Copenhagen process itself.

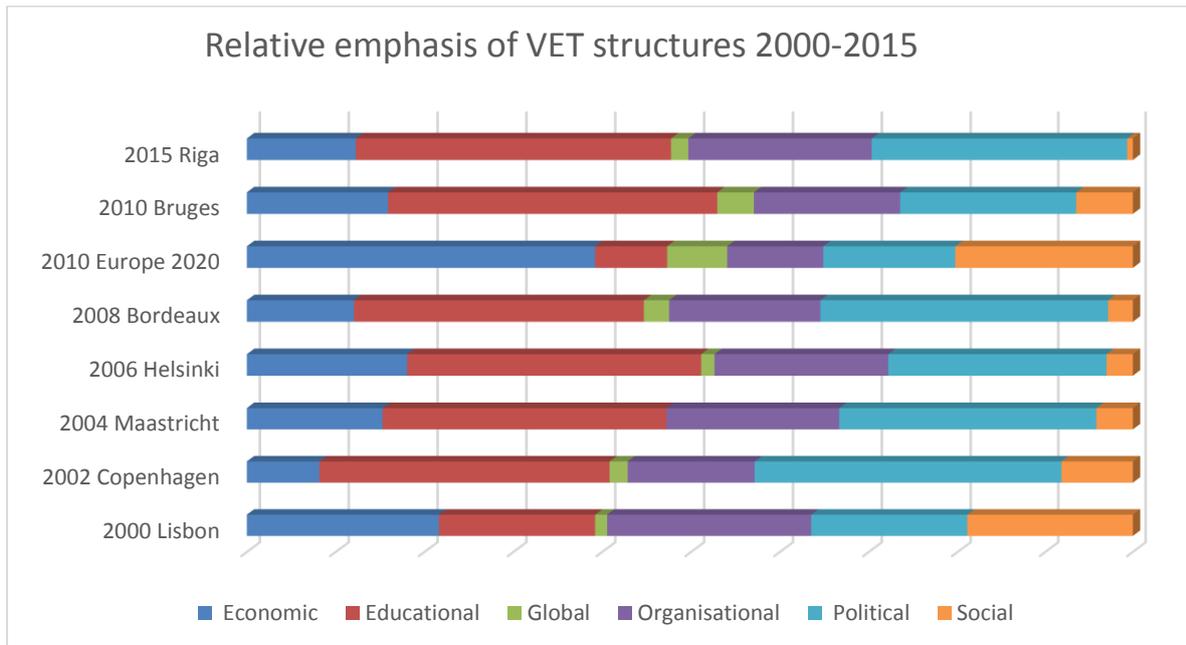


Figure 5-9 Relative emphasis of VET structures

Based on the relative references to structures (figure 5-9), the overall picture over time was that the emphasis on social structures decreased whilst the emphasis on educational structures increased. In 2010, although there was still reference to social structures, the Europe 2020 strategy was worded to place significant emphasis on economic structures such as businesses, firms and companies for national VET policy making. This would imply that VET policy was being made, at least in structural terms, between 2000 and 2010 from a social, political, economic and educational perspective and post 2010 from an economic and educational standpoint. The purpose of VET as defined by the structures involved in policy making had changed over time.

In terms of the morphogenetic approach (section 5.3), structural conditioning in the European dimension from a broad range of structure types followed by interactions gave

way to the elaboration phase whereby revised economic and global structures came to the fore in Europe 2020. In the sub-European dimension, a dominance of educational structures was maintained but political structures became more significant than social structures. This was represented by the infrastructure established for the centralisation of European VET policy, as envisaged by the VET ministers: for example, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This might suggest that Europeanisation was still an influence on VET policy making in the later part of the period, although because the political structures analysed contained both European and national structures, this cannot be concluded from this part of the analysis. Europeanisation is discussed further in Chapter 8.

On the other hand, references to agents (Chapter 1) showed different patterns (figure 5-10). The EU space dimension indicated an increase in economic agency (commercial, social partners and the workforce) and social beneficiaries (groups for whom the policies were intended) at the expense of VET agents (teachers, institutions) between 2000 and 2015. The sub-EU space dimension also indicated an increase in economic agency, together with VET agency, at the expense of the social beneficiaries. These participants for whom the policies were intended may not be agents in a conventional definition but they play a part in the production of policy as potential beneficiaries from it. Their agency may be one of presence or absence rather than direct decision making and so it was considered valid for the purposes of this study. These groups include young people, adults, migrants (Chapter 7) and those defined by educational terms (for example, people lacking qualifications).

With the exception of the Copenhagen declaration, which set out a process still being referred to in 2015, and can be seen as an outlier in terms of its drafting and its longevity as a policy reference point, the references to political agents (European institutions and member states) did not change much over the period (figure 5-10). However, European institutional agents were mentioned on more occasions than member state agents. This may indicate, in terms of agency, that Europeanisation was still a key driver, even by 2015.

No specific social agents (for example members of the third sector) were identified from the texts, although, of course, social structures were identified. In the main, references to structures were more prevalent than references to agents.

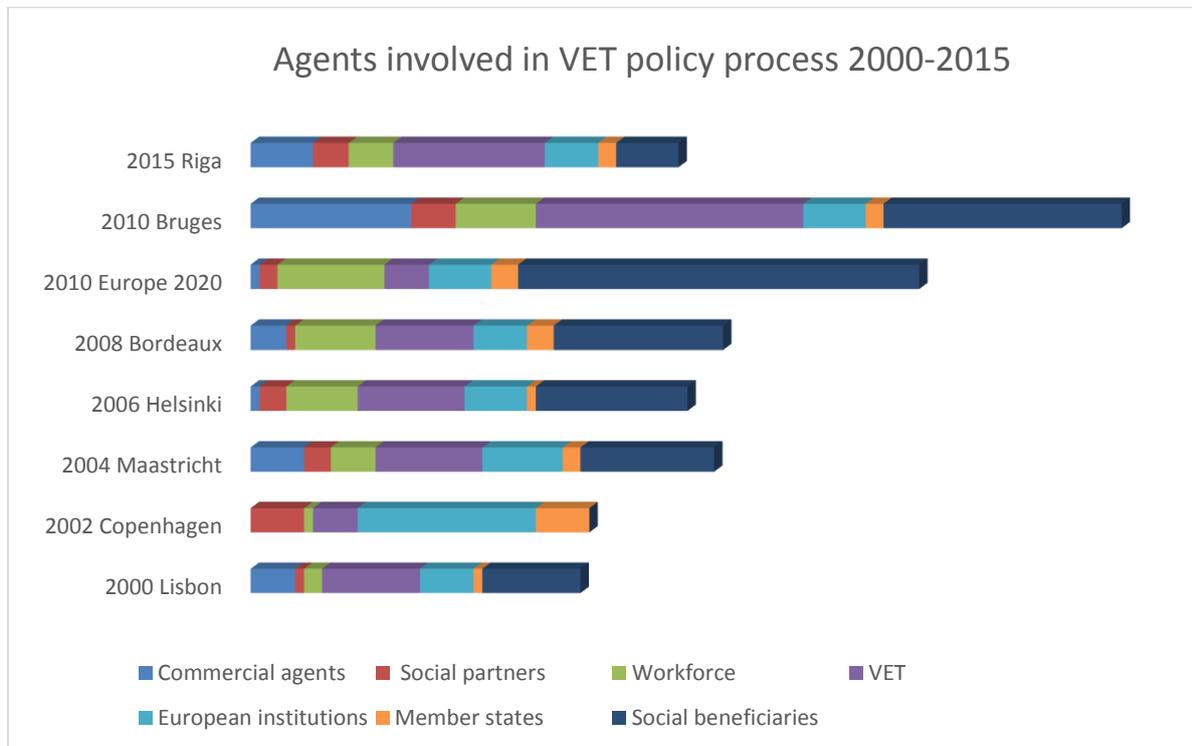


Figure 5-10 Agents involved in VET policy making

From the perspective of agents, therefore, few social agents were engaged in policy making, suggesting a greater emphasis on economic and educational purposes. There was, however, in most texts, a greater emphasis on social beneficiaries rather than economic beneficiaries (workforce). This suggested that VET policy was intended to have social benefits, although the policies made were principally concerned with iVET participants, who might be considered as a future workforce, rather than VET within lifelong learning, which arguably has a more immediate social and economic remit.

5.5 Conclusion

In this section, I addressed the consistency of the practical reasoning argumentation within the texts, summarising whether the underlying purposes have changed over time and between spaces. I have done this by comparing the dominant purposes apparent from the analyses of the different elements of argumentation (Appendix D) and subsequently drawn out the complexity of purposes identified for VET, relating these trajectories to policy theories identified in section 5.3 before discussing specifically the volatile nature of VET policy making in this context. Finally, I discussed the elements of the first research question relating to the discourse of VET purpose within the EU and sub-EU spaces which set the scene for further comparisons with national VET policy making in Chapters 6 and 7.

In terms of practical reasoning argumentation, the texts were predominantly concerned with actions to change VET policy (means) and the values that supported these actions rather than claims and goals for the policies once made (Appendix D). This would be expected from the ministerial texts as they were concerned with VET policy making rather than the overall strategic direction of the EU. The two strategic texts put forward social values but any type of claim (educational) was only found in the Lisbon text, which also set predominantly educational goals, to be achieved by political means. In 2010, the Europe 2020 text made no specific claims for VET and the goals set did not indicate a focus on any particular purpose for VET. This was reflected in the VET-related actions: economic, educational and political purposes were identified. The most striking difference between 2000 and 2010 in the EU dimension was the replacement of educational goals with educational actions and the emphasis on economic actions for achieving VET policy, which, as previously stated, reflected the different global contexts in which the two strategies were developed.

Over the full period, the sub-EU texts reflected social and educational values, but these were supplemented by both economic and political values in the Bruges and Riga texts. Educational goals were consistently set, but the predominant method of achieving these

was by political means. The Riga text was mainly concerned with values and means whereas the Copenhagen text had a strong political focus but a more broadly-based argumentation. This shift from a clear justification of policy in an early text to what was, in effect, an action plan, represented the evolution of the process of VET policy making, within the sub-EU space, even though the purposes were becoming increasingly complex. There appeared to be a difference in temporal direction between the EU and the sub-EU spaces, creating a dynamic dimension to the discourse (Chapter 1).

The balance between structures and agents was also noted, as this interaction brings about the policy change according to Bhaskar (2015) and Archer (2017c). However, there were clearly more references to structures than agents. I considered whether the presumed hierarchical structure of the EU imposes a top down approach to VET policy making and that some agents are viewed by those exercising greater power within the policy processes as more engaged in the implementation phases of VET policy than its originating stages. A further consideration was whether the purposes indicated by these structures and agents were consistent with those indicated within the PDA. How complex was the VET policy making context becoming? As outlined on page 150, in the sub-EU space the goals for VET policy became increasingly educational and social over time, although there had been a strong economic emphasis in Europe 2020. The means were all VET related. However, some means were more directly educational, for example those dedicated to achieving a better quality of VET, whereas the Europeanisation and national VET actions were more politically linked. As previously noted, there was a difference in emphasis on purpose from the means between the two spaces, the EU space being more political at the expense of educational.

Although socially linked values did underpin the texts, this initial influence was augmented by additional economic drivers, the politicised values relating to national diversity and educationally related values of quality during the period. Economic growth may appear to have decreased in significance but mobility became of greater significance, in terms of the number of references. The extent to which this is an economic value rather than an educational one is debated elsewhere (Chapter 7), but in all probability in this context, the

intention was economic. However, agents were not as strongly politically linked whereas there was strong political structure engagement.

The morphogenic approach outlined in section 5.3 has been redrawn, as derived from this analysis of structures and agents as follows (figure 5-11):

Structural Conditioning – economic and educational purposes (EU)
educational and political purposes (Sub-EU)

Educational Interaction - economic and social beneficiaries (EU)
economic and educational agents (Sub-EU)

Structural Elaboration – economic and social purposes (EU)
educational and political purposes (Sub-EU)

Figure 5-11 Revised VET policy making morphogenetic approach

(adapted from Archer, 2017d)

This demonstrated a spatial difference as well as a temporal difference in the two EU approaches to VET policy making between 2000 and 2015. What emerged from the analysis was a complex picture of VET policy making in two different spaces, with a strong compulsion towards centralisation or Europeanisation (political purposes) as well as an educational trajectory from those more closely connected to VET itself. This is illustrated in Figures 5-12 and 5-13 below, which were created from the PDA structure outlined in Appendix D.

In the early period of the study (2000- 2002), the VET purposes of the EU and sub-EU spaces were aligned in terms of values and means, but the goals and claims both differed, those from the EU being expressed as educational and those from the sub-EU space being predominantly political, linked to Europeanisation.

Adapted from Practical Reasoning Structure
(from Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012)

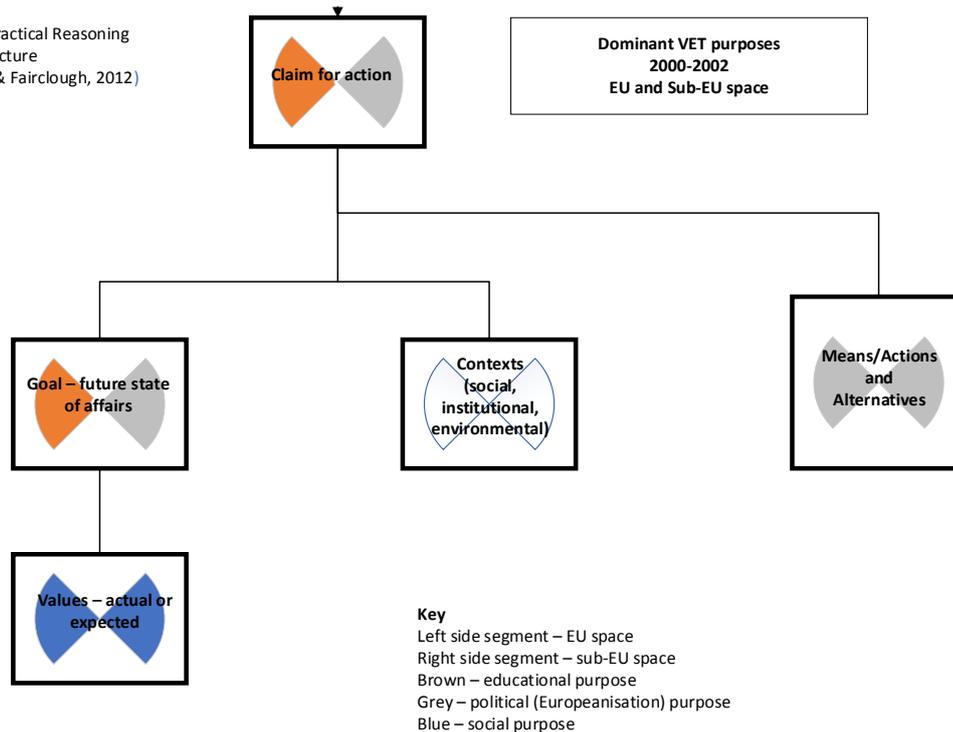


Figure 5-12 Dominant VET purposes 2000-2002

On the other hand, there was greater divergence of purpose between 2010 and 2015. Means were still viewed as political in both spaces, but the predominance of social purpose in the values documented by the EU was not mirrored in the sub-EU space, instead there was a balance between social and economic purpose. Social and economic purposes were prevalent in the goals presented by the EU whereas education was the predominant purpose in the sub-EU goals. However, this was reversed in the case of claims, where the EU claims had an overtly educational purpose but the sub-EU claims had social and economic origins.

Adapted from Practical Reasoning Structure
(from Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012)

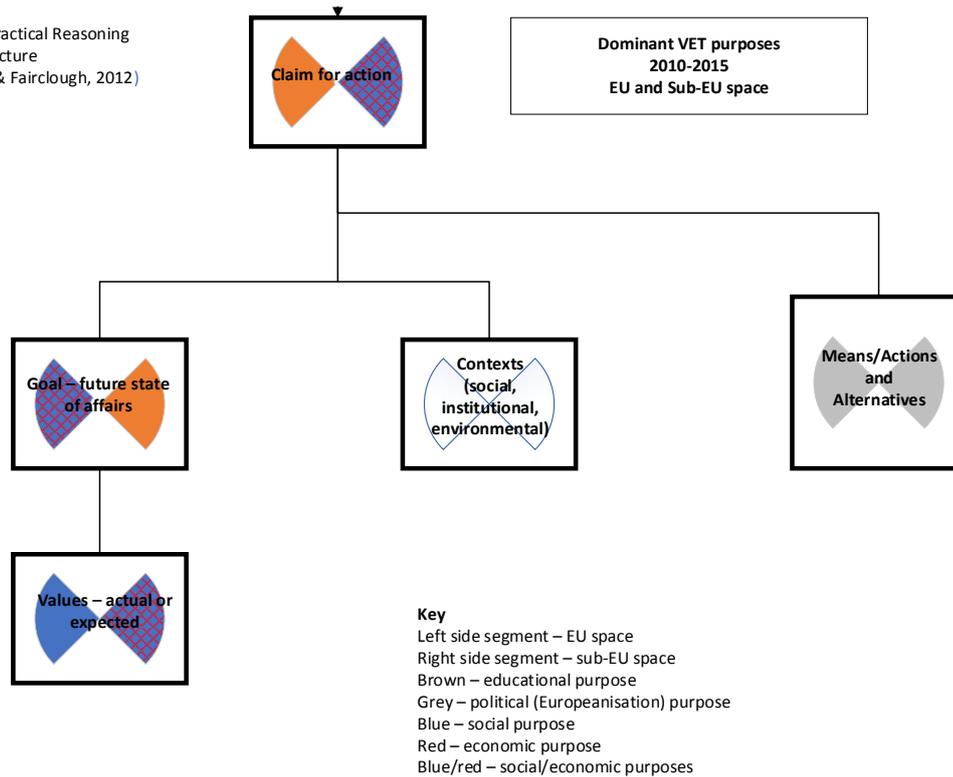


Figure 5-13 Dominant VET purposes 2010-2015

It therefore remained questionable as to whether the two spaces were working in opposition to each other throughout the period or whether the phenomenon of opposition occurred at different times because of changes in context. A change of discourse can be seen between the Bordeaux text and the Bruges and Riga texts. The impact of the Europe 2020 strategy was observed within the Bruges and Riga texts and yet in some instances they were more akin to the other ministerial declarations than to the immediately preceding strategy.

Derived from the values analysis, the issue of national diversity was raised in the Lisbon strategy and has gained more significance since 2006. This may reflect a more nuanced approach to policy making following the EU expansion in 2004 (Chapter 2) and a recognition of the principle of subsidiarity (Chapter 2) in relation to VET policy although, as is considered later (Chapter 6), this may be called into question by the predominance of perspectives about the purpose of VET: from an economic point of view VET became fair game for EU

policy making, if VET has a social purpose it can be left to policy makers in member states. Similarly, this may also reflect an increased push back against Europeanisation although whether this takes the form of Europeification (Antunes, 2016) or policy divergence per se (Silova, 2012) is open to debate (Chapter 8).

It is clear from this chapter that many VET policies were being developed simultaneously, from the design of iVET policies to address youth unemployment to cVET policies supporting lifelong learning. This was the reason for selecting this form of analysis to determine the underlying purpose of the discourse, in particular, to look for coherence of policy making. With this in mind, there was significant discourse about the European VET space (Grek et al., 2009), which did not gain traction in the way that the Bologna process established the European Higher Education Area (Brøgger, 2018). Although a full comparison between these two processes is outside the scope of this thesis, there may have been a clarity of purpose about higher education that was missing from VET (Chapter 2). Bologna, despite notable outliers (England) has made common ground. VET within the EU has not. Did the focus on VET, started within the Lisbon strategy, result in policy changes to VET within a national space and did these changes take different effect in different member states? I explored this further in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

As an exemplar of European methods of VET policy making, the above analysis raised many questions and presented many challenges in addition to the overarching question of what the purpose of VET is represented to be by reference to these key European texts. The PDA was conducted in depth to uncover the real levels of the relationships between two VET policy making spaces (EU and sub-EU). These relationships have been shown to build complexity into VET policy making and to alter the nature of the discourse about the purpose of VET over time, but in differing ways. As anticipated, Research question 1 was only partially addressed in this chapter. The complexities of EU VET policy making have been drawn out of the analysis. It is also recognised that national VET policies may be of more significance later in the period of study (i.e. post Europe 2020) (Chapters 6 and 7). The discourse of VET policy has thus been shaped initially by social and educational purposes but latterly by political purposes, to a greater extent than perhaps was expected. The balance

between economic and political purpose has fluctuated, especially since 2010. Differences between spaces have also been recognised and policy making in such a complex context appears to be more akin to a series of currents, rising and falling as a result of different temperatures and levels of salinity, equated with policy contexts (policy making gyre concept, section 4.7), rather than a readily discernible cycle.

To conclude this aspect of the discussion, these relationships appeared to indicate policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) towards political determinations of VET policy, rather than VET's purpose being grounded from economic or social perspectives. This indicated intentions of policy convergence (Aarkrog & Jørgensen, 2008) or Europeanisation (Alexiadou et al., 2010), perhaps from the two strategy texts. However, the increase in references to national diversity as a value might suggest differing political tensions by 2015 (Silova, 2012). The increase was observed in both spaces. If national VET policies become of more significance, unless they have already been aligned with EU policies (Europeanisation), then neither Europeanisation nor Europeification (Antunes, 2016) is likely to be occurring. Instead the political differences within different member states, in particular the difference between neoliberalism and social democracy ideologies (Donnelly & Evans, 2018) may preserve different perspectives on VET. In their policy analysis framework, Rizvi and Lingard (2010, pp. 54-56) presented a digest of other factors influencing national education policy making that demonstrate the multiplicity of influences over national systems, before considering the EU dynamic. Was the recognition of national diversity mere rhetoric designed to acknowledge the principle of subsidiarity, which, with the advent of the European Semester, seemed to be increasingly less applied to VET policy? This is further addressed in the European Semester analysis (Chapter 6).

6. European and national policy making through the European Semester process (2011-2019)

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore European Semester documentation (Country Reports - CRs, National Reform Programmes – NRPs, and Country Specific Recommendations - CSRs) through a critical discourse analysis (N. Fairclough, 2015). The documents were used as a representation of EU and national (Danish, English, Finnish and Scottish) VET policy over the period 2011-2019, after the European Semester process replaced the less rigorous approach of the OMC, which had been established by the Lisbon strategy (Chapter 2). I examined the relationship between EU and national VET policies (as communicated through the EU's formal mechanisms), a different set of perspectives from those considered in Chapter 5. The findings therefore complement the findings of Chapter 5 in addressing research question 1:

How has the evolving relationship between national VET policy making and EU VET policy making shaped discourse about the purpose of VET? (from a different perspective than that of Chapter 5)

and begin to address research question 2:

To what extent and for what reasons have VET policies in the four countries converged or diverged between 2000 and 2019 (this chapter covers 2011 to 2019 whereas Chapter 7 covers the whole period).

I have offered a different but related interpretation of the mechanisms within the EU that influenced national VET policies (and vice versa) and the shallows or depths reached by the EU's policy-making operations in each country, as interpreted from the official documents. This interpretation contributes to developing understanding of the purposes of VET policy from EU and national perspectives and the climate for VET policy making created by the European Semester process (Chapter 2). After reviewing these mechanisms, I developed

illustrative, comparative case studies (Stake, 1995), covering policy making in adult VET (section 6.4.2); young people's drop-out from and completion of VET programmes (section 6.4.3); apprenticeships (section 6.4.4) and the role of VET institutions in national VET policy making (section 6.4.5). The rationale for selecting these case studies was to compare VET policy making for a student group; when used to overcome perceived barriers for young people's engagement in education; for a suite of programmes and in establishing a sense of place for VET. These enabled me to further explore policy making convergence in spatial, scalar and temporal dimensions (Chapter 1) and at an ontological actual level (Chapter 3). Consideration of the findings is then set within the context of the policy gyre conceptualisation (Chapter 4).

6.2 Method: Critical Discourse Analysis

The version of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) chosen to explore the discourse within the texts was based on that set out by Fairclough in 'Language and Power', (N. Fairclough, 2015). I selected this method as it was more suitable for operational documents, as compared with the more overtly political strategies laid out in the texts examined in Chapter 5, whilst still providing an analytical mechanism for explanation and critique that aligns with the critical realism stance.

The Semester processes (Chapter 2) sought to develop and embed the economic and social objectives that the EU had put forward in Europe 2020 by critiquing and influencing national policies in order to encourage policy change and measure the progress of such change towards achieving the set objectives. CDA, because of its phases of description, interpretation and explanation, was an appropriate framework within which to analyse the discourses of purpose and change of VET policy within the European Semester texts. My interpretation of critical realism in terms of structure and agency (Chapter 3) related to Fairclough's method as he recognised that 'explanatory critique' of this nature allowed a focus on social structures and strategies as well as social change (N. Fairclough, 2015, p. 49). In this chapter, the method was applied through an overall description of the discourse relating to VET policy within the sets of texts (section 6.4.1) followed by an interpretation of

the context of the discourse within each illustrative case study (sections 6.4.2 - 6.4.5) and an explanation in terms of VET policy convergence or divergence (section 6.5).

As with the texts in Chapter 5, the texts used in this chapter are defined by being official documents of the European Semester, rather than by any other selection process. The sole choice made about this document population was whether to examine all years from 2011 to 2019, which I chose to do because this built in a temporal dimension to the comparative process, in addition to the spatial (geographic) and scalar (hierarchical) comparators. The combination of dynamic, temporal, scalar and spatial dimensions (Chapter 1) supported the exploration of a policy gyre (Chapter 4).

After ascertaining from an initial study of the documents and information on the EU websites how the Semester process operated (Chapter 2), I made observations about the nature of the texts (section 6.4.1). Coding of the texts was then carried out in three stages, using nVivo. The initial coding was based on the CSRs as these summarised the previous round of documents (CRs and NRPs) in the annual European Semester cycle and represented the outcome of the negotiations between the EU and the member state about policy making. Themes relevant to VET policy making were drawn out from the CSRs (Appendix C). The NRPs were coded using the CSR themes. Because of the length of the CR documents, these documents were coded against six of the key CSR themes relating to education, skills, VET, learning, adults and apprenticeships. From these CSR themes, those relating specifically to VET were coded again, using codes arising from the VET themes, such as apprenticeships, adult VET and unemployment. Charts drawn from these codings are included in Appendices F, G and H. A further coding of the problematisations (Bacchi, 2009) relating to VET (for example, low completion rates, lack of employer engagement) was also carried out from the VET related CSR themes (see charts at Appendix I). Bacchi's problematisation analysis was seen as a useful addition to CDA, although it has been viewed as more socially constructionist than realist at its roots (Chapter 4). However, the framework of the problematisation analysis offered an additional opportunity for explanatory critique through delving below the surface of VET policy making discourse.

Within the themes coded by using these methods, it was possible to identify convergence and divergence of VET policies and the related purposes of VET policy by tracing the policy making references through the various texts (spatial) and over the period (temporal). The full list of codes is provided at Appendix C. The subsequent selection of topics for the case studies was based on the frequency of references to policies being highlighted over more than one period (Appendices F, G and H). These charts illustrated the differing emphases within the texts placed by nations on VET policy themes. These are set out in Table 6-1:

Table 6-1 Case study topics

Section	Case study subject	VET policy making perspective addressed	Countries where most frequently referenced (Appendix G)	EU emphasis (Appendix H)
6.4.2	Adult VET	cVET, an ill-defined student group, either in terms of age or employment status	Denmark Finland Scotland UK	2011 2013 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019
6.4.3	Drop-out and completion	A perceived problem - mainly linked to iVET and youth unemployment	Denmark	2011 2012 2013 2014
6.4.5	Apprenticeships	A VET suite of qualifications, spanning the boundary between education institution and employer	Denmark Finland Scotland UK	2011-2019
6.4.6	VET institutions	Colleges, training providers and others delivering iVET, cVET and hVET, whether independent organisations or governed by the	Denmark Scotland UK	2015 2018

Section	Case study subject	VET policy making perspective addressed	Countries where most frequently referenced (Appendix G)	EU emphasis (Appendix H)
		state or municipality		

As can be seen, these topics were not all prioritised (in terms of frequency of textual references) by all the countries in the study or, indeed, by the EU. These differences support the analysis by looking at exceptions as well as areas of major policy focus (for example, apprenticeships). The case studies are used to present comparisons of the national VET policies put forward by each country (either by presence or absence of such a policy) and the policy recommendations from the EU. The case studies explored whether VET policy purposes and drivers were converging or diverging (Chapter 2) between the four countries between 2011 and 2019 and enable consideration as to why this might be the case (Research question 2). They also served to explore the purposes of VET policy as well as to interpret the trajectory towards an underlying convergence or divergence of policy drivers and the relationships between the EU and the countries in terms of VET policy making. The problems that the policies were put forward to address (Bacchi, 2009) (Appendix I) were also grouped by VET policy purpose (for example, social, economic, educational) and the comparative orientation of this purpose between the perspective of each country and the EU was considered within the conclusion section (6.5) as part of the response to the research questions.

6.3 Relevant literature

This chapter draws on literature referenced in Chapters 1 and 2, in particular literature about EU and national VET policies and VET policy discourse as well as the theories of policy convergence and divergence put forward by, for example, Holzinger and Knill (2005) and Aarkrog and Jørgensen (2008), in order to set the scene for this specific analysis. Since the texts used were drawn from two scalar dimensions (the supranational and the national), the influence of globalisation and hence neoliberalism viewed as a dominant social imaginary of globalisation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 42) as a converging mechanism (specifically

Europeanisation as put forward by Cort (2010), Alexiadou et al. (2010) and Antunes (2016)) was foregrounded, although Rizvi and Lingard (2010) contended that globalisation was not necessarily a root cause of education policy developments. They instead suggested looking more deeply into sources of policy change, rather than ascribing them solely to globalisation. As an example, Jørgensen (2016) outlined the circular nature of Danish policies designed to address drop-out from VET, suggesting that the unintended consequences of many policies led to further policy changes without due consideration of the context. This clearly contributed to a complex national policy environment and, in my view, this may have consequently mitigated the influence of any EU policy directives. This supported the view of Alexiadou and Lange (2014), who had found that the OMC had a limited influence on UK education policies.

In an earlier study of the OMC, Alexiadou et al. (2010) had concluded that bottom up and top down processes did indeed apply to EU education policy making and that the OMC (as the forerunner of the Semester) influenced national education policies through the introduction of particular discourses. West (2012), however, observed that VET seemed to be occupying a smaller place in Europe 2020 than in the earlier phases of the OMC because the Europe 2020 strategy had other economic priorities. However, this is to place VET as having a solely economic purpose and, as can be seen from Chapter 5, this did not appear to be the case.

The assumption made in accounts of Europeanisation (and indeed, Europeification) was that supranational VET policy making will result in policy convergence. This may be expected through having common policy levers (for example, the Youth Guarantee), a common policy driver (reducing youth unemployment) or a common policy purpose (social justice or economic recovery or political coherence). Policy convergence literature was conflicted about what was expected to be converging and similarly about what was expected to diverge (Chapter 1). Divergence was not, however, simply the reverse of convergence. Policies may appear to be on a convergent or divergent trajectory as a result of sticking at different spatial or temporal points. The context, including individual policy trajectories, is thus an important factor in the consideration of policy convergence or divergence (Raffe, 2005).

Distinctions can be made between Europeanisation of education policy (relating to EU education policy) and Europeification of national policy and the relationships between the two, as summarised by Antunes (2016) (Chapter 2). Antunes concluded that national educational policy extended much further than the EU remit, and that this might appear as divergent, or perhaps as an extension of EU intent not made explicit by EU policy makers. On the other hand, in their specific analysis of lifelong learning policies designed to reduce youth unemployment in nine EU countries, Valiente et al. (2020) found evidence of convergence towards a VET policy purpose (economic), based on EU policy solutions, but noted that the national design of the policies did not necessarily converge.

Literature about specific convergence and divergence between the countries of study was summarised in Chapter 2 and also by Pither (2020). Relevant to this chapter was a recognition of the increasing divergence of VET policy between Scotland and England (Hodgson & Spours, 2014) and convergence of VET policies relating to economic purposes between Denmark and Finland (Jørgensen et al., 2018, Chapters 1 and 5).

6.4 Findings

This section firstly presents observations about the nature and origins of each type of text (CRs, NRPs and CSRs), including the formats and use of language and considers what is indicated about the relationship between the EU and the member states in the study (Research question 1) as well as the effectiveness of this process as a means of negotiating VET policy making between the EU and its member states, specifically whether it supports an overall (presumed) agenda of policy convergence (Research question 2). Secondly, a series of short case studies has been used to convey the differing approaches to VET policy making between the EU and the four countries and between the four countries. From these studies, VET policy purposes and drivers have been identified and the convergence or divergence between these policy purposes and policy drivers is drawn out.

6.4.1 European Semester Process

The differences in approach to the process were illustrated by the following examples from NRPs:

The three consultations are referred to as the “National Semester”. In the light of the closer coordination of the economic policy in the EU, this is a good example of a strengthened role for national Parliaments in the EU. (The Danish Government, 2014, p. 63);

Through the above measures, coordination of economic policy and the governance of the Member States has been strengthened significantly in the period 2010–2012. The priority areas will be taken into account in national policy (Finland) (Ministry of Finance, 2012, p. 14);

In 2011 and 2012, the European Council adopted recommendations for all Member States aimed at guiding national decision-making. (Finland) (Ministry of Finance, 2013 in abstract);

The process of governments identifying national bottlenecks, and then being held accountable for tackling them, has the potential to be a valuable way of encouraging reform, recognising the impact of measures on the aggregate EU economy whilst ensuring national ownership; (UK) (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 7);

The UK strongly supports Europe 2020 and the European semester as important developments in the EU's overall surveillance framework. (UK) (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 3).

The Danish and Finnish texts displayed the process as engaging the EU more closely with national policy making, without necessarily subjugating national identities. Whilst the UK also presented this viewpoint, the use of the word ‘surveillance’ suggested that the Semester process was already being viewed as a bureaucratic burden.

Country Reports (CRs)

As outlined in Chapter 2, the CRs were produced annually by the European Commission for each member state. This means that there were CRs for Denmark, Finland and the UK as a whole (Scotland is included within the UK). As the Semester process developed, a more sophisticated framework was used to structure the CRs (for example the use of benchmarking and red-amber-green ratings) and the documents became longer. The content varied, depending on what emphasis was placed by the European Commission on particular policy drivers. In 2011, for example, the focus was on the drivers established by Europe 2020; those of a 'smart economy' and an 'inclusive economy' (European Commission, 2010), interpreted through a VET perspective as educational improvement, economic recovery and social inclusion. An additional driver was that of political coherence within the EU: 'reinforcing economic, social and territorial cohesion' (European Commission, 2010). Although the CRs may have been seen as a summary of each member state's progress towards economic recovery, the commentary frequently included reference to social and educational policy (including VET policy). These texts were analysed from a VET policy perspective, coding specific parts of the text related to VET policy against the VET themes (Appendices F & H).

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

NRPs were initially planned to be produced on a triennial basis by member states, starting in 2005, following an EU led review of the Lisbon strategy implementation, which concluded that there had not been as much pace to policy changes as had been desired by the EU (West, 2012). There was no particular prescription for their format. However, within the Semester process, the NRPs were produced annually by each country, including Scotland, although Scottish policy examples were also then quoted in the UK NRP.

In response to the Europe 2020 strategy, Member States are to submit a National Reform Programme outlining their structural reform plans in April every year. The Scottish Government is strongly supportive of the Europe 2020 strategy, which is closely aligned with its own priority on economic growth. The Scottish Government believes it would be of assistance to the Commission to set out Scottish policies in greater detail in a separate Scottish NRP, intended to complement the UK NRP. This is in line with the Scottish Government commitment to engage positively with EU

Institutions and fully represent Scottish interests and highlight particular Scottish strengths (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 3);

The Scottish Government has contributed fully to the development of the UK National Reform Programme. In order to help provide the European Commission with more detail on the unique characteristics of Scotland and the distinct approach taken, the Scottish Government has also produced a distinct Scottish National Reform Programme 2012. This report is intended to complement the UK NRP and is in line with the Scottish Government's commitment to engage positively with EU Institutions and fully represent Scottish interests and highlight particular Scottish strengths (Her Majesty's Government, 2012, p. 6);

The devolved administrations have contributed fully to the development of the 2017 UK NRP. This is in line with the devolved administrations' commitment to engage positively with the EU Institutions and represent regional interests (Her Majesty's Government, 2017, p. 7).

Whilst appearing to welcome the Scottish initiative in the early period of the decade, the UK documents did not acknowledge it after the Brexit referendum (the first NRPs produced after that were those for 2017). This illustrated the divergence of opinion between the UK and the Scottish governments about policy following the referendum which had consequences for VET policy divergence, as well as many other matters.

For education and VET policy, the UK adopted the convention that most examples referred to England and that examples from the three devolved nations were specifically identified as such:

The 2012 NRP emphasises reporting on implementation of existing structural reform commitments. As such it sets out actions taken by the UK as a whole, including those by the UK Government and by the Devolved Administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where policies are devolved. This distinction is made clear throughout the document (Her Majesty's Government, 2012, p. 6).

Whilst the Danish and Finnish governments adopted similar formats over the period (and indeed, similar formats to those produced in 2008) the UK format changed in terms of length. West's interpretation of this (West, 2012) was that the UK was not taking this process very seriously in the early stages of the process, comparing the UK contributions unfavourably with those of Romania, a newly admitted country. Certainly, both the length of the documents and the effort put into their production (more analysis within the

Romanian document) varied, but alternatively it could be argued that a newly admitted country had more information to offer to the EU than an established member. The language used in the early UK NRPs does support West's interpretation, however. The greater length of UK NRPs in later years reflected more information being available from the Scottish NRP and the decision to tabulate the devolved nations progress towards the EU headline targets separately. This added more pages to the reports, without necessarily more positive engagement on the part of the UK, signposting the disengagement from EU policy making that was evident several years before the Brexit referendum and hence, divergence from the EU influences on VET policy making.

Most NRPs examined contained an update against the EU's headline targets from Europe 2020, the policy progress against objectives in previously set CSRs and any further information that the country felt was relevant. The Scottish NRPs contained pictures and infographics, features not observed in the other three NRPs, although Finnish NRPs included more graphs and tables than the Danish or UK NRPs. The relative informality of the Scottish NRPs, especially in the post Brexit referendum period (Chapter 8) may reflect not only the fact that there was no formal requirement to produce such a document but also the Scottish government's wishes to build a closer relationship with the EU than the UK had established.

we remain a committed player on the European stage (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 2);

This NRP also sets out where the Scottish Government is taking action, within the powers available to it, against the European Commission's CSRs provided to the UK. (The Scottish Government, 2016, p. 6);

In January 2018 we published. 'Scotland's place in Europe: People, jobs and investment' which provided detailed analysis on the economic, environmental and wider social benefits for Scotland of retaining membership of the Single Market, as well as the benefits of the free movement of people for Scotland's demographic needs and sustainable economic growth (The Scottish Government, 2018, p. 3).

The NRPs might be thought to express the policy drivers of each country, where these

differed from the EU's stated position. However, due to the methods of reporting that all countries adopted, my sense was that the documents reflected what each country's policy makers believed the EU wanted to read, rather than necessarily reflecting the actual policies being deployed. An example in the UK related to University Technical Colleges, described by a CR as:

The UTCs will train up to 50 000 young unemployed people to work in particular sectors, such as engineering, business and other practical skills (European Commission, 2012, p. 20);

whereas, in fact, they were established to attract young people from schools at the age of 14 and train them into technical routes, with the overall sponsorship of a university. There has been no engagement between UTCs and young unemployed people. This implied an alternative route into higher education (albeit possibly hVET) rather than into technical education. It was not clear whether this type of misunderstanding was ever corrected within the Semester process. The UTC rollout within England has been the subject of subsequent, major criticism (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2019) and embarrassment may have led to ignoring this error. This approach to misinformation highlighted a lack of interest in engaging in the Semester process on behalf of the authors of the UK text.

Scottish NRPs contained significant amounts of data about participation rates and qualification levels, as well as the levels of Scottish investment in education. This was significant because the UK NRPs for the corresponding period did not always report the same information that Scotland provided. This particularly seemed to occur when the Scottish data suggested that Scotland was performing better than England (for example, The Scottish Government (2018) and Her Majesty's Treasury (2018)). It was certainly the case that the UK did not directly report against the EU headline targets, the only member state in the EU not to do so. Instead, the EU calculated certain data for the purposes of the Semester cycle but also left blank the UK's entries in sections of published benchmarking tables (Eurostat, 2021).

The authorship of NRPs also varied between countries. In Finland, NRPs were produced by the Ministry of Finance (Valtiovarainministeriö). In Denmark they were authored by the

Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior on behalf of the Danish Government. UK NRPs were authored by HM Treasury on behalf of HM Government until 2018 when they were authored and issued by the Treasury. The Scottish Government authored and produced all NRPs, which contained a foreword by a senior government minister. The authorship and badging indicated the policy purposes from a national perspective; the Finns treating NRPs as economic documents whereas the Danes considered NRPs to be both political and economic and the Scots considered them to be political. This was because the UK government still keeps control of the UK economy despite devolution of certain matters, including education and employment, to Scotland. The Scottish Government's production of NRPs was an increasingly provocative act, aimed at forming alliances with the EU and other member states, rather than aligning with the UK government's priorities.

For the purposes of this chapter, I refined the distinction between these terms as follows:

Table 6-2 VET purpose terms

Term assigned to VET purpose	Meaning assigned in study
Political	Exercise of power and control through governing, governance and decision making
Economic	Management of resources (financial, human, physical) including distribution and trade
Social	A collection of individuals or communities in the same (notional) space with a dominant culture and value set
Educational	Furthering learning or personal development through the sharing of knowledge in a way that principally benefits individuals

The UK government, whilst initially treating the process as political and economic, downgraded it to an economic process, conducted by only one part of the government after the Brexit referendum, in keeping with their insistence that the EU was solely an economic partnership. The difference between this approach and the Finnish approach, for example, apart from consistency, was that Finland, part of the eurozone, had a series of economic

based documents to produce within the Semester, because of its precarious economic situation in the early part of the decade. Although the Finnish Ministry of Finance produced the NRPs, Finland did not regard the EU solely as an economic partnership:

The most important task of the European Union is to safeguard peace, security, prosperity and the rule of law on our continent. Strengthening Europe's relatively weakened position requires from the Union strong functional capacity, unity and the trust of citizens. The Community method is the way of guaranteeing the stable and equitable functioning of the Union as well as ensuring democracy in EU decision-making (Finnish Government, 2015, p. 34).

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

As the final part of the European Semester cycle, the CSRs were issued annually by the Council of Europe for each member state (Denmark, Finland and the UK). These were relatively short documents, summarising points from the CRs and the member state's response in its NRP and making short recommendations for policy action. Although the CSRs were produced by employees of the European Commission as part of the European Semester process before endorsement by the Council of Europe for action by the member states, there was variability between them, depending on to which member state they were addressed. This was also borne out by the fact that not every report carried the same number of recommendations. The CDA process was used to explore the representation of education and skills policies within the CSRs to establish what the dominant discourse or discourses might be and to relate this to the shaping of relationships between the EU and member states as expressed through VET policy discourse (Research question 1) as well as the convergence or divergence of VET policy purposes and drivers (Research question 2). The number of recommendations within the CSRs relating to education and skills policies (just over 22%) was compared with the overall number of recommendations (Figure 6-1). Based on this, I have assumed that these policies were important to the EU.

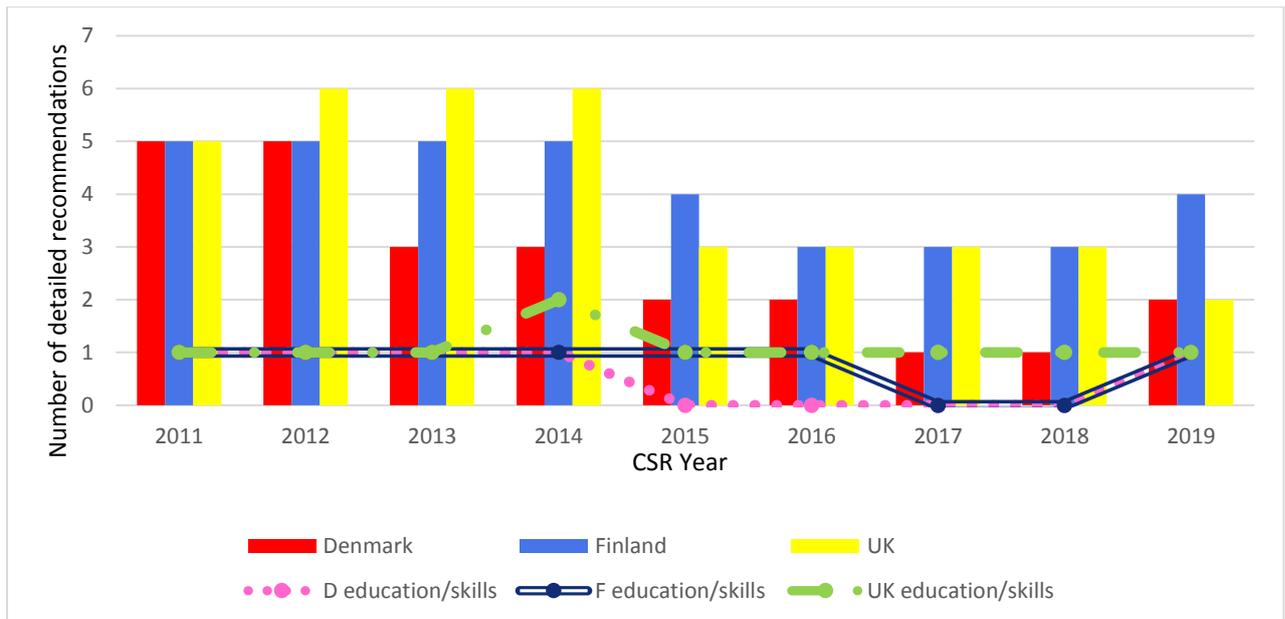


Figure 6-1 Total CSRs compared with numbers of skills related CSRs by year

Whereas all CSRs made clear the link between the labour market and VET (and, in some cases, general education) the language used by the EU text writers differed for the different countries as well as over the period from 2011 to 2019. Specific emphases are highlighted in Table 6-3 below.

Table 6-3 Language relating to education and skills in CSRs

Year	Denmark	Finland	UK
2011	'improve the quality of the education system' 'Reduce drop-out rates' 'increase the number of apprenticeship places available'	'improve the employability of older workers and their participation in lifelong learning'	'ensure that a higher share of young people enter the labour market with adequate skills' 'Address skill shortages by increasing the numbers attaining intermediate skills, in line with labour market needs'
2012	'Implement announced measures, without delay, to improve the cost-effectiveness of	'Implement the ongoing measures to improve the labour market position of young people	'Continue to improve the employability of young people, in particular those not

Year	Denmark	Finland	UK
	the education system, reduce drop-out rates, in particular within vocational education, and increase the number of apprenticeships.'	with a particular focus on skills development'	in education, employment or training, including by using the Youth Contract. Ensure that apprenticeship schemes are taken up by more young people, have a sufficient focus on advanced and higher-level skills, Take measures to reduce the high proportion of young people aged 18-24 with very poor basic skills'
2014	'Improve educational outcomes....., and the effectiveness of vocational training. Facilitate the transition from education to the labour market, including through a wider use of work-based training and apprenticeships.'	'Improve the labour-market prospects of young people, with a particular focus on vocational education'	'improving skills that meet employer needs' 'placing emphasis on addressing skills mismatches through more advanced and higher level skills provision and furthering apprenticeship offers.' 'Reduce the number of young people with low basic skills'
2019	'Focus investment-related economic policy on education and skills,'	'Improve incentives to accept work and enhance skills'	'Focus investment-related economic policy on ... training and improving skills'

Sources :Annual CSRs from Council of the European Union (2019) (Appendix B)

In the Danish texts, the discourse related firstly to a poor education system and to the need for greater numbers of apprenticeships. The cost-effectiveness of the education system was then stressed and finally a strong link between economic policy and education and skills was

made. Imperatives ranged from 'reduce' or 'increase' to 'improve' or 'facilitate' and finally changed to 'focus'. In the Finnish texts, there were complimentary references to lifelong learning but the recommendations were short and generally contain 'improvement' as the key imperative. Greater emphasis was placed on demographics and the ageing population and ways of addressing this labour market problem through active policies including more VET in the Finnish CSRs.

The UK, on the other hand, received relatively detailed recommendations from the Council of Europe suggesting an underlying concern about the whole education and skills system. These ranged from commentary about the numbers of young people leaving school with inadequate or low basic skills to observations about skills mismatches between employer needs and skills availability. As in the Danish texts, apprenticeship policy was heavily emphasised, but rather than merely a recommendation to increase the numbers of places to meet demand from potential apprentices, the UK's recommendation referred to increasing the uptake (supply of apprentices) onto apprenticeship schemes. Also, as in the Danish texts, the imperative language used was more direct: 'ensure', 'address', 'take measures' and 'reduce' although this had moderated to 'focus' in 2019.

This similarity between the Danish and UK 2019 recommendations represented the first instance of similarities between countries in terms of CSR recommendations; there are clear instances of repetition between years within a country (for example Finland in 2012 and 2014 from Table 6-3). One reason might be a convergence of education and skills policy purpose between Denmark and the UK (or, perhaps, a less diligent approach to the CSR produced for a country that had not been intended to be an EU member state by the time the 2019 CSRs were compiled). An alternative explanation could be policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) or policy diffusion (Jakobi, 2012) (Chapter 1). However, given the very different approaches to VET policy making in the two countries (Chapter 2), these types of natural occurrences of policy change seem less likely than an attempt by the authors of the CSRs to create convergence of policy purpose although there is a difference in terminology between education and training that signals a more expansive approach to VET on behalf of Denmark rather than in the UK.

In summary, however, there were differences between the CSRs, both between member states and over time, in the way education and skills policies are represented, even though there was a common backdrop of Europe 2020 targets. There were implications that some education and training systems were preferred to others (or thought to be operating more efficiently) because they were less critically referenced and also borne out by the tone of the language of influence used in the recommendations (Table 6-3).

Overall, the tailoring of the content of the texts to the individual member states and the differing responses by the member states in what were standard types of document contributed more to a singular relationship between the EU and each member state than to a broader field of policy learning (Cort, 2010), as was potentially facilitated by the VET ministerial declarations (Chapter 5). The official policy direction was set as top down, from the EU to the member states. However, there was evidence to suggest that member states had more influence over VET policy making, even within the rigidities of the European Semester, than might be initially apparent. This influence ranged from the initial adoption of a policy subject by the member state (for example the Danish recognition of the problem of drop-out) which was then reflected in the EU texts, to the complete disregard for CSRs from the UK. The UK's most frequently referenced VET policies related to apprenticeships:

The Government has placed apprenticeships at the heart of the skills system (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 44);

and national structures (Appendix G) as well as a directing of VET policy effort towards iVET and young people. However, recommendations from the EU around a Youth Guarantee (as adopted in Finland):

The UK could build on the current Youth Contract to implement a Youth Guarantee and address the problem of youth unemployment and those not in education, employment or training (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 9);

were not taken up by the UK, despite Scotland's expressed wishes to comply with this recommendation, documented in other national policy documents:

This ambition is supported by the endorsement from the Scottish Parliament, on 19 March 2014, of the principles and aims of the European Youth Guarantee to reduce youth unemployment in that all young people under the age of 25 would receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship (The Scottish Government, 2014b, p. 5).

This ensures that all 16-19 year olds are guaranteed an offer of a place in learning and provides a strong platform for our ambition to introduce the European Youth Guarantee (EYG) in Scotland. However it remains disappointing that the recommendations within Lord Smith's report falls well short of the proposals we would require to be able to fully implement the EYG (Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, 2014, p. 5).

Nor did the UK set national targets to facilitate ease of EU monitoring of the education headline targets, or to aid its own monitoring of policy progress in line with other EU member states:

However, in line with the Public Services Transparency Framework, the government has moved away from setting topdown targets as a performance management tool. The government has therefore not set any new targets under the Europe 2020 Strategy (Her Majesty's Government, 2014, p. 51).

The UK government was demonstrably being uncooperative with EU processes to which it had subscribed as a member state. In doing so it was fracturing a relationship with Scotland, one of the home nations (Raffe et al., 1999), as well as isolating itself from both the EU and peer member states even before the Brexit Referendum. In resisting engagement with EU VET policy making it was also neglecting any opportunities for VET policy learning, even if it had not wished for convergence of VET policy.

Differing relationships within the Semester process

Differing stances on the relationship with the EU were illustrated by the approach to consultation as set out in the NRPs (Table 6-4) and discussed below:

Table 6-4 National stakeholder engagement

Denmark	Finland	Scotland	UK (England)
<p>A contact committee has been set up in Denmark with representatives of relevant ministries and professional organisations. The committee is regularly informed about European policy questions of relevance for Europe 2020 and is consulted when the National Reform Programmes are being formulated. The Folketing (Danish Parliament) is also regularly involved and informed about discussions concerning both Europe 2020 and the National Reform Programmes (The Danish Government, 2011, p. 65).</p>	<p>The programme has been handled in accordance with the Government's decision-making procedures. In addition it has been presented in the Economic Council and to social partners in connection with EU procedures (Ministry of Finance, 2012 in foreword).</p>	<p>The Scottish Government has taken a proactive approach in engaging stakeholders with the Europe 2020 strategy. In addition to the close stakeholder working that typifies the general development of policy in Scotland, the Scottish Government held two specific stakeholder events on the Europe 2020 strategy; a Sub Rosa meeting in Brussels on 24 and 25 June 2010 and a workshop in Edinburgh on 23 February 2011 (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 4)</p>	<p>Substantial engagement with national parliaments and the wider public is critical to the success of Europe 2020. All the actions reported in this National Reform Programme have been subject to extensive public consultation, and examples of stakeholder involvement in delivering structural reforms are provided in the document. In addition, the UK's draft National Reform Programme 2010 was placed on the Treasury's website, the Department of Finance and Personnel's website, stakeholder engagement seminar with local and national interest groups was held on 23 February 2011 (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 8)</p>
<p>The Contact Committee for the Europe 2020 Strategy is the pivotal point with regard to national anchoring of the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester in</p>	<p>The National Reform Programme is presented to Parliament. The National Reform Programme was presented to the Cabinet</p>		<p>Substantial engagement with national Parliaments and the wider public is critical to the success of Europe 2020. The government consults widely on policy development as a</p>

Denmark	Finland	Scotland	UK (England)
<p>Denmark. The committee was established in 2001 in connection with the adoption of the Lisbon strategy and consists of approx. 30 regional and local authorities and a wide range of organizations with an interest in the European growth and employment agenda (The Danish Government, 2019, p. 47).</p>	<p>Committee on European Union Affairs on 6 April and the Government Plenary Session on 13 April. Parliament was notified of the preparation of the National Reform Programme with an E-communication on 13 April (Ministry of Finance, 2018, p. 43).</p>		<p>matter of course. The governing principle is proportionality of the type and scale of consultation to the potential impacts of the proposal or decision being taken, and thought is given to achieving real engagement rather than merely following bureaucratic process. Consultation forms part of wider engagement, and decisions on whether and how to consult should in part depend on the wider scheme of engagement. Since the NRP does not contain any new policy announcements, it is not subject to formal consultation (Her Majesty's Government, 2014, p. 7).</p>

From 2014, the UK government sought to create distance between the EU and the four constituent nations in terms of policy making (although the Scottish government continued to promote its relationships with the EU), whereas the Danish and Finnish governments maintained a more open relationship. This resulted in national VET policy makers in the UK having less opportunity for engagement with formal channels of VET policy making in the EU educational policy arena. As opportunities for VET policy makers to engage with the EU became less formal, in addition, the UK government was indicating that relationships with the EU were of less importance than previously. This was despite frequent 'cherry picking' references to EU member states in policy-influencing reports such as the Sainsbury report

(HM Government, 2016) and the Augar report (Augar, 2019) although there was no reference to EU VET policy but only other direct references to national VET policies. Although there is little evidence of any changes to policy making as a result of these references, this might indicate peer learning in policy-making rather than any top down or bottom up influences on UK VET policy (Chapters 2 and 8).

The frequency of occurrence of VET policy themes identified from the national texts and the EU texts were charted by year (Appendix H). These charts highlighted the changes in national VET policy priorities over time (as communicated to the EU) and those of the EU as communicated to Denmark, Finland and the UK. The EU's main policy priorities were apprenticeships and adult VET, with an increased emphasis on quality of VET, reform of VET systems and even funding of VET systems in later years. By contrast, the national priorities also reflected national structures, VET institutions and, in earlier years, VET for young people. This pattern suggested that the EU was perhaps more reflective of national VET policy priorities during the European Semester process, rather than dictating VET policies to the member states. This would imply a bottom up approach to VET policy making (Chapters 2 and 8) that was at odds with the perceived behaviour of the UK government with its resistance to any policy that appeared to be handed down by the EU.

This may be compared with the findings from Chapter 5, where, despite the two EU strategy documents (Lisbon and Europe 2020) setting out priorities for national VET policies, the VET specific ministerial documents did not necessarily mirror the EU strategies. Parallels may be drawn with the European Semester process, where the EU's role in shaping VET policy was operating through dialogue, rather than a process of practical reasoning argumentation (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). The consistent themes of apprenticeships and adult VET may be exceptions to this, but only in 2013 and 2016 did the frequency of EU references to apprenticeships exceed those of the member states and Scotland. In the main, Denmark and the UK dominated the discourse about apprenticeships as will be explored in the case study below (section 6.4.3). These findings confirmed that the relationship between national and EU VET policy making evolved over time and that the discourse of VET policy purpose was not solely shaped by the policies put forward by the EU as represented in the EU texts (Research question 1). Instead the discourse was also influenced by the positioning

of some member states, either perceived by the EU or self-promoted to demonstrate good practice in VET policy. Furthermore, this relationship was in turn affected by the dominant social, economic, political or educational contexts in which VET policy making was determined within each member state.

6.4.2 Case study: Adult VET

Adult VET, as analysed in this section of the study, included references to adult skills training, basic skills education, language learning for adult migrants, adult apprenticeships, adult workforce development and continuing professional development. It did not include recreational or lifelong learning references, as these are far broader concepts (Chapters 1 and 7). The focus of adult VET policies in terms of problematisation (Appendix I) was on low skilled adults. This was particularly emphasised by Denmark, Finland and the UK although the EU was more concerned about this issue in the UK than in either Denmark or Finland.

Each country made (or planned to make) changes to its policies for adult VET in the period of study. This was reflected in every case by the EU texts, usually the CRs (adult VET was only mentioned very briefly in CSR reports, once for Denmark, three times for Finland and twice for the UK). In most cases, the EU texts reflected the plans that the country had in place. There was, however, criticism of UK adult VET systems within the CSR report for 2012, and of UK adult education systems in general, as follows:

The UK also continues to have a relatively high number of adults with very poor basic literacy and numeracy skills, who are not well placed to benefit from vocational training (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 9).

This was not, however, translated into a recommendation and there were no recommendations or partial recommendations in CSRs about adult VET policy, a likely indicator of the low priority placed by the EU on adult VET policy at the time, despite identifying low skilled adults as a national problem for the UK.

However, the national discourse about adult VET policy was different. The approach taken to adult VET policy differed across the countries:

Table 6-5 Adult VET policy in NRPs

Denmark	Finland	Scotland	United Kingdom (England)
Adult learning centres (2013)	Small scale entrepreneurs (2011)	Workforce	Adult English and Maths (2014)
Recognition of prior learning (2011)	Adult immigrants (2012)	VET for low carbon economy	Maintenance loans for technical education at level 4 and above, when attending Institutes of Technology and National Colleges (2017)
VET for unemployed, unskilled, low skilled	Those with incomplete or only basic education between 30 -50 years of age (2015)	Parents (2013)	Pilot for flexible learning delivery to working adults with low or intermediate skills (2018)
VET for manufacturing, construction and digital	Those with basic education between 20-29 years of age (2015)	CPD for teachers (2016)	Digital skills for adults – free in some circumstances (2019)
Upskilling and reskilling	Young people and adult VET programmes (2017) combined		Low paid, employed adults (2019)
Lower priority than iVET (2013)	Unemployed (2019)		

Source: National Reform Programmes for Denmark, Finland, Scotland and the United Kingdom (collective referencing in Appendix B)

There were also frequent references to budget allocations for adult VET in Denmark as well as a distinction between adult VET and iVET that made clear the Danish order of priorities:

The committee is to make recommendations for a long-term, sustainable solution to the training place challenge, increased quality in vocational education and training programmes as well as an enhancement of opportunities for low-skilled adults in the adult and continuing education training system, so that low-skilled adults with labour market experience are secured the fastest route to skilled education and training and simultaneously do not take up training places in the vocational education system that could be given to the young (The Danish Government, 2013, p. 21).

From the very specific policies a more general reform followed when the Finnish government's VET reform in 2017 brought together VET for adults and young people, offering the same programmes within the same institutions as places of study. This combination of systems was the main emphasis within the more recent Finnish texts:

Overlaps in vocational education and training will be eliminated by combining young people's and adult education into a single entity (Ministry of Finance, 2017, p. 17).

These widespread changes to adult VET led the EU to exhort Finland to continue to invest in adult VET (indeed in VET in general) as the government aimed to make budget cuts to meet the financial targets set by the EU.

This suggests a need for continued investment in adult learning (European Commission, 2018c, p. 5);

although the EU was complimentary about the Finnish system:

The highly performing adult learning systems continue to improve (European Commission, 2019b, p. 33).

This type of comment was not frequently observed in the European Semester texts.

The Scottish adult VET policy changes emphasised the requirements of the workforce, for example, in the low carbon sectors that Scotland planned to develop, rather than those of unemployed adults. This was because until April 2017 the UK government was responsible for employment support policy, rather than it being devolved to the Scottish government. However, there was a clear demonstration of the Scottish government's intention to diverge its policies, including VET policies, from the UK policy trajectory. Where possible within the constraints of devolution, therefore, Scotland emphasised distinctive adult VET policies.

As mentioned previously, the EU was repeatedly critical of the UK education system, a product of which was the high number of adults with low basic skills, who then required basic training before they could progress to VET. Some UK responses lacked precision:

include streamlining the adult skills system so that it is simpler as well as more demand led, with incentives for providers to deliver the greatest skills gains for their learners and for employers to increase their investment in training (Her Majesty's Government, 2013, p. 58);

whereas others were too prescriptive:

The pilot is targeted at adult learners aged 19 and above that have been motivated to move out of unemployment and into low paid employment and are wanting to further progress in work and in their chosen career. Adult Learners must be in receipt of a low wage which is less than £15,736.50 annual gross salary. The pilot gives eligible learners the opportunity to access education and training provision up to and including EQF Level 3 (Her Majesty's Treasury, 2019, p. 24).

Another feature of the UK government's changes to adult VET policy was the preoccupation with structure such as qualification levels and new organisations (section 6.4.5) and with short term projects, such as the pilot Flexible Learning Fund, which was never fully developed. The texts studied did not convey a sense of a policy direction or strategic approach.

As can be seen from Table 6-5 and the text extracts above, unlike the adult VET policies in Denmark and Finland, and Scotland to a more limited extent, the UK government's discourse about adult VET was reflective of a deficit model (perhaps in response to criticisms about low skilled adults) and principally concerned with funding adult VET, rather than the educational, social or economic benefits that might accrue from it or, indeed, a wider consideration of the part that adult VET could play in government strategy. Extending an analysis of the problem of low skilled adults further could have led to a consideration of why the compulsory education system was not best placed to equip young people in schools with the skills they need as they become adults. This was not undertaken. Instead the UK government chose to portray adult VET as requiring investment by an individual to boost their career earnings, in other words solely to benefit an individual, a neoliberal approach,

rather than reflecting any national social or economic benefits to having a well-trained workforce.

Although the EU criticised the UK's adult VET policy, it did not initially appear to offer a counter to the ideology from which the policy originated. However, through peer comparisons and benchmarking, it was apparent that there were preferred models for adult VET. What was less clear was whether these were pragmatically selected because targets were being met or whether there was a belief system underpinning them that was supported by EU policy makers (Chapter 8).

In conclusion, this case study illustrated the different approaches to policy making taken by the different countries and the relatively 'hands off' stance of the EU, if, in their judgement, a country was pursuing a policy trajectory with which they agreed. There was no evidence for policy convergence, other than from the Scottish government's attempts to develop a system different from that of other parts of the UK, that was perceived to borrow more from other parts of the EU (Hodgson et al., 2019). Adult VET policy is, however, a broadly defined field spanning aspects of labour market policy and differing education sectors (Chapter 1). Gaps between policy endeavours made it more difficult to identify evidence for policy convergence. EU policy makers did not appear to set out their approaches to adult VET policy (Europeanisation) (Alexiadou, 2007) nor indeed was there a putative EU standard (Europeification) (Antunes, 2016) for national VET policies. A study of a more specific policy field (apprenticeships – section 6.4.4) confirmed this initial finding.

6.4.3 Case study: Drop-out and completion

The references analysed in this case referred to young people leaving VET before completion of a programme or programmes or not achieving a qualification at the end of their programme. Despite the EU headline target relating to early school leavers (Chapter 5), drop-out in VET was only referenced frequently by Denmark and this was reciprocated by the EU in the Danish CRs and CSRs:

Early drop-out rates from vocational youth education (almost 50%) are rather high (European Commission, 2011a, p. 13);

Denmark has difficulties with relatively high drop-out rates from upper secondary vocational training and education (European Commission, 2014b, p. 4);

leading to recommendations such as:

Reduce drop-out rates, particularly in the vocational education sector, (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 10);

although the EU concluded that by 2015 sufficient progress had been made for the recommendations to be dropped. This is also reflected in the problematisation charts (Appendix I), showing that the national Danish texts and the EU texts relating to Denmark have high number of references to low completion rates (more from the Danish perspective) and high drop-out (more from the EU perspective).

Denmark made several policy changes to improve this situation, including a fundamental change that indicated the Danes were right to be concerned about VET drop-out:

reduce the drop-out rates, for example by reducing the number of classes without a teacher present (The Danish Government, 2012, p. 24);

as well as reframing the problem to be one of VET programme completion:

increasing the proportion of young people who complete VET education from the current level of 19% to 25% in 2020 (European Commission, 2015, p. 17).

The Danish system previously provided opportunities for young people to move from one VET programme to another so the distinction between drop-out and completion became blurred. A young person may have dropped out of four programmes and completed the

fifth, so that they had completed VET education but the drop-out from the programmes was still very high and the problem was different depending on whether it was viewed through the perspective of the programme or the individual (Jørgensen, 2016). This affected the reported data and hence the performance against the high-level target for drop-out, set in Europe 2020 and resulted in the production of conflicting policies to address the case of young people who had lost a training contract 'through no fault of their own' (The Danish Government, 2012) and needed to complete a programme, as well as increasing the number of school based VET programmes in order to ensure that more students in absolute terms completed VET programmes. This represented a change from the traditional dual system structure (Chapter 2). Tightening the entry requirements for VET programmes was also expected to increase numbers who completed (Danish Government, 2017).

The EU indicated that the VET policy reforms undertaken by Denmark had met its national agenda increasing the supply of skilled labour to the labour market (European Commission, 2018b) and the Danish government concluded that:

The dropout rate in VET is therefore expected to decline in the coming years, because of demands on the students' basic school education, and because of the focus on ensuring apprenticeships (The Danish Government, 2019, p. 38).

reflecting the policy of increased academic entry requirements for VET programmes as well as increased supplies of apprenticeship places. This exchange through the Semester process demonstrated the evolving relationship between the EU and one of its member states, from critique to compliment.

Denmark's VET policy solution to early school leaving (whether occurring through drop-out or non-completion) was thus different from that of the UK and Finland (Chapter 5). Again, the EU's policy agenda was interpreted in different ways in national VET policy making. This did not imply a common EU VET policy although it may have been more akin to convergence by Europeification (Antunes, 2016). The problems were perceived through different lenses in each member state, leading to very different policies being made. Thus, policy convergence was less likely to occur, even if there was convergence of drivers or purposes.

In this instance, the EU's drivers were both to build a future supply of skilled workers for the labour market and to reduce the number of unemployed young people (economic and social purposes). The solution in Denmark was built from a previously identified problem relating to the sequential number of VET programmes undertaken by young people and the perception (also applied to university programmes) that young people in Denmark were becoming perpetual students because of the generous funding arrangements (Tænketanken DEA, 2015). It was a different type of systemic problem than that experienced by Scotland and the UK (Table 6-6). Finland neither experienced nor recognised VET drop-out as a problem and therefore had no policy responses.

Table 6-6 Policy responses to drop-out

Policy space	Policy purpose	Driver	Lever	Target
EU	Reduce drop-out from education	Reduce youth unemployment	-	More young people in education than unemployed
Denmark	Reduce drop-out from and increase completion of VET programmes	Inclusion or mobility	Increased number of teachers. Raised entry requirements to VET programmes. Reduce grants to individuals behaving as perpetual students. New programmes	More young people completing VET
Scotland	Reduce the number of NEETs Reduce levels of youth unemployment			
UK (England)	Reduce the number of NEETs		Removal of public funding for courses with	Improved retention and achievement

Policy space	Policy purpose	Driver	Lever	Target
	Reduce levels of youth unemployment		low retention and achievement rates. Creation of new institutions to deliver new VET programmes	

The problematisation charts for each country (Appendix I) indicated references to drop-out (retention) in both Scotland and the UK although this was not prioritised in VET policy making by either country. It was possible that other policies were thought likely to address this issue, for example, that broader policies relating to youth unemployment or NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people would also address programme retention and student drop-out issues.

Although Europe 2020 set reducing drop-out from education as a headline target, policies to achieve this did not feature heavily in the country documents studied, with the exception of Denmark. It could be argued that, from the EU's perspective, Finland and the UK had already achieved the targeted reduction and that this represented a convergence of policy objective. However, Finland did not consider that it had a problem to address, whereas the UK did put forward policies that influenced drop-out and completion, even if they were designed to achieve other goals. Thus, the policy levers (invisible at EU level), as discussed above, were divergent and the likelihood of unintended consequences to rapidly created policies was high because of a superficial application of policy levers to an under-analysed problem. This policy making approach is explored further in the next case study of apprenticeships.

6.4.4 Case study: Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships was the policy area that received most attention from policy makers as can be seen from the graph in Appendix F. In some parts of the EU, apprenticeships are synonymous with VET as outlined by Jørgensen (2017). The EU and the four countries

engaged in policy conversations about apprenticeships within the texts through the entire period studied, although Denmark, the UK and Scotland were most involved according to the references within the texts. In this instance the EU appeared to adopt a uniform approach to apprenticeship policy so that it made more references about Finnish apprenticeship policy according to the texts whereas the Finnish government did not prioritise apprenticeship policy making. This demonstrated that Finland did not always comply with EU VET policy direction when it did not align with the Finnish government's own priorities.

The problematisation of apprenticeships was not universal (Appendix I), a reflection of the complexity of the issue and the many policy approaches to it as well as the different national contexts in which apprenticeships fall. The problems therefore included overall employer engagement with education, a shortage of work placement opportunities (not solely linked to apprenticeships), employers not paying for training and a shortage of apprenticeship places. Before any further analysis, there was policy convergence around the driver of providing employment (via a training route) for more young people, in keeping with reducing unemployment but policy levers diverged across the four countries.

The EU texts created a discourse relating to apprenticeships that viewed them as a solution to the youth unemployment problem that had followed the 2008 global financial recession although this was disputed by the UK government:

However, according to the National Institute of Economic and Social Research neither the expansion of apprenticeships nor the expansion of the work experience scheme are sufficient to address the scale of the youth unemployment problem (European Commission, 2011b, p. 13).

Instead, the discourse evident from the UK texts in relation to English apprenticeships demonstrated different priorities, which related to the funding of apprenticeships, in particular ensuring that this was not the responsibility of government.

The push to deliver 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020 will be funded by a levy on large employers amounting to 0.5 % of an employer's pay bill starting in April

2017. The levy will be paid into an apprenticeship fund. Employers will be incentivised to offer more apprenticeships (European Commission, 2016, p. 49).

However, a simplistic and misleading statement in the 2018 NRP summarised the employers' response:

The number of apprenticeship starts declined in the second half of 2017, coinciding with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. The previous year has seen significant changes for employers and as a result, it will take them time to adjust and respond. It is encouraging that employers are taking their time to plan high quality, well thought through apprenticeship provision that meets their specific needs (Her Majesty's Treasury, 2018, p. 20).

Other EU preoccupations were the quality of apprenticeships (from a VET attainment perspective) and the number of available places:

The creation of more apprenticeships for vocational education and training also plays an important role since the lack of apprenticeships impacts vocational education attainment levels negatively (European Commission, 2011a, p. 14);

The insufficient number of apprenticeship places also remains a source of concern (European Commission, 2014a, p. 4);

Furthermore, the difficulty of finding an apprenticeship place — which is the student's own responsibility and a compulsory part of most vocational education and training (VET) programmes — remains a key challenge (European Commission, 2017a, p. 24).

The Danish government sought to address these issues by increasing the number of apprenticeship places (this discourse originating in Denmark rather than in the EU) and engaged in successful negotiations with employers and social partners to do so.

Furthermore, the government and the social partners agree to strengthen the companies' incentives to create more apprenticeships for students in VET by

introducing a bonus to the companies recruiting more students, funded by an additional fee from the companies who do not have apprentices (The Danish Government, 2019, p. 38).

Similarly, the Scottish government increased steadily the number of apprenticeship places in both public and private sector organisations and placed this discourse in the context of wider conversations with employers about their engagement with FE colleges. In the texts, both Scotland and Denmark referred to the need to support small and medium sized employers (SMEs) to employ apprenticeships rather than placing reliance solely on large employers.

Denmark has had a long tradition of employer engagement with VET providers and operates a dual VET system, ensuring that VET students have the opportunity for extended work placement even though these may not lead to a formal apprenticeship (Jørgensen, 2018b). The Scottish system as outlined in the Scottish texts, albeit starting from very low numbers, appears to have been modelled on a European rather than English model in that there was a linkage between the school and VET systems:

growing vocational provision for young people in the senior phase of school education, including a significant expansion of modern and foundation apprenticeships (The Scottish Government, 2017b, p. 9).

This concurs with the conclusions drawn by Hodgson et al. (2019), that the Scottish government was borrowing policy from European countries, among others, rather than the home nations and recent texts such as 'All Points North' (Scottish Government, 2017) confirmed this.

In 2016, the EU appraisal of the new UK apprenticeship levy plans proved to be prescient:

There is a danger of rebranding existing graduate programmes without effect on the productivity and skills, so monitoring the quality of apprenticeship training will be key (European Commission, 2016, p. 49).

There has been a continuous commentary within the English media, which has finally achieved a response from the Department for Education (DfE) about MBA and other graduate apprentices, likely to be already in receipt of training, being the major beneficiaries from the levy system. This has resulted in a very recent (2020) policy change to ensure that this does not continue (Whieldon, 2020). Whilst the apprenticeship levy was operational in Scotland as well as in England, it was deployed differently through direct investment in 'skills, training and employability' by the Scottish Government (The Scottish Government, 2017a), and was used to fund not only apprenticeships but also workforce development and pre-employment programmes. In England, the levy funded only apprenticeships.

Finnish apprenticeships are provided mainly for adults (Pither & Morris, 2020). Even after the Finnish VET reform in 2017 most young people are still expected to undertake school-based VET, rather than apprenticeships although apprenticeships were recommended in limited circumstances:

Unemployed young people who have no vocational training will be directed towards apprenticeship training (Ministry of Finance, 2016, p. 21).

This statement indicated that apprenticeships were not regarded as a mainstream element of Finnish iVET.

In summary, apprenticeships seemed to be of more significance to both the Danish and Scottish governments, perhaps because of the level of investment and the governments' appreciation of the benefits of a well-functioning apprenticeship system within an overall VET system. Public perception in both Denmark and Scotland was portrayed as positive. In England, policy levers of target setting, based on programme starts rather than completions; funding, programme reform and a new structural body, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), introduced within a relatively short period, built in additional complexity and apprenticeship policies are currently viewed as operating separately to other elements of the FE system, even though they are in some way supposed

to align with the new English T level qualifications (HM Government, 2016), unlike the VET policies operating in Denmark and Scotland.

In the case of apprenticeships, like that of drop-out (section 6.4.3) although there was a convergence of policy drivers across the EU and the countries, the policy levers diverged very distinctively. Thus, the policy lever of increasing apprenticeship places to address policy drivers of both social cohesion and economic challenges operated within national systems differently because the countries had very different starting points and different value sets (Chapter 5), so that their interpretations of the drivers differed. Unsurprisingly, the policies made were also different. From the four countries studied, there was therefore limited evidence of convergence of apprenticeship policy, except that Scottish policy appeared to align more closely with European models in terms of employer engagement and linkage of school and apprenticeship systems. In doing so, of course, it diverged further from English policy (Research question 2). This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

6.4.5 Case study: VET institutions

In order to develop understanding of the relationship between national VET policies and EU policies, I decided to analyse a set of findings relating to the places where VET was delivered, ostensibly the subjects of national policy making. National purposes were then explored further in Chapter 7. From the texts, this was policy within national spaces, rather than the EU policy space so that the EU texts (mostly CRs; there was only one reference within the CSRs) reflected the national policy agendas, occasionally providing a commentary about the national policy in later periods:

build vocational education and training providers' capacity to respond to the needs of employers by promoting innovation and entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2019a, p. 55);

In addition, the financial health of many further education colleges has seriously declined since 2010/11 (49), which prompted a major reform of consolidation and specialisation of colleges across 40 areas covering all of England to be completed by March 2017 (50). The challenge is to increase efficiency in the sector while

maintaining broad universal access (European Commission, 2016, p. 48).

Although the Danish, UK and Scottish texts included changes to VET institutions (Danish colleges, FE colleges and training providers) within their policies, Finnish texts did not indicate that this was a major policy initiative within Finland.

VET institutions were very much agents of government policy change, either through adoption and promotion of the policies or through being obliged by policy makers to change or through a mediation that amends or even reverses the policy (Coffield et al., 2008) although this was outside the scope of this study. However, this case study seeks to clarify the relationship of these agents to the convergence or divergence of VET policy making as well as how this relationship then fits within the supranational policy relationship between the EU and its member states (Research question 1).

The Danish and English texts made most reference to VET institutions. In Denmark, governance of hVET institutions underwent significant changes, to provide a demarcation and separate governance from universities to enable a distinctive focus for hVET (quasi marketisation) and VET colleges were provided with additional funding to improve the quality of programmes, provide professional development for teachers and leaders and enhance student support, for example careers advice and guidance and student voice. Although Danish colleges are run by the municipalities, there remains significant government intervention, albeit through agreement between municipalities, government and social partners.

By contrast, the English government conducted an area-based review of FE colleges in 2015-2016, which resulted in some changes to institutional structure (a reduction in numbers of colleges to save costs) but not to the governance arrangements; English FE colleges are still independent of government control, although in receipt of public funding, at the time of writing. Government intervention has increased over the period, for example with the introduction of the colleges' insolvency regulations (HM Government, 2017), arguably to

subject colleges to a similar regime to that of private training providers although this was presented in a more positive manner.

The government is also supporting the sector with a Strategic College Improvement Fund, worth £15 million over the next two years, to provide support for weaker colleges, as well as National Leaders of Further Education and a £40 million Centres of Excellence programme to spread best practice around the system (Her Majesty's Treasury, 2018, p. 44).

Much of the commentary within the UK NRPs about VET institutions related to Scottish examples, rather than English ones. The Scottish Government undertook a major reform of FE colleges over the period, that resulted in the regionalisation and recentralisation of FE colleges (also reduced in number) under government control in 2014 and an abandonment of the Local Management of Colleges that was implemented in Scotland (and also England) in 1993. This was a reversal of the market approach.

Scotland's colleges offer a diverse curriculum – including vocational, further, and higher education – to a diverse range of people and communities (The Scottish Government, 2012a, p. 38);

the Commission has been tasked with developing recommendations to: • Improve Scottish vocational and further education and training starting in the senior phase of school through to college and apprenticeships; (The Scottish Government, 2014a, p. 22);

The Curriculum for Excellence is helping young people develop vital skills for life and work, while colleges are being reformed to ensure the skills people develop will help them find work and grow the economy (Her Majesty's Government, 2015- about Scotland, p. 27);

It will strengthen the links between schools, colleges and employers, ensuring young people can leave school with a host of work-related skills, qualifications and experience that equip them for their next step, whether that is training, further or higher education, or employment, and future economic success. (Her Majesty's Government, 2015 - about Scotland, p. 27).

Furthermore, the English government chose to expand the VET institution market place by creating many new institutions as well as extending the remit of FE colleges into educating 14-16 year-old school age pupils on a significant scale.

The Government currently supports a network of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) which offer full time courses for students aged 14 to 19 that combine practical and academic studies. The UTCs are sponsored by a university, which allows colleges to use specialist facilities and teaching from university staff, but also prepares students for higher education. Employers also play a major part in the UTCs, providing work placements and ensuring that qualifications that students gain reflect local labour market needs. The Government announced at Budget 2011 that it would expand the University Technical Colleges programme to establish at least 24 new colleges by 2014 (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 30);

National Colleges are being established to provide specialist higher level vocational training at levels 3 to 5 (but predominantly levels 4+) in sectors critical to economic growth, where there is a recognised skills gap. They will operate alongside schools, colleges and other providers of further education to provide strong progression routes from entry level to postgraduate. They will be employer led, and will set industry standards for training within their particular sector based on emerging and future technology, using cutting edge technology and state-of-the-art equipment (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 23);

We are building a new network of National Colleges and elite new Institutes of Technology to provide specialist provision in key sectors like digital, nuclear and oil and gas (Her Majesty's Treasury, 2019, p. 43).

Thus, the main policy lever deployed in VET policy making in terms of institutions in England was the creation of new structures (Chapter 5). This illustrated an uncomfortable relationship between the English government and its VET policy agents. The structural emphasis may be drawn from neoliberalism as expounded by the creation of more markets when the initial markets fail, which was inevitable because VET (and education in general) does not lend itself to the types of competition promulgated by neoliberal ideology. However, the enhancement of the market through relentless competition in VET was critiqued by Augar (2019). In addition to the new colleges described above, the IfATE was established to oversee apprenticeships and gained the additional remit of technical

education in 2016, with further expansions of remit subsequently, perhaps to compensate for the resistance of a policy recommendation for an additional new structure:

The prospect of a full Further Education and Training Authority which could provide for more strategic control, as emphasised in the Sainsbury report, is not currently being considered (European Commission, 2017b, p. 25).

The constant policy changes and new institutions with overlapping remits, have, however, built layers of complexity at national level in England that served to throw dust in the eyes of many observers, perhaps including the EU. These changes may represent a device to hide a vacuum in policy rationale or indeed, the existence of any policy (Chapter 8).

Finland's colleges, on the other hand, are mainly run by municipalities (Pither & Morris, 2020). There was no fundamental reform of these colleges over the period of the study, although numbers have gradually reduced due to funding pressures and demographic shifts. The type of reform undertaken indicated the relative prioritisation of VET by each national government. Both Scottish and English reforms sought to save money by reducing the number of institutions but in Scotland, the move to centralise control indicated a political prioritisation of VET that had more in common with European models as well as prioritising the building of a more coherent education system. English reforms, on the other hand, moved funding from one part of the VET sector to another and did not lend themselves to creating a coherent system, even if that had been a policy rationale. They were political in nature but lacked educational, social or even economic purpose. The Danish reforms were overtly educational in nature, designed to improve the quality of VET but also served to encourage more young people to choose VET and to complete their programme (social and economic purposes).

With the agreement, therefore, practical training placement centres have been set up at vocational colleges on an experimental basis. The centres are, among other things, to establish communities of approved companies that can give the students the opportunity to receive practical training in several companies according to a predetermined plan. It will be assessed, on an experimental basis, if the vocational

colleges are able to take responsibility for the student's entire education (The Danish Government, 2012, p. 39).

Economic pressures in Finland, which led to reducing numbers of VET colleges, did receive a rare criticism from the EU:

Reducing the number of education outlets particularly in VET, can reduce easy access to and even the provision for all in a country of the size of Finland (European Commission, 2018a, p. 30).

This case study demonstrated the complex national relationships between the structures and agents of VET policy, irrespective of any complexity that EU VET policy making may introduce (Research question 1). The evidence confirmed that national structures and agents were not the subjects of EU VET policy making and there was little evidence of policy convergence with regard to VET institutions, in fact, the Scottish demarketisation once again suggests a divergence from English VET policy (Research question 2). Danish and Finnish VET institutions also operated under different VET models, the Danish one with close linkages to employers in the dual delivery system and Finnish VET institutions being the major deliverer of VET programmes with much more limited employer engagement.

6.5 Conclusion

In this section I summarised specific conclusions from the findings against the two research questions considered and signposted more general conclusions to be discussed in Chapter 8.

Finland has presented problematisations of its VET (Appendix I) in broad alignment with the EU's representations (these were principally concerned with demography and budget deficits). Denmark and the EU also concurred about apprenticeships and high levels of drop-out. The UK and Scotland, on the other hand, identified perceived educational system or individual failure as well as employer engagement, skills shortages and poverty. The EU, whilst recognising all of these problems, prioritised monitoring of the systemic failure. With

these differing contexts for the development of VET policy, notwithstanding the EU's headline objectives for VET, the interrelationships (section 6.4.1) shaped discourse about VET policy purpose so that it was not clear, and not capable of representation in a simple cyclical way. As already proposed (section 4.7), the temporal and spatial dimensions of VET policy making are better expressed by the contra currents, ebbs and flows of a gyre.

Despite the flexibility and fluidity referred to by Stevenson (2019), the Semester process (2011-2019) outlined in section 6.4.1 did seem to restrict the opportunities for horizontal policy learning that may have been more available between 2000 and 2010. Instead, un-EU-mediated policy learning is reliant on individual initiatives. Convergence from policy learning is therefore unlikely to be taking place. Convergence may then be limited to a convergence of objective (arising from overarching policy drivers) rather than to actual policy (or indeed policy levers). Alternatively, what appears as convergence may arise through drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) or diffusion (Jakobi, 2012). However, before a conclusion can be drawn that might establish EU policy drivers in a hierarchical relationship with national VET policies, the absence of EU policy within some VET policy areas, for example, adult VET suggests a more complex set of relationships. A question considered further in Chapter 8 was whether policies emphasised within the Semester only arose because a problem was expressed or whether they were created to justify EU VET policy making machinery.

Indeed, the relationships between national and EU VET policy making processes have become more complex since the Semester process emerged. On the one hand it appeared that a simple top down and bottom up process (Alexiadou et al., 2010) might be in place but this does not seem to describe adequately the interplay between the discourse of VET policy purpose between the EU and the countries in the study. Thus, the purposes of VET continue to come under question, strong social and educational purposes emphasised by Finland and Denmark, being counterbalanced by the more educational and economic purposes of the UK (including Scotland) as set out in Figure 6-2 after a further grouping of the problematisations identified in Appendix I into either educational, economic or social purpose.

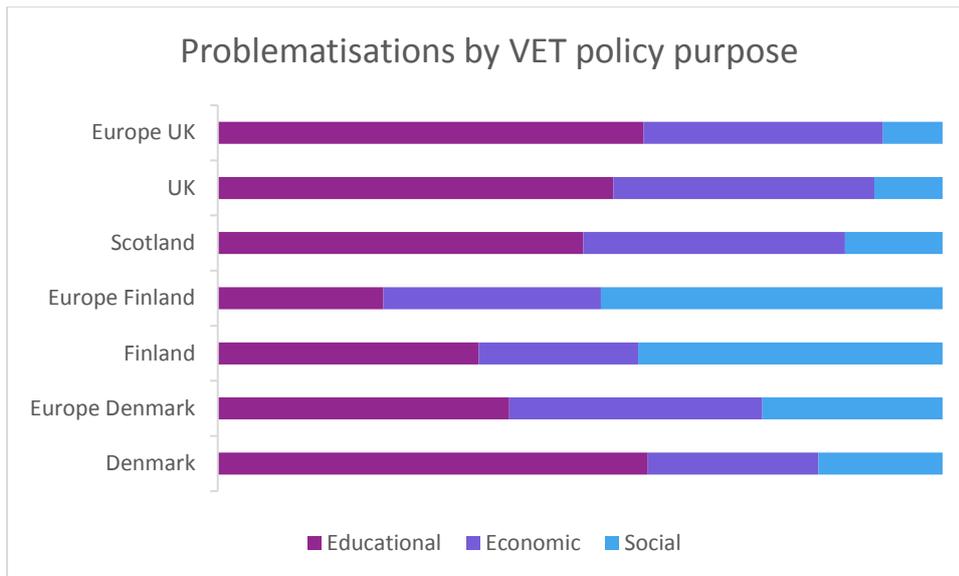


Figure 6-2 Problematizations by VET policy purpose

As a further example, there was an emphasis in all three types of text (CR, NRP and CSR) on perceived educational failure (either systemic or on an individual basis). The discourse was solution-focussed: one of change and improvement to VET systems, although, as already drawn out in section 6.4.5, the policies deployed to address these problems differed between the countries. The difference to some extent can be related to the purposes of VET; a more socially focussed policy was apparent in Denmark and Finland, where VET was viewed through a social lens as well as an educational lens. Irrespective of deep purpose, at actual level, there were many contraflows in VET policy making that indicated the complex nature of the relationships, within which member states had positioned themselves to accommodate their national context, culture and pace of VET policy making, rather than forming EU VET policy or an EU VET policy space.

The four case studies support these initial conclusions about convergence and divergence and other policy change theories (Table 6-7).

Table 6-7 Case study summary

Section	Case study	Policies in	Policy change theory	EU role
6.4.2	Adult VET	All four countries	Policy drift or diffusion	Non-interventionist but critical

Section	Case study	Policies in	Policy change theory	EU role
6.4.3	Drop-out and completion	Denmark	Policy learning	Reflective of national policy
6.4.4	Apprenticeships	All four countries, particularly Denmark and England	Europeification (convergence)	Promotional, seen as key EU VET policy
6.4.5	VET institutions	All four countries, particularly England and Scotland	Policy learning, policy isolationism	Hands off – principle of subsidiarity operating

The adult VET case study (section 6.4.2) demonstrates a less interventionist approach to policy making by the EU. The drop-out case study (section 6.4.3) represents a single set of engagements between one country and the EU, although the Danish problem of drop-out has perplexed Danish governments for many years (Jørgensen, 2016), so that the impact of any EU intervention was limited to a reflection of the problem, rather than Europeanisation or even Europeification. In the case of apprenticeships (section 6.4.4), although the EU promoted apprenticeships extensively, because the four countries had such different approaches to apprenticeships, it is difficult to see how Europeanisation could be claimed. However, it could be said that there was Europeification, as all four countries were developing policies for apprenticeships (although this would probably have happened in any case). Finally, where policies are clearly of national rather than EU concern, as is the case with VET institutions (section 6.4.5) there appeared to be little EU appetite for policy making. There therefore appears to be limited policy convergence between the EU and the four countries from the studies carried out in this chapter (discussed further in Chapter 8) and, indeed, active policy divergence between England (as distinct from the UK) and the other three countries (Research question 2). To what extent this is a function of diverging relationships with the EU is discussed in the Brexit section in Chapter 8.

7. The Lisbon strategy and national policy making 2000-2019

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a thematic analysis of selected national VET policy documents based on VET-related themes derived from the Lisbon strategy (European Council, 2000) in order to consider the more immediate and more far reaching influences of Lisbon on VET policy. This provides an exploration of the impact of a key EU strategy on national VET policy making over a period of 20 years and addresses Research question 3:

In what aspects has the Lisbon strategy influenced national VET policy in Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland in the period between 2000 and 2019?

The analysis was considered through the lens of the policy gyre concept and was carried out at what may be considered the surface dimension of the policy gyre, equating the three dimensions of waves, tides and deep currents conceptualised in the gyre (Chapter 4) with the three domains of surface, actual and real from ontological realism identified by (Bhaskar, 2015) in his critical realism framework (Chapter 3). It was therefore a more broadly-based analysis than that developed in the two previous chapters, exploring through four themes that originated from the Lisbon strategy, treated as representations of how a single EU statement of intent was altered by surface actions of national policy makers, and questioning (at deeper levels of analysis) the intentions behind these actions. The mapping of the four themes has enabled an historical approach to the process of VET policy making between the EU and the four countries in the study and also contributed part of the temporal, spatial/scalar and dynamic comparisons developed throughout this study (Table 1-2). The themes were: foreign language skills (7.4.2), lifelong learning (7.4.3), mobility (7.4.4) and the role of VET teachers (7.4.5)

The Lisbon strategy has been viewed by many commentators (Chapter 2) as setting the scene for overall EU policy making because it reflected the planning for a significant expansion of the EU in 2004 as well as establishing a new form of putatively collaborative

working – the OMC (Chapter 2). Although subsequent strategies, in particular, Europe 2020 (Chapter 2), have reflected changes to the composition, economic and political aspirations of the EU, the Lisbon strategy was the first to attempt a common approach to matters not necessarily under the EU’s direct control, for example, education. Following on from recent policy declarations in the EU’s designated year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 (European Commission, 1996), lifelong learning policies were strongly represented within Lisbon and consequently VET policies were also referenced as they were considered to be a subset of lifelong learning (Chapter 1). From a VET perspective, Lisbon represented the beginning of an EU consolidation of lifelong learning policy and an attempt to coordinate VET policies across the EU. As noted in Chapter 2, Lisbon was the forerunner to a series of VET related declarations in the sub-EU policy making space.

However, in seeking to develop an understanding of the purposes of VET policy from the EU and national perspectives and the changes in these purposes over time, the mapping of VET policy related themes from the Lisbon strategy into national policy documents was expected to demonstrate the reach of the Lisbon strategy across time and territory. This mapping has also explored whether it was possible to preserve a long-term VET strategy through policy planning or whether VET policy was merely viewed as a reactive element of other educational, social or economic policies. By using non-EU facing national policy documents, readily available on the internet, written for a variety of national audiences including policy makers, regulators and in some instances, practitioners, in this section of the analysis, it was expected that there would be further insight into what elements of EU VET policy the four countries actually maintained within their own national policies, rather than what they reported to the EU they were doing or planning to do (Chapter 6).

7.2 Method

The national VET policy documents were selected with reference to accounts of education policy development in each country between 2000 and 2019. These were then mapped onto a national timeline, which also incorporated significant national events relevant to VET policy, for example, the reorganisation of Scotland’s FE colleges, as well as the EU VET declarations and other major events such as the global financial recession (Appendix B).

This mapping helped me to develop a picture of the development of VET policy in each country over the period and to ensure that there was a level of representation of significant events in the chosen documents. To some extent this then became an opportunity sample because of the availability of documents in the public domain and on the internet (McCulloch, 2004). Availability in the public domain was taken as a form of legitimacy although it was recognised that some documents contained accounts of policies that were proposed but not implemented or that were later reversed. For the purposes of mapping trajectories of policy development, this was deemed to be acceptable as the absence of references to a particular policy theme at a particular time or within a particular country was explored within the analysis. The numbers of coded documents by year and country are set out in Table 7-1 below.

Table 7-1 Documents coded by themes from the Lisbon strategy

Country/Year	Denmark	Finland	Scotland	UK (England)
2000				1
2001				
2002	1			3
2003		2		
2004			1	2
2005	1		1	1
2006	1			3
2007	1	1	1	1
2008	4	1		2
2009				3
2010		2	1	3
2011	1	2	2	3
2012	3	5	2	2
2013	2	4	3	3
2014	4	2	5	1
2015	2	5	3	3
2016	2	1	1	4

Country/Year	Denmark	Finland	Scotland	UK (England)
2017	1	2	5	2
2018	1	3	3	2
2019	2	5	2	1
Total	26	35	30	40

There was an additional complexity in that documents from Denmark and Finland had also to be available in English (Chapter 4). In a very limited number of documents (indicated in Appendix B), translations were made, although these were not wholly reliable. However, in view of the nature of the analysis (thematic rather than discourse) it proved possible to search for the number of occurrences of a theme such as ‘entrepreneurship’ within a translated document. Although English is not an official language in Finland, more documents were readily available in English, perhaps because of the wide international interest in Finnish education since the PISA tables (Chapter 2). This was not always the case for Danish documents, but some documents, presumably believed by the authors to be of wider interest to non-Danish language speakers were readily available, for example a parents’ guide to VET produced by the Ministry of Education (Danish Ministry of Education, 2015). In this instance, the document was made available to those for whom Danish was a second language, the presumption being that they might more readily understand English. It was also possible that the document was believed to be of wider interest to academics in other countries and it may even have been felt to be of interest to those monitoring VET policy in the EU. In both cases, I was conscious of what may have been lost in translation, although the officially translated documents were consistent in the quality of written English. The experience of Vulliamy and Webb (2009), who found, during an Anglo-Finnish project, that even with the high standard of English spoken by Finnish participants, certain words were not readily translatable or that the literal meaning in English did not represent the Finnish action, was also borne in mind.

The full list of documents, included at Appendix B, shows the origins of the documents, some field notes and provides the background for the construction of Figure 7-1. These documents either described a VET policy change or stated what existing VET policy was and

have thus been used as a proxy for VET policy making. All documents had major references to VET policy although in some cases this was not the full content of the document. In some cases, I coded only those sections of documents relevant to VET policy (for example in the Finnish government programmes) rather than necessarily fully coding the whole document.

Although thematic analysis is a more limited method of analysis than, for example, critical discourse analysis, I chose it for this section because it enables the tracing of themes across dimensions on a large scale. The descriptions of thematic occurrences are therefore set in the context of either time or space. The documents were initially coded against themes solely derived from the Lisbon strategy, that I considered to be of direct relevance to VET policy, for example 'training, 'social exclusion' and 'foreign language skills' (full list at Appendix C). These themes were not predetermined but emerged from readings of the Lisbon strategy followed by a summarising of themes that were relevant to VET policy, based on personal experience of VET policy (Chapter 1). The themes were then analysed using nVivo and presented in graphical format for the findings sections of this chapter. Certain themes were selected for exploration in a series of case studies, based on areas not necessarily previously well researched in relation to VET (Chapters 1 and 2) and that seemed characteristic of a change in approach to VET policy in the spirit of the Lisbon strategy. Since I was approaching VET from an educational perspective, all but one of these case studies had an educational orientation. The case study that does not – mobility – was selected because of the varying interpretations of mobility and also the linkages between this theme and that of foreign language skills in connection with VET policy that I observed from the documents.

7.3 Relevant literature

Literature relevant to this chapter, for example, West (2012); Cort (2008b) and Alexiadou et al. (2010) was included in the literature review included in Chapters 1 and 2. These chapters included an outline of the EU VET policy making process originating from the Lisbon strategy (Chapter 2) and policy theories of convergence and divergence (Chapter 1). Policy making contrasts between the OMC, arising from the Lisbon strategy, and the processes of

establishing the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process (Brøgger, 2018) were also reviewed in Chapter 2.

7.4 Key findings

Initial mapping of the Lisbon themes within the selected VET policy documents over the period of the study suggested a diminution of frequency of reference to the themes over time. However, more policy documents were available in the later years of the period, as illustrated in the VET policy making diagram below (Figure 7-1). This may also indicate peaks of activity in national VET policy making, as determined by the number of documents each country produced. For example, the Danish government reviewed and updated its VET policy between 2006 and 2008 and again between 2013 and 2015 as a result of the 2008 global financial recession detailed in the European Semester reporting processes (Chapter 2). The UK government, on the other hand, also had a period of VET policy making in the first decade (relating to England) and then a further focus of policy making in 2011- 2013 (post the Wolf report (Wolf, 2011)), followed by a period of activity in 2016-17, which coincided with the Sainsbury report (HM Government, 2016) and the subsequent legislation to introduce technical education. However, while the other three countries were continuing to develop VET policy from 2018 onwards, there was less indication that English VET policy was being developed, which may be due either to a lengthy policy implementation phase or a frozen state of pre-Brexit VET policy paralysis. In the case of Finland, in contrast, there was a compact policy making operation whereby planning and legislating for major reform in 2015-16 and the introduction of the full reform in 2018, sat alongside an ex-ante evaluation of the reform in 2018 (Räisänen & Goman, 2018) to allow further policy development even as the existing policies were being implemented (Appendix B).

Figure 7-1 also illustrates that there was little consistency in the timing of VET policy making across the four countries so that, despite the European Semester process described in Chapter 2, it is suggested that changes to policy were driven by national responses and timescales rather than a common European time frame. The exception to this was changes to national VET policy as a response to the global financial recession but even this did not

follow a similar timescale, or, indeed, activity level. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, that countries take different times to respond in terms of policy making, depending on their national structures and secondly, that if VET policy development is not viewed solely as a response to an economic crisis, then there may not be a direct relationship between the timing of such a crisis and changes to VET policy. In this instance, EU VET policy influence did not a priori appear to have a bearing on national VET policy making in the four countries studied.

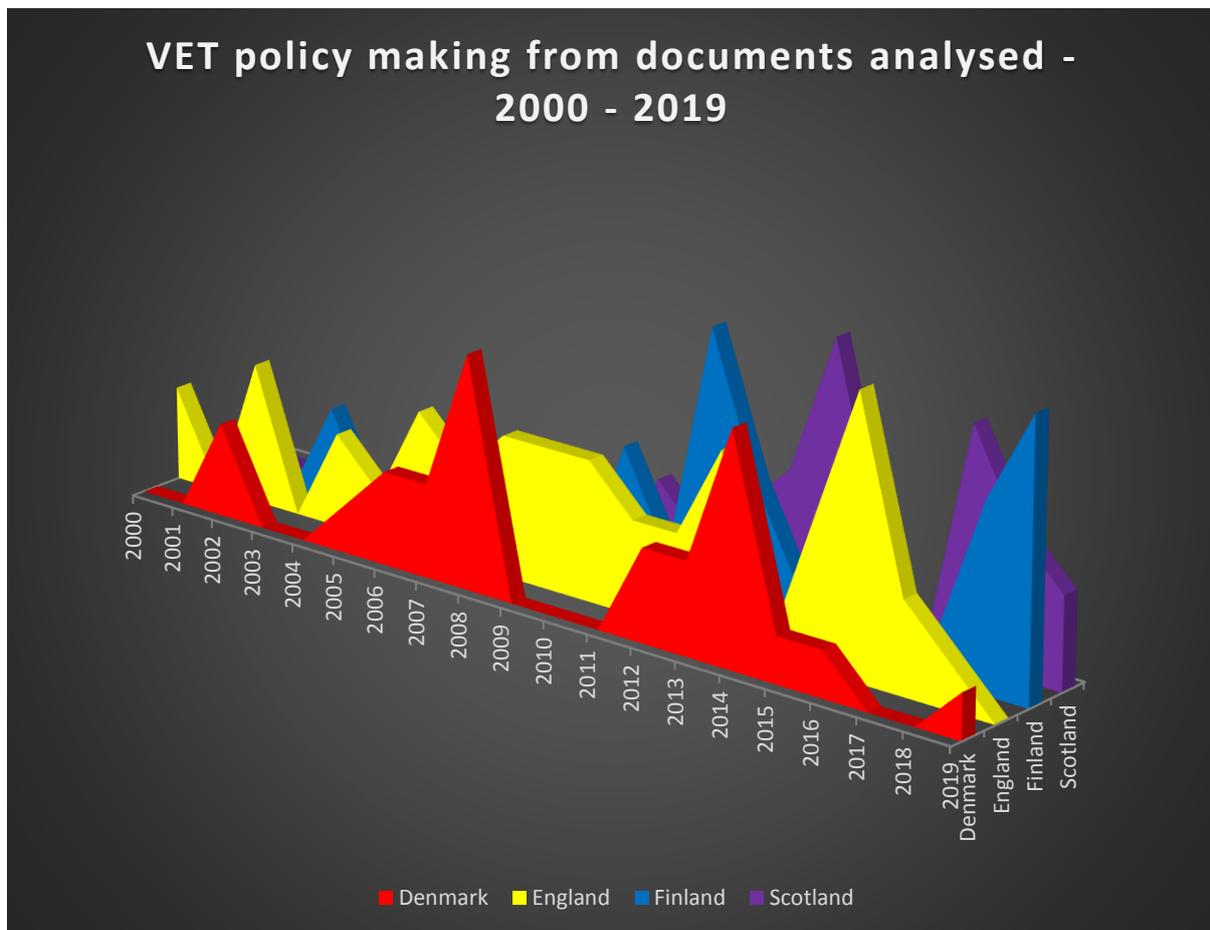


Figure 7-1 VET policy making represented by numbers of documents analysed, by country

After this initial review of VET policy making activity following the publication of the Lisbon strategy in 2000, four case studies were produced to represent the tracing of specific Lisbon themes, as detailed in the introduction to this chapter, into national VET policy. A brief

review of references to the four selected Lisbon themes within the other European declarations was also undertaken (section 7.4.6).

7.4.1 Foreign language skills

The unpacking of references to foreign language skills within lifelong learning, as recommended in the Lisbon strategy:

a European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills (European Council, 2000, p. 15);

has raised some questions of interpretation and an underlying social tension. I initially interpreted this to mean learning a further language to enable mobility, which was another theme within the Lisbon strategy, (section 7.4.3) and broader communication across the EU, notwithstanding the additional educational benefits arising from developing language skills that are outside the scope of this thesis. However, interpretation of what was meant by foreign language skills in the context of VET policy enactment has differed markedly across the four countries of study. A starting point was: to whom was the language foreign? The questions posed were: was the language reference to the home country's language teaching being made available to non-native speakers to support their integration into their new country of residence (including their participation in the labour market) or was it an additional language to the home language, being provided by the education system, including the VET sector, so that it was foreign to all those learning it or, as in the case of Denmark and Finland, was it tuition in migrants' own languages to help integration into VET or was the rationale (other than the educational benefits of learning another language) to facilitate people's movement within the EU, either for study or work purposes? The alignment of movement with study indicated a more educational, cultural or social purpose for VET whereas the alignment to work indicated an economic purpose. Figure 7-2 shows the references to foreign language skills in the policy documents.

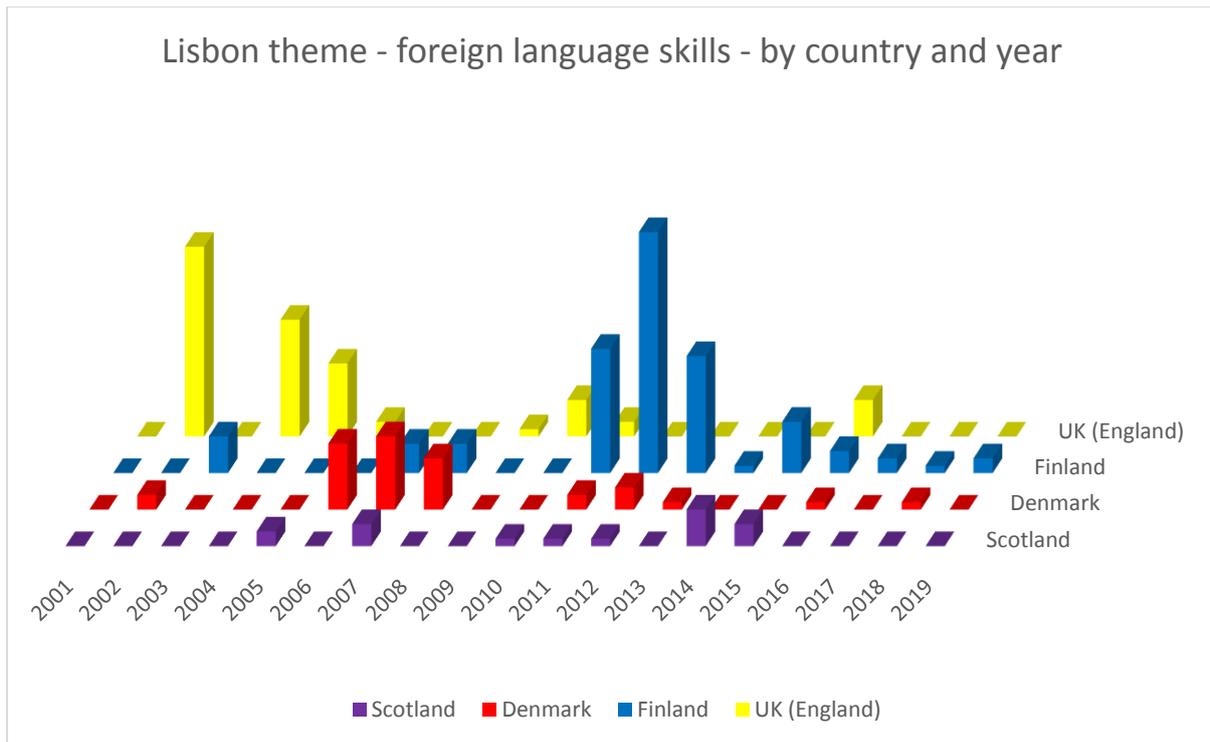


Figure 7-2 Foreign language skills references in national VET policy documents

Key points have been summarised in Table 7-2, which lists the role of foreign languages within EU and national VET policies and reveals the purpose behind the change, linking this to policy change theory (Chapter 1) where appropriate.

Table 7-2 Foreign languages within VET policies

Space	Foreign language policy within VET policy ²	Underlying VET purpose/policy change theory
EU	Part of lifelong learning skills	As part of European framework of lifelong learning: Political Policy of Europeanisation
Denmark	Include in VET curriculum (Undervisningsministeriet, 2006)	Educational Policy convergence
	Meet labour market demand for more languages	Economic Policy divergence

² References to immigrants, mother tongue and similar phrases are taken from the original texts

Space	Foreign language policy within VET policy ²	Underlying VET purpose/policy change theory
	(The Danish Government, 2018b)	
	Danish for speakers of other languages in VET curriculum (Hedegaard, 2007)	Economic/social Policy convergence
	Danish language option for speakers of other languages for ethnic minorities (Cort, 2008a)	Educational/social Policy convergence
	Main immigrant languages core subjects in VET curriculum (Field et al., 2012)	Educational/economic Policy convergence
England	Remove foreign languages from 14-19 curriculum (Department for Education and Skills, 2004)	Educational exclusion Policy divergence
	ESOL – employers should fund courses for their workers; funding only available for active jobseekers (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010a)	Economic Policy divergence
	ESOL qualifications to be subsidiary to GCSE English (Wolf, 2011)	Political/educational exclusion Policy divergence
Finland	Finnish language for immigrant physicians (Unattributed, 2003)	Economic Policy convergence
	Third language compulsory in vocational qualifications (Ministry of Education and Culture., 2019)	Educational Policy convergence
	Employers and employees to study languages (Prime MInister's Office, 2011)	Economic Policy convergence
	Language education for immigrants in vocational training (Prime MInister's Office, 2011)	Economic/social Policy convergence
	Adult training using immigrants' own language as starting point (Finnish	Social Policy divergence

Space	Foreign language policy within VET policy ²	Underlying VET purpose/policy change theory
	National Board of Education, 2012)	
	Immigrant language studies in VET and apprenticeships (Suomen Kuntaliitto, 2015)	Economic/educational Policy divergence
	Language and VET programme to aid recognition of immigrants' competences (European Union, 2017a)	Economic/social Policy convergence
Scotland	Learn two languages in addition to mother tongue at school (Scottish Government, 2015)	Educational Policy convergence
	ESOL for skilled workers arriving in Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2007)	Economic Policy convergence

Cort (2008a), in an outline of the Danish VET system, appeared to interpret foreign languages skills to mean Danish for 'immigrants' (sic) and suggested that the foreign languages policy within VET promoted short VET courses for immigrants incorporating Danish language courses, to divert labour into areas where there are skills gaps. Curiously, Danish language courses for foreigners used to be free (as at 2016, personal anecdote), once certain criteria had been met, but are now only free for refugees and 'other integration residents' (Copenhagen Language Centre, 2018). This may, of course, cause social and economic restrictions for those entering the country if they cannot afford to learn Danish and also, by steering any free provision towards labour market gaps, potentially widen social inequalities, if those gaps were located in the lower paid, less popular sections of the labour market. This consideration of foreign languages in relation to labour market mobility is further considered in section 7.4.3.

The interest in foreign language skills identified within the English policy documents in the first decade related to the attempts to reform the 14-19 curriculum that led, paradoxically, to the removal of compulsory study of a foreign language after the age of 14 in 2004,

despite recognising shortcomings in the approach to other languages. Thereafter English VET policy engagement with foreign language skills was confined to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), although in some instances this only related to the funding of the provision. A policy change for ESOL was signalled by Wolf (2011) who appeared to disparage many ESOL qualifications in favour of the rigidity of a school-based GCSE English qualification.

However, there is a large range of existing English qualifications, partly because of the enormous popularity of English as a second/foreign language. Provided that it is clear that English GCSE should be the standard eventual destination post-16 for all students, schools and colleges should be able to identify suitable intermediary qualifications where needed. The crucial thing is to recognise the central place of English and Mathematics GCSEs in English life, and the duty of post-16 education to prioritise them (Wolf, 2011, p. 172).

The policy change did not appear to have considered the nature of ESOL courses which were frequently offered at level 2 (GCSE equivalent) and were available at level 3 (A level equivalent) and often had a more relevant vocational element than an English GCSE. The impetus to have a single English (and Maths) qualification rooted within the academic school system rather than the vocational system also devalued level 2 functional skills qualifications with a more vocational element. This demonstrated the unequal footing that VET holds by comparison with academic routes in England and further preserved the inequalities inherent in government policies for English VET.

There was also extensive language provision for 'immigrants' to Finland, both linked to employment routes and to integration into the Finnish society (Anon, 2013). In Finland, vocational qualifications include compulsory language elements for Finnish, Swedish (Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish) and a third language (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). The references in table 7-2 indicated a more comprehensive set of policies relating to foreign language skills, aimed at bringing about both social and economic benefits as well as stressing the educational benefits of using languages.

The Scottish Government also reviewed its foreign languages skills strategy recently, perhaps in preparation for its closer ties with the EU, (heavily promoted by the government since the Brexit referendum). Although this was applied within the school curriculum it was more ambitious than the equivalent in England. The Scottish Government also considered ESOL within its VET policies, in the first decade but made fewer references to it within the documents studied for later years.

In conclusion, on the surface, there was both policy convergence towards the Lisbon policy of including foreign language skills within lifelong learning skills and divergence from it. In addition, the underlying purposes to which countries directed their VET policies on foreign language skills also varied. It appeared that the potentially outward facing concept of learning a foreign language within the VET system was translated by some countries into inwardly facing policies dealing with the language skills of those entering a nation and their need to develop home language skills so that they could form part of the local labour market. This represents a human capital approach rather than a socially just approach (Avis, 2018). On the other hand, one country, Finland, adopted the educational approach as well as the economic approach and there was evidence that Denmark and Scotland followed this policy to a lesser degree. The underlying message in relation to VET policy making was that if VET was considered to be educational in purpose then foreign language skills would be included in VET policy, in an inclusive manner. The enactment of national VET policies has again been shaped by national contexts, rather than by EU proposals. This was despite the national tendencies to support, for example, Finland, or refute, for example, England, the EU guidance on such matters (Chapter 2).

7.4.2 Lifelong learning

For the purposes of this study, lifelong learning was viewed in the context of VET policy development, that is, related to cVET and to workplace learning and training, rather than a broader definition that would also include higher education and liberal adult education. These chosen perspectives were guided by the references in the Lisbon strategy, for example, to the economic benefits of lifelong learning:

by exploiting the complementarity between lifelong learning and adaptability

through flexible management of working time and job rotation;

The European Council makes a special appeal to companies' corporate sense of social responsibility regarding best practices on lifelong learning, work organisation, equal opportunities, social inclusion and sustainable development (European Council, 2000, pp. 6-7);

as well as the social:

giving higher priority to lifelong learning as a basic component of the European social model (European Council, 2000, p. 6).

Despite broad guidance from the Lisbon strategy, the benefits of lifelong learning were interpreted differently by the four countries:

Everyone shall be challenged in a learning process that develops inventiveness and pleasure in being able to improve oneself continuously (Denmark) (Hedegaard, 2007, p. 1);

VET supports lifelong learning and students' development as human beings and members of society (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency of Education, 2019, p. 6);

Scotland becomes recognised globally as the most creative and engaged learning society. A society where people develop through life-wide learning from the multiple contexts of home, work and their social lives and lifelong learning – often described as from cradle to grave (Education Scotland & The Scottish Government, 2014, p. 6);

We will offer every adult a Lifelong Learning Account bringing together information about available grant funding and learning opportunities as well as access to new government-backed loans (England) (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010a, p. 39).

It was striking that the UK (England) government chose to consider lifelong learning in the context of a financial allowance, rather than the educational, human and societal benefits that may accrue from the process described by the other countries. The Lifelong Learning Accounts policy suggested was not subsequently implemented; the proposal emerged at the time of transition from the Labour Government to the Coalition (and subsequently Conservative Governments). This provided an example of the major policy reversals and changes of direction in the UK (specifically England) from 2010 onwards, none of which have

been observed to be positively oriented towards VET. Lifelong learning has been a consistent theme in Finnish VET policy, despite the rebranding in 2018 of lifelong learning as ‘continuous learning’. Although there was now an expectation that employers and/or individuals would contribute to the costs of VET, signalling a more marketised approach to cVET and workplace learning, due to Finnish budgetary pressures, Finland still recognised the wider social benefits of lifelong learning. Scotland expressed aspirations to embrace lifelong learning although whilst it aspired to the European approaches to lifelong learning epitomised by Finland and Denmark, Scotland had budgetary constraints imposed by the UK government in certain areas. Denmark has also reiterated lifelong learning policy as central to its VET policy and showed little alteration in this policy objective over the period of the study.

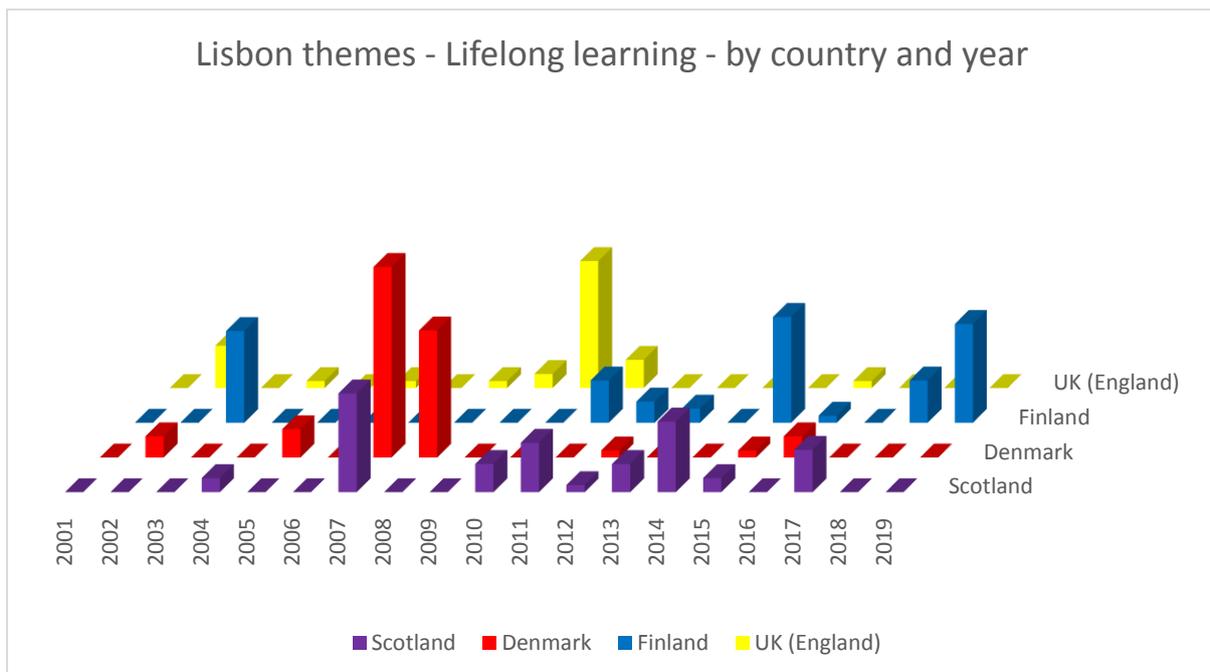


Figure 7-3 References to lifelong learning in national VET policy documents

The more frequent references to lifelong learning within a country’s policy documents (Figure 7-3) may therefore be taken as a representation of a more coherent approach to VET policy, recognising the role of VET within wider education and learning and over a lifespan and suggesting a more strategic approach to VET and a long-term approach to policy making. From this perspective, the Scottish and Finnish documents contained references that suggest this approach, whereas the Danish documents, as was the case with other

Lisbon themes examined, had specific references to lifelong learning during peaks of VET policy making but not in other periods. References to lifelong learning were included in the discourse as a matter of course, for example: 'Lifelong learning is a key principle in Denmark' (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry for Children Education and Gender Equality, & Ministry of Culture, 2016, p. 20).

The UK (England) documents made fewer references to lifelong learning after 2010; this was especially noticeable during the last peak of VET policy making in 2016-2017 during which VET policy development was targeted towards 16-18 year-old young people. There was no detectable strategy within the documents studied for how adults, whether employed or unemployed, might continue to learn and develop, in ways that might benefit both them and the society and economy in which they operated. The sole reference to adults in the Sainsbury report (HM Government, 2016), was a description of the newly developed technical education system in Singapore, and the learning from this does not appear to have been transmitted into the UK government's proposals for the English technical education system. Indeed, including this international comparison as a reference only serves to illustrate more thoroughly the fragmentation and narrowness of the English approach to VET policy. It is difficult to understand how VET policy can operate in a separate context from a framework of lifelong learning, even if this is narrowed to an i-VET policy (Mason, 2020). The reason may lie in the UK government's policy of reducing state funding for VET in England, so that employers or individuals pay for cVET or workplace learning. From this analysis, there is a very clear demonstration that VET policy for England was driven by marketisation, rather than a broader educational or social rationale, or even a more far reaching economic rationale, as proposed by the Lisbon strategy.

There was less to critique about lifelong learning policy in either Finland or Denmark, based on the texts studied. This may be due to an absence of policy or interest in such a policy but as noted above, the evidence suggested that lifelong learning philosophies are integrated into VET policies in both countries. It appeared that both Finland and Denmark more adequately resourced lifelong learning, based on the absence of criticism by the EU, compared with the extensive criticism of adult VET that the UK received (Chapter 6).

However, part of this criticism may have been borne of frustration with the perceived UK resistance to the European Semester process. Alternatively, the UK government perhaps did not recognise problems with the adult and lifelong learning elements of the VET system that seemed obvious from external scrutiny as it did not make credible policy to address them (Mason, 2020);(Chapter 8). Latterly, Scotland, by reconsidering lifelong learning policy, once again distanced itself from English VET policy making. The temporal comparisons indicated a stability of lifelong learning policy in Denmark, Finland and, indeed, Scotland, that was absent in England.

7.4.3 Mobility

Mobility was another term used within the Lisbon strategy in relation to VET policy that has been differently interpreted in the four countries. The Lisbon strategy itself defined mobility in terms of student, teacher and professional opportunities to gain experience and knowledge within different EU countries, supported by EU funding, as shown by the quotations below:

take steps to remove obstacles to the mobility of researchers in Europe by 2002 and to attract and retain high-quality research talent in Europe;

define, by the end of 2000, the means for fostering the mobility of students, teachers and training and research staff both through making the best use of existing Community programmes (Socrates, Leonardo, Youth);

and:

to take steps to remove obstacles to teachers' mobility by 2002 (European Council, 2000, pp. 3 - 5)

This reflected the unusual nature of the Lisbon strategy, which not only put forward policy recommendations but also dived into details of implementation (Chapter 2). The lack of clarity about the definition of mobility within the Lisbon strategy became evident in the multiplicity of references within national VET policy documents. This lack of initial clarity may have been due to a lack of agreement about the term or different influences or authors

for different parts of the Lisbon strategy which was then compounded as different authors at national level added their interpretations. Alternatively, it may have been deliberately vague to allow national interpretation in a policy area that was considered to be politically sensitive because of the freedom of movement allowed by the European single market (European Commission, 2021b).

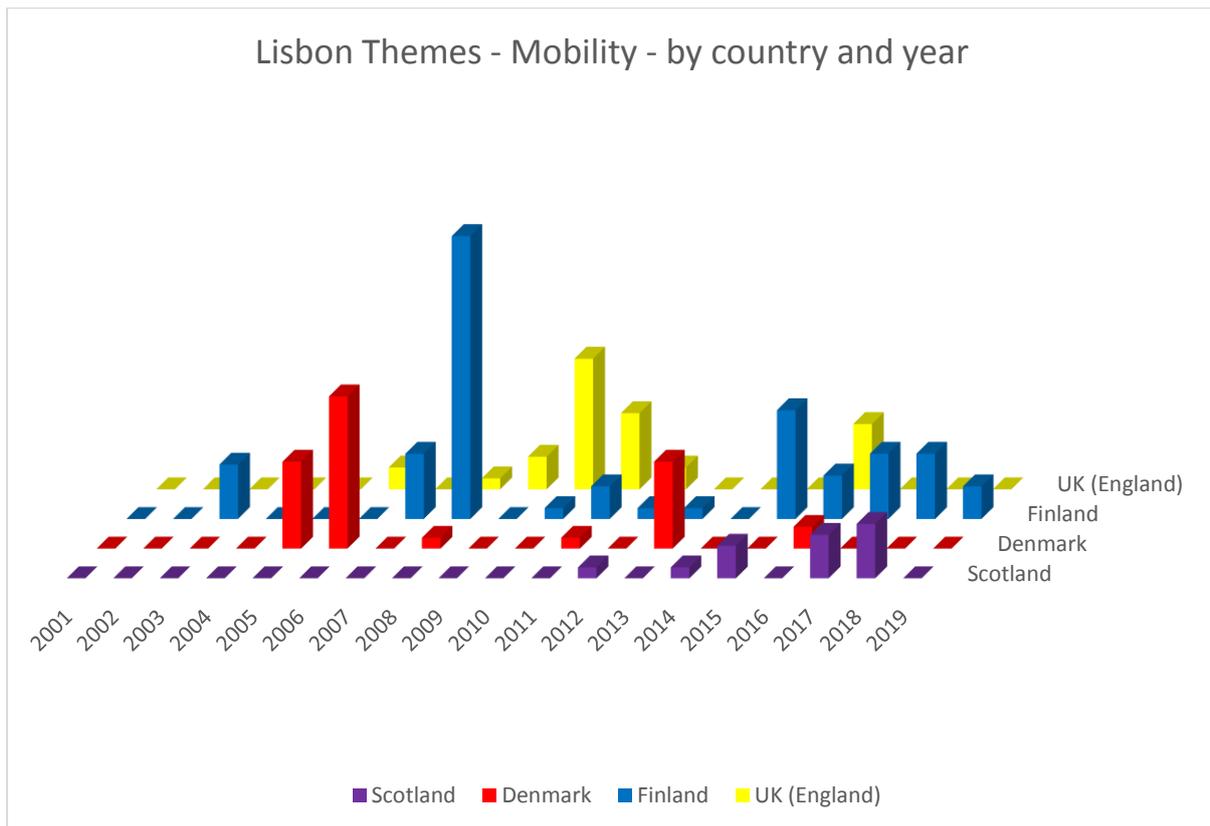


Figure 7-4 References to mobility in VET policy documents in the four countries

An initial review (Figure 7-4) of the use of mobility in the VET policy documents showed that each country had used the term at different times, with the most frequent use being logged in Finland and England. The term was only used in Scottish documents post 2011; the impact of devolution changed the Scottish VET discourse and policy priorities different from those of the UK (particularly England) began to emerge in the Scottish government’s narrative. This suggested that mobility became important in VET policy at different times as countries faced challenges such as economic migration, refugees and asylum seekers (Denmark and Finland) and social mobility (United Kingdom).

However, following a detailed recoding of references from the texts, it was observed that the term was used very differently by each country as illustrated in the following chart (Figure 7-5):

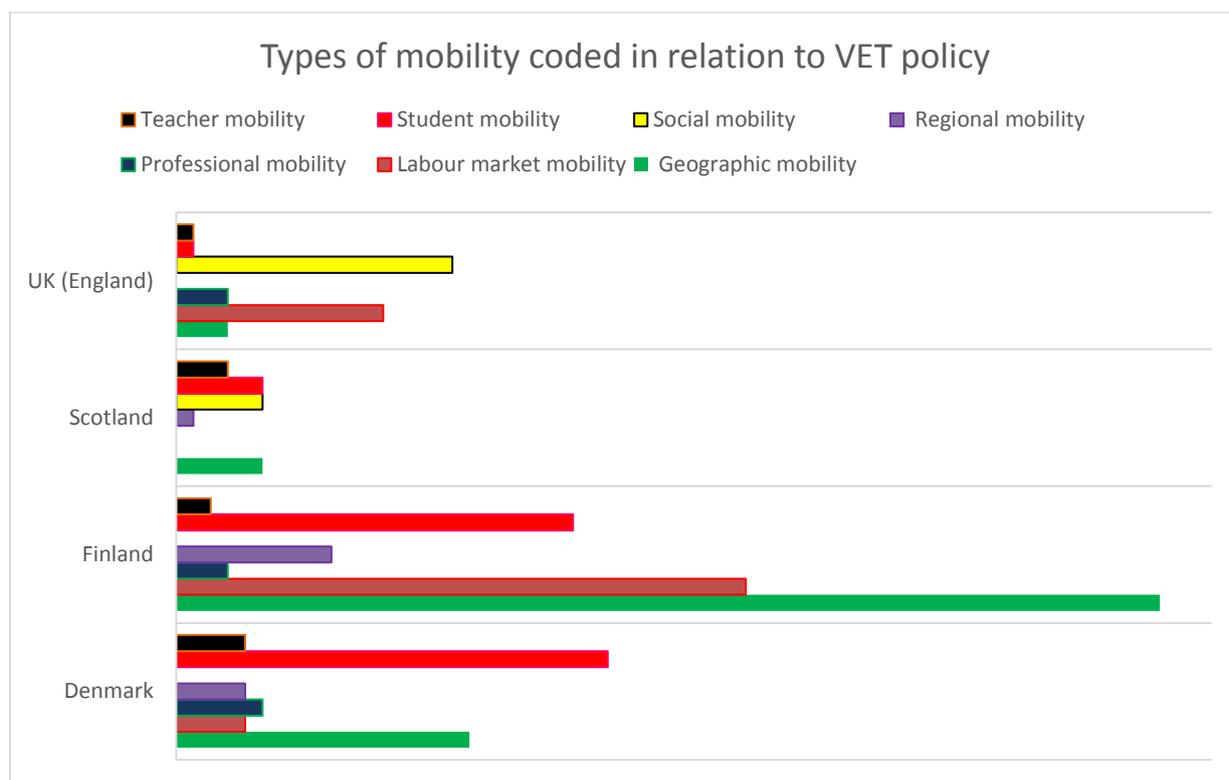


Figure 7-5 References to types of mobility related to VET policy making

Teacher and student mobility were defined as in the Lisbon strategy (p. 231). Professional mobility included researcher mobility but also included reference to the mobility of other defined professions, rather than the more general references to employment which were included in labour market mobility. There was a clear distinction between mobility focussed on learning (and the benefits of broader experiences) and that focussed on employment (obtaining a job and staying in it or being able to move as the labour market changed).

A further distinction could be drawn between the concept of geographic mobility, between countries (not necessarily from within the EU) and regional mobility, both of labour and of educational opportunity, within a country. In both Finland and Denmark, concerns were expressed about the availability of VET (and other education sectors) within the regions to

support development of regional societies and economies, rather than seeing the concentration in the capital areas of Helsinki and Copenhagen. There was some limited reference to regional mobility in the Scottish documents, but the UK (England) documents did not acknowledge regional mobility at all; perhaps the government considered that this was already addressed by skills plans developed by Local Enterprise Partnerships or perhaps it was regretting the steps it had taken towards devolution.

In Denmark, the relationship between geographic mobility and VET policy was expressed in immigrant training strategies (section 7.4.1). The Finnish view of labour market mobility also referenced the training of those in the labour market of the future, not just the immediate present, whereas this was not evident in government VET policy in England:

In terms of working life and mobility, vocational training has the task of improving students' employment and securing access to employment for working life. (Translation from Räisänen & Goman, 2018, p. 16).

Social mobility referred to movement across socio-economic classes and might also have spatial elements, particularly in the regions of England. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the most significant difference was the absence of any reference to social mobility in either Danish or Finnish documents whereas it was prevalent in mobility references in the UK (England) documents and also present in Scottish documents. An illustration of its use in relation to VET policy is:

As those who choose vocational routes into work tend to be from lower socio-economic groups, a strong further education and skills system is fundamental to social mobility (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010b, p. 30).

This type of societal stratification was largely absent in Finland and Denmark and there is thus no reference to social mobility within VET policy documents. VET policy was not seen as an instrument to preserve social injustice in the way that it was in England. However, both in Finland and Denmark, the problem of social mobility was framed in a different way, being identified more with country of origin and ability to speak Finnish, Swedish or Danish so that the individual can participate in VET to find a place in both the economy and society. This was a very different frame from the class framing all too evident in English VET policy,

for example, the references to 'other people's children' and 'the bottom 50%' within a recent book about further education (Lenon, 2018) and as well as the rebranding of VET through the Sainsbury report (HM Government, 2016) as technical education because of the perceived stigma attached to VET. As Billett (2014) observed, privileged others were prescribing how VET was arranged in order to preserve the status quo. This was particularly the case in England.

Of the references from the Lisbon strategy, student and teacher mobility were included by all countries, although Finland and Denmark had a greater frequency of references to student mobility. This correlated with a greater emphasis on learning within VET policy in Finland and Denmark, contrasting with a more economic outlook in the UK (England). The Scottish documents, while containing fewer overall references, also focussed more on mobility of learning.

However, by number of references, the Finnish documents indicate the greatest concern with labour market mobility. This arose partly because of the linkage of VET policy to integration training for immigrants and to the policy of steering immigrants into employment via VET (section 7.4.1). There was also an acknowledgement that the Finnish labour market would require the skills of immigrants in certain sectors and that this was to be encouraged:

The Government will promote work-related migration that enhances employment in Finland, boosts public finances, improves the dependency ratio and contributes to the internationalisation of the economy. The whole of Europe is ageing and will have to deal with the resulting problem of public deficits. Immigrants enhance our innovation capacity and increase our know-how by bringing their cultural strengths to Finnish society (Finnish Government, 2015, p. 40).

This contrasted with a view implied by the Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011) that may be interpreted to mean that immigrants should not be holding down jobs in the British construction industry.

In some parts of the country there is an acute shortage of apprenticeship places. British construction companies meanwhile employ large numbers of skilled immigrants who have trained under different systems (Wolf, 2011, p. 77).

Whether intentionally or not, this indicated a racial bias that reached far into the UK government, because of Wolf's influence, not only through her own report but also as a member of both panels behind the Sainsbury and Augar reports and her role in February 2020 as an adviser on FE to the Number 10 policy unit (although there is no evidence of more recent engagement during the pandemic). Furthermore, it may be interpreted as a lack of willingness to accept that other national VET systems deliver training of equivalence to that in the UK, which is a contentious viewpoint.

The Scottish Government's comparative absence of reference to mobility in relation to VET policy was considered. The references found within the policy documents were mostly since 2015 and it is possible that the Brexit problem (from the Scottish Government's perspective) has heightened attention on mobility and VET policy, particularly, for example, labour market mobility. Alternatively, mobility may not have been the term used in Scotland over the period of the study because it has been shown to be such a nebulous term.

This review of the different national interpretations of mobility and the insights it provided into how VET policy was developed illustrated, once again, the disparity about the nature and purpose of VET within EU member states as well as within the UK. The educational aspects predominated in Scottish and Danish policy documents whereas the Finnish documents balanced the educational and the socio-economic aspects, and English policy documents demonstrated none of the anticipated purposes, but were rather dominated by class consciousness. This illustrates some of the differences of approaches to mobility that were epitomised by the question posed by Sen (1999): is mobility solely about inflows of population for the development of the labour market or is it part of a freedom of choice? In

the instance of both European and national VET policy, it appeared to be predominantly about the development of the labour market and there was thus evidence of policy convergence around this, although the imprecision of the term might indicate that, instead of convergence, it may be policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017).

7.4.4 Role and expectations of teachers

It was unsurprising that expectations of VET (and school) teachers were included within the Lisbon strategy, given the breadth of the strategy and the uneven balance between broad policy statements and implementation detail. Recognition of the role of teachers gave a prominence to the profession even though the references were specific to the identification of a particular skills gap and considerations of mobility (apparently for the teachers' own benefit) and quality.

all the teachers needed are skilled in the use of the Internet and multimedia resources by the end of 2002;

and:

to take steps to remove obstacles to teachers' mobility by 2002 and to attract high-quality teachers (European Council, 2000, pp. 2, 5).

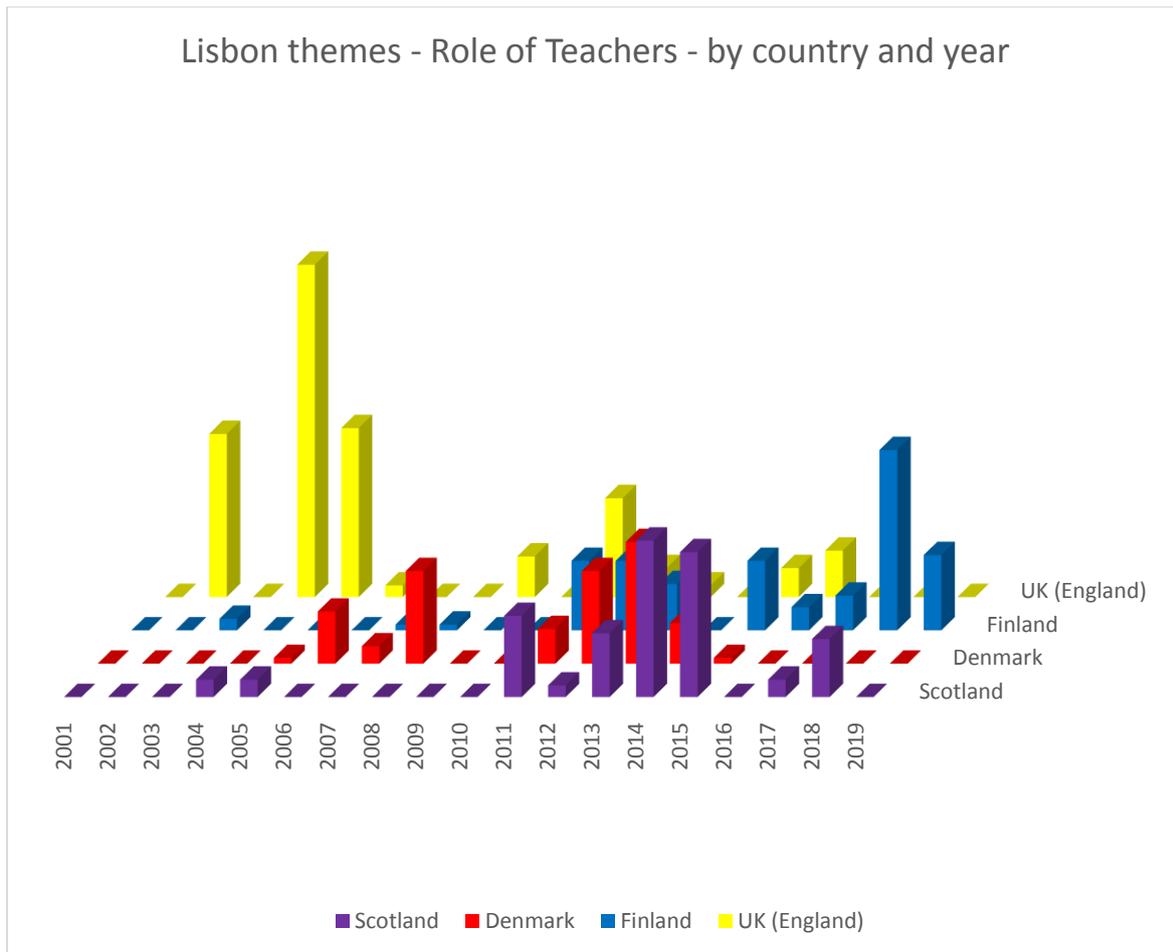


Figure 7-6 References to the role of teachers from VET policy documents

However, within the national VET policy documents coded (Figure 7-6), teachers' digital skills were not specifically referenced and mobility was infrequently mentioned (Figure 7-7 - internationalisation code). Since both of these factors were assigned deadlines of 2002, it perhaps was to be expected that they would not be prominent in many of the documents selected for coding, the dates of which are weighted towards the second decade of the 21st century. These may have been aspirations that were now embedded in practice (although the explosion of online learning in English colleges as a result of the recent pandemic has exposed some skills gaps in digital literacy). Instead, either directly or indirectly, the focus was on high quality teachers, although this was expressed in different ways in the different countries. As with previous themes, the discourse about the roles and expectations of VET teachers also illustrated perceptions about VET within the countries concerned, and this is further illustrated by Figure 7-7, which presents a further analysis of the role of teacher

coding, taking descriptors from the documents themselves, to examine the principal discourses about teaching roles.

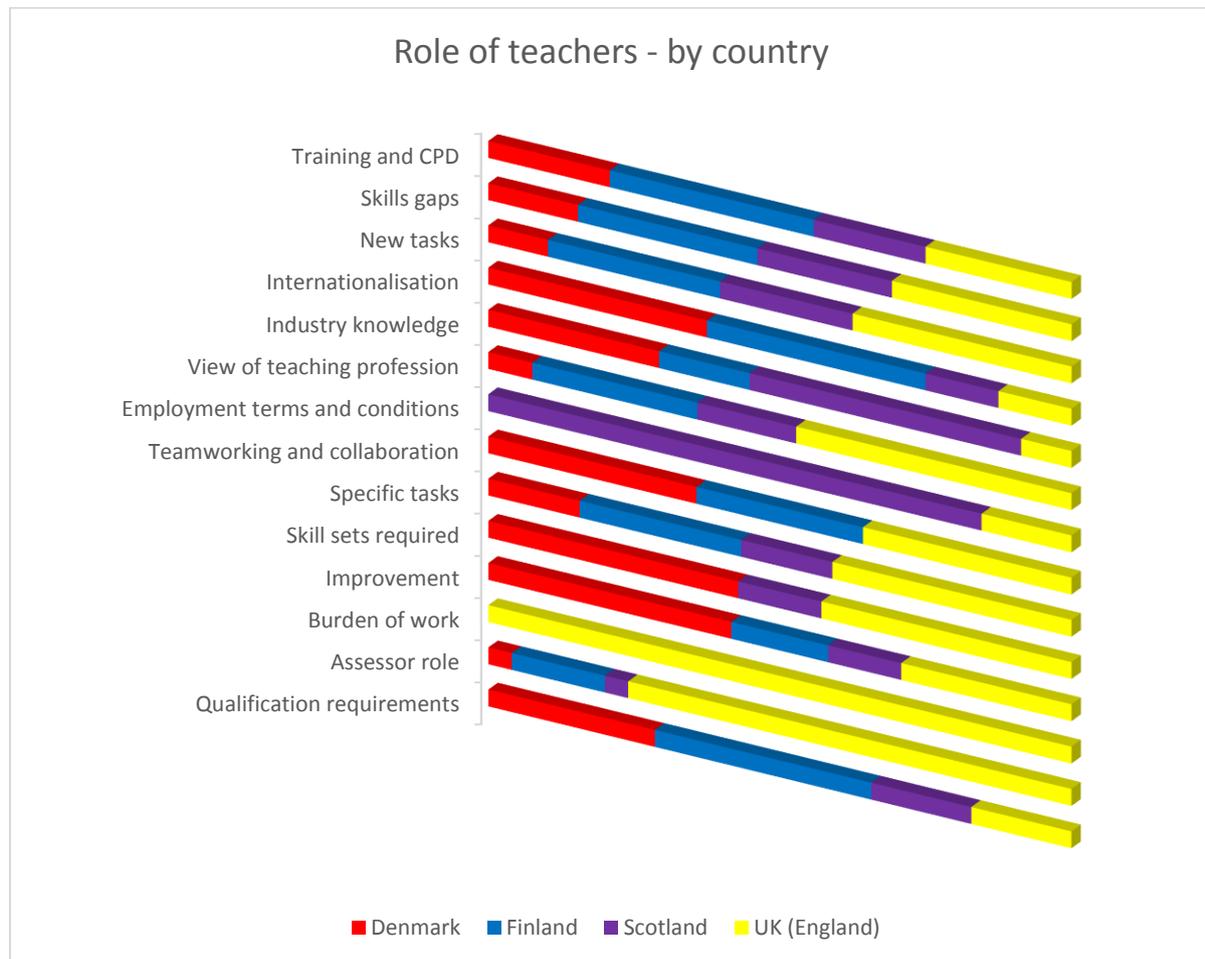


Figure 7-7 References to the role of teachers – a further analysis

All four countries specified the qualification requirements for VET teachers, although these requirements differ, with Finland’s teachers requiring professional teaching qualifications as well as a subject degree and Denmark’s teachers being more recently encouraged to acquire newly revised teaching qualifications (Danish Ministry of Education, 2014). In England, on the other hand, FE teachers were not expected to have a professional teaching qualification until 2012 and it is still possible to begin a VET teaching career without a degree or teaching qualification (National Careers Service, 2021). In Scottish documents, it was noted that college teachers are required to have professional experience and a teaching qualification (although this may be acquired during the early years of a teaching career) but that this is not a requirement for other VET providers. Industrial knowledge was emphasised in Danish

and Scottish documents but was less readily identified in the Finnish documents perhaps because it has been a requirement in Finland for many years. In the English documents, whilst a lack of industrial knowledge was viewed as a problem, few policy solutions were advanced to address this in the documents studied. The differences highlighted here indicated the differing ways in which the profession was viewed in each country. These mirrored the different national approaches to VET in that Finland and Denmark placed VET systems alongside other educational sectors and their policies reflected its national importance. In Scotland, this became increasingly the case although the fragmented provider market meant that coherent teaching policies were not made for the entirety of VET provision. In England, with an even more fragmented provider market and with a persistent denial of the importance of VET, the contributions from VET teachers were not only difficult to track but were also undervalued.

All four countries identified new work for VET teachers over the period of study and all specified further training and CPD requirements. In Danish policy, this was described as ensuring that training and CPD was made available systematically, whereas in Finnish policy, it was noted that there was a minimum annual training requirement for VET teachers, to be provided by the municipalities. In English policy, the initial emphasis was more on initial training than on CPD. The skills gaps that all countries identified (ranging from subject specific skills such as Maths in England to pedagogic skills in Denmark) were not necessarily then linked to training and CPD provision within the documents studied. Nor was it always apparent that the qualification requirements and skill sets identified were best delivered by the training and CPD described. This may have been a partial picture, as the VET policy documents are, by definition, a broad policy outline, rather than a detailed account of practice, although both Finnish and English documents contained some very detailed specifications of the tasks to be undertaken by VET teachers. However, the Finnish documents tended to describe the role of the teacher in relation to learning and skills development whereas English documents described functional roles such as exam invigilation and administration and yet it was also the English documents that expressed the hope that teachers would not be overburdened by the sheer volume of tasks (particularly connected to assessment). English policy documents thus also contained the most

references to a separate assessor role, viewed as important for workplace learning aspects of VET. Whilst listing a range of tasks, there was also a narrative about teachers being engaged purely to teach. The confusion about VET purpose and place within the English education system is also manifesting itself in confusion about the roles of VET teachers.

Indeed, the discourse from the English documents did not portray a teacher as a person but more as an input to generate learning for the learner – a human capital approach (Sen, 1999). This was exemplified by the differing views of the VET teaching profession in the four countries. Both in Denmark and Finland, policy documents stated that VET teachers should find their roles attractive and fulfilling (there was significant over subscription for VET teaching places in Finland) and that they were trusted professionals. In England, on the other hand, according to the policy documents, teachers were viewed in a more negative light, on the one hand being expected to add careers guidance to their full schedules but then being criticised for not being fully aware of the opportunities offered by apprenticeships. The profession was not particularly recognised as a profession; although there was debate about whether FE teachers should have a teaching qualification, for example, the requirement to have a teaching qualification before working in FE was removed in 2013. It is therefore possible to undertake teaching qualifications whilst working as a teacher. There were also still many barriers to the promised mobility between school and college teaching roles, introduced in 2012, with some caveats (for example, terms and conditions and the processes of obtaining qualified teacher status). Reference was made to teachers being required to be experts (HM Government, 2016) and what good teachers should do (Richard, 2012) but there was little evidence of respect for the VET teaching profession.

The Scottish college reforms meant that VET teachers' terms and conditions were part of the policy discourse between 2015 and 2017. A reduction in teaching staff numbers in order to save costs during the early part of the changes was swiftly followed by an increase in numbers because of increased demand for VET as the work done by FE colleges gained increasing visibility after the changes. This utilitarian view of the teaching profession was,

however, balanced by references to professional teacher autonomy and the hope that teachers will be ‘future literate’ and ‘highly developed learners’ (Skills Development Scotland, 2018).

In summary, there was a divergence of discourse about the role of VET teachers across the four countries and also across the time period. Whereas specific focus was given to VET teachers in the policy documents studied for Scotland, Denmark and Finland, at the time of VET reforms, there was less evidence of this in the UK (England) documents. The latest set of reforms, post 2016, will undoubtedly have required changes in teaching roles but these have not been explicit within the policy making documents studied, although it is assumed that they will be considered in the implementation phases of policy making. In other words, this suggests that VET teachers’ agency in England is confined to practice rather than included within policy making. Teachers were portrayed as a problematic resource rather than professionals with a key role as agents of policy change.

7.4.5 – The six European VET declarations

Finally, the four selected Lisbon themes were traced into the six sub-EU VET declarations and also into Europe 2020. The purpose of this was to see whether these Lisbon themes persisted within the EU VET dimension and/or Europe 2020, the next EU strategic document. An explanation for the differences in longevity of the concepts in national VET policies might be that they had not survived in the VET dimension or were not reinforced in Europe 2020.

There was reference to lifelong learning and mobility in Europe 2020 but no mention of either foreign languages or the role of teachers. By 2010, from the EU strategic perspective, VET policy making was still linked into lifelong learning. Mobility (albeit now defined as encompassing both student and teacher as well as labour mobility) was still perceived to be either a by-product of VET or an element of VET programmes.

In the VET dimension, there was a different order of prioritisation as shown in Figure 7-8:

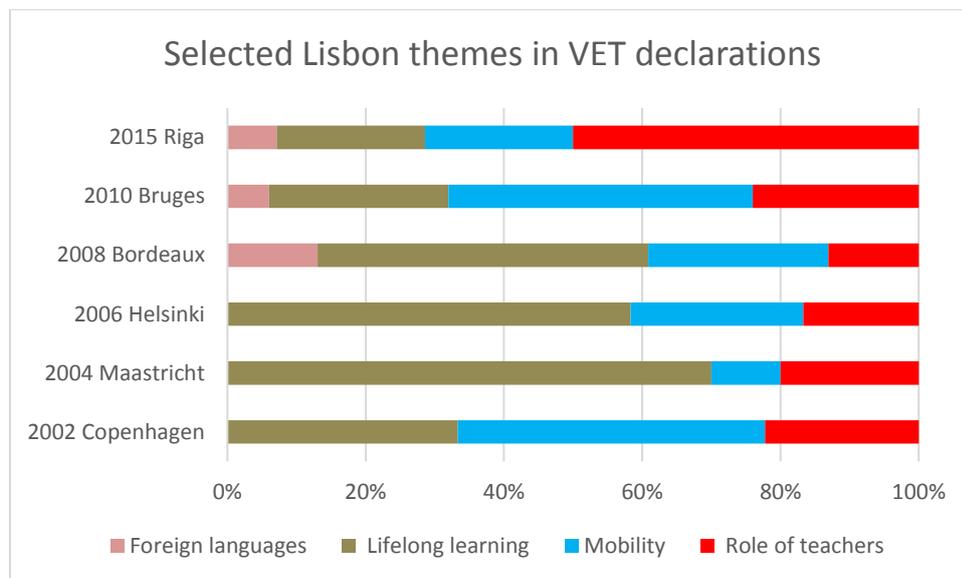


Figure 7-8 References to four Lisbon themes in VET declarations

Between 2002 and 2006 the VET declarations referred only to lifelong learning, mobility and the role of teachers. From 2008 onwards, foreign language skills were also included. However, Figure 7-8 does show that discourses within the EU VET dimension reflected all four Lisbon themes until 2015 (which was, of course, the last of such documents) whilst this was not the pattern in the four countries of study.

Mobility and the role of teachers were elements of VET policy making post 2010 (and indeed 2015) in all four countries but only Finnish and Scottish documents continued to refer to lifelong learning and only the Finnish government continued to include foreign language skills in its VET policy reforms. Although Copenhagen was widely believed to have established a common VET policy discourse and, for example, was held to be foregrounding the establishment of a European VET area (Grek et al., 2009), the diversity of approaches to VET policy, as demonstrated through the references to the selected Lisbon themes in the national policy documents, did not support such a claim, as discussed further in the next section. On the surface, based on the four themes analysed, national VET policy making did not take much account of VET policies arising from sub-EU VET declarations unless it was already incorporated in what they were doing.

7.5 Conclusion

Although the analyses above are not all conclusive in their outcomes, the overall findings show that there was a wide variation in interpretation of explicit concepts from the Lisbon strategy, ranging from encompassing them to ignoring them, in relation to VET policy making in the four countries. The scattering of these Lisbon concepts over an already complex set of policy currents operating within each country and between each country and the EU (Chapters 5 and 6) meant that no discernible VET policy making 'cycle' was visible, but did support the concept of a VET policy gyre. Indeed, the national interpretations of Lisbon VET concepts appeared to be based on the way in which each country views the purpose and nature of VET within both society and the economy.

Political influences have also been identified, for example the changes to policy specifically in England after the 2010 general election. A diminution of impact of the Lisbon strategy on national VET policy, as explored by these themes, might have been expected over time, but this was not the case in Finland, nor to some extent in Denmark. In Scotland, too, the themes were carried into VET policy reforms post Scottish devolution. It was in English VET policy that the Lisbon effect has faded most quickly and noticeably (Chapter 8).

A further question arising from the temporal analysis of all themes above, posed as a result of considering the impact of the Brexit decision on VET policy (Chapter 8), is whether the UK (in particular, England) has been less engaged with EU VET policy since 2010. This date is significant, both because of the introduction of the European Semester following Europe 2020, but also because of the change of government in the UK, leading to a more accelerated form of neoliberalism and Euro-scepticism. As previously observed, Scottish and English VET policy has diverged (Chapters 5 and 6) and, based on the approaches to the four Lisbon themes, this has become more marked since 2010, although this is also linked to Scottish devolution (Chapter 2). It appears from the above, that English policy was already diverging from EU VET policy influence as well as the policy of other countries within the EU, prior to Brexit, despite warm words about EU membership in the NRP of 2016. This was, of

course, legitimate, because EU VET policy was not mandatory, due to the principle of subsidiarity (Chapter 2). It is questionable whether this resistance has benefited English VET. Despite this, the English government does not appear to have implemented much through policy learning from any of them. Policy learning (Chapter 1) implies an openness to ideas and knowledge from other cultures that has not been demonstrated in this study (for example, p. 236).

Consequently, these findings indicate that it is too simplistic to say that there was a disjunct in VET policy making (in terms of inclusion of VET policy themes from the Lisbon strategy) because of Europe 2020 and the global financial recession of 2008/2009. Some themes have persisted beyond this change of direction arising from the setting of policies designed to aid economic recovery and others have been assigned to a backwater. However, eddies can develop from backwaters (Chapter 4) and the eddy of foreign languages in relation to VET is an example of this (section 7.4.1). Although the tracking of these themes has been an analysis at the surface of the gyre of VET policy making, it has presented a complex picture, and, on occasion, shown that what is lying in the depths of EU and national VET policy making can surface at unexpected moments and vice versa, which is a familiar picture from the findings of the two previous chapters at different levels of analysis. In terms of both temporal and spatial comparison the interplay of European drivers with national drivers in creating VET policy has differed in each country studied.

Referring to Research question 3, the initial conclusion from this chapter is that the Lisbon strategy, through various themes, was seen to have influenced national VET policies. However, in some cases this was a positive influence, through reinforcement of national tendencies, whereas in other cases the absence of policy drawn from Lisbon may also be seen as an influence, albeit negative. This does suppose that the Lisbon influence should always be considered benign. This may not be the case where a country's ideologies and ways of policy making are very divergent from what has been put forward as the European ideal in the Lisbon strategy, so that policy harmonisation, convergence and hence Europeanisation were unlikely to occur. It may be too destabilising for such a country to

attempt to conform, especially in an area where the EU role is influential rather than regulatory. Most policy making alignment was observed where the countries (predominantly Finland and Denmark) were already making policies in a similar way, in similar time scales and supported by similar philosophies. This continues the debate about top down, bottom up and peer to peer influence over VET policy making; whether the EU is influencing its members or whether the members are shaping the EU policy as well as whether there is a dynamic process (a gyre) that best represents VET policy making, which is continued in Chapter 8.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I draw together the major findings from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 into a summary table and discuss their wider implications in the context of the three research questions, repeated here for reference:

Research questions

1. How has the evolving relationship between national VET policy making and EU VET policy making shaped discourse about the purpose of VET?
2. To what extent and for what reasons have VET policies in the four countries converged or diverged in the period between 2011 and 2019?
3. In what aspects has the Lisbon strategy influenced national VET policy in Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland in the period between 2000 and 2019?

My conclusions were built on analyses informed by the conceptualisations discussed in earlier chapters, for example, in assessing my contribution to knowledge (section 8.3), I also reflected on the conceptualisation of the policy gyre (Chapter 4) and its applicability to EU and national VET policy making. I then considered what I might have done differently (section 8.4) and recommend next steps for future research (section 8.5) before summarising conclusions in respect of the overall research aim:

To find out what is the purpose/orientation of VET policy in the EU as illustrated by VET policy making between the EU, three member states and a region.

8.2 Findings table

In Table 8.1 I summarise the key findings from Chapters 5, 6 and 7, related to the critical realism domains (Table 3-1), policy change theories and phenomena (Table 1-2 and Figure 4-2) and the research questions.

Table 8-1 Key findings summary

Number	Finding	Chapter location	Policy change theory	Resulting policy phenomenon	CR domain	Gyre dimension	Cross reference to Research question
Reference			Table 1-2		Table 3-1	Figure 4-2	
1.	EU VET space or policy Neither an EU VET space nor policy appeared to have been created. However, there was evidence of EU influence over VET policy making. This sometimes appeared as interference or disruption rather than construction.	6/7	Policy transfer	Harmonisation/convergence	Real	Spatial	1
2.	VET policy making over time There was a difference in influential effect between short and long-term policy making. Where long time frames for change were involved, the EU sometimes created policy to look busy. There was a difference between policies made to solve a problem and policies made to justify the existence of policy making structures and agents.	7	Policy drift, Policy diffusion	Divergence	Real	Temporal	1
3.	Notable policy absences , for example, sustainability, might indicate that VET policy making is	5	Policy drift, Policy diffusion	Divergence	Real	Dynamic	1

Number	Finding	Chapter location	Policy change theory	Resulting policy phenomenon	CR domain	Gyre dimension	Cross reference to Research question
Reference			Table 1-2		Table 3-1	Figure 4-2	
	not always as forward looking as it might be or that VET purposes are not fully understood.						
4.	Sub-EU VET policy making – represented policy making devoted to a specific education sector, i.e. VET, so that this group of policy makers had a different perspective from EU policy makers. This diminished in significance of influence after the introduction of the European Semester and its absence affected convergence around the EU VET policy space ambition. The increased size of the EU and the need for central control after the global financial recession led to a lower priority for a sole emphasis on VET	5	Policy borrowing, Policy learning	Convergence	Actual	Spatial	2
5.	Europeanisation and Europeification. These phenomena of convergence were thought by some researchers and EU policy	6	Policy borrowing, Policy learning	Convergence/divergence	Actual	Dynamic	2

Number	Finding	Chapter location	Policy change theory	Resulting policy phenomenon	CR domain	Gyre dimension	Cross reference to Research question
Reference			Table 1-2		Table 3-1	Figure 4-2	
	makers to contribute to the creation of EU VET policy but it was not clear what aspects of policy were expected to converge, whether it was policy purpose, goals/targets/objectives, drivers or levers. There was evidence of policy learning and borrowing but also that some change might be more readily attributed to drift and diffusion.						
6.	The lessons that EU and national VET policy makers learned from response to the global financial recession may be relevant to Brexit and Covid and are linked to an understanding of the purpose of VET.	7	Policy learning, Policy lending	Convergence	Actual	Dynamic	2
7.	EU VET policy making role This evolved from the OMC to the Semester. It imposed artificial time constraints as well as moving from selective and strategic (Lisbon) to	5	Policy transfer	Harmonisation/convergence	Surface	Spatial	3

Number	Finding	Chapter location	Policy change theory	Resulting policy phenomenon	CR domain	Gyre dimension	Cross reference to Research question
Reference			Table 1-2		Table 3-1	Figure 4-2	
	prescriptive in the time of economic crisis and at the time of writing had not changed back (reflection of the size of the EU). This also varied between top down, bottom up and peer to peer. A binary between iVET and cVET was created and the relationship to lifelong learning was not always explicit.						
8.	National VET policy making The context was important to VET policy making – even at regional level. To some extent countries were following their own agenda and doing what they would have done in any case without any reference to EU recommendations. There was confusion over the consistent application of the principle of subsidiarity. Formal communication with the EU differed between nations. It appeared that England, while	6/7	Policy borrowing, Policy learning, Policy drift, Policy diffusion	Convergence/divergence	Surface	Spatial	3

Number	Finding	Chapter location	Policy change theory	Resulting policy phenomenon	CR domain	Gyre dimension	Cross reference to Research question
Reference			Table 1-2		Table 3-1	Figure 4-2	
	appearing exceptionalist, was subconsciously mirroring the EU by creating a lot of busy work around VET policy with no substance.						

The information from the table was further condensed to provide a response to each research question.

Research question 1

In raising this question, I aimed to develop an understanding of the relationships between national and EU VET policy making that also cast light on the purposes for which VET policies were intended and hence the purpose of VET itself. As concluded in Chapter 5, the mechanisms of EU VET policy making were complex. As they evolved during the expansion of the EU and were deployed to address the global challenges of the financial recession in 2008/2009, these mechanisms emphasised centralised control, accountability through benchmarking and appeared to impinge on the principle of subsidiarity. The Lisbon strategy created some expectations that VET was perceived by the EU to have a social and educational purpose but latterly the political purposes of the EU (Table 6-2) influenced VET policy making more greatly. Whilst researchers such as Grek et al. (2009) have proposed the development of an EU educational space, this was not easily recognisable for VET, particularly if the EHEA was used as a comparator (Chapter 2). As an example, although lifelong learning had initially been emphasised in the Lisbon strategy, iVET was prioritised over cVET by the EU so that there appeared to be a binary approach to VET, rather than relating both approaches through lifelong learning strategies. Only Finland was consistent about lifelong learning in its policy making whereas the other countries within the study appeared to use it as a theme within policy at intervals, but with little detailed strategy to support meaningful policy making (Chapter 7).

Looking at the temporal analyses in Chapters 5 and 6, EU and/or sub-EU VET policy making may have had traction between 2002 (Copenhagen) and 2008 (Bordeaux). As was recognised in the Europe 2020 strategy, the global financial recession then impacted on VET policy making at EU and sub-EU level as well as enhancing the complex interplays between national and EU VET policy making already apparent following the Lisbon strategy (Chapter 7).

With hindsight, within the sub-EU space, the references in both Bruges and Riga to the Copenhagen process, designed to operate in a very different context, perhaps added to the complexity of VET policy making in the EU. The problems that the Copenhagen process was designed to address were no longer the key problems for VET policy. Developing VET policy in the EU was a process of adaptation to a series of moving targets and the adaptation was perhaps not as straightforward as might have been hoped, hence the problems being addressed within the ministerial texts are less simple to isolate. As Cort (2008b) suggested, the different voices of those countries hosting the ministerial declarations were shown to be a factor within what was put forward as EU VET policy.

The relationship between the EU and its member states, first of all mediated at sub-EU level by the EU VET Ministers, but latterly more directly through the tightening control exercised by the EU Semester, appeared to be a top down driving of VET policy and thus it might be expected that VET purposes in the member states would mirror those apparent in EU VET policy making. However, I found this not to be the case (Chapter 5). VET policy making was different in the four countries in the study and there were also divergent purposes between the four countries in the study. The existing and evolving national contexts exerted a strong influence on the way in which EU VET policy making was received, for example, the UK followed a line of resistance in English VET policy that was particularly apparent from 2010 onwards, after a change of government, although the Scottish government attempted to follow a more conciliatory stance to the EU and also to policy learning in relation to VET. Whilst Denmark claimed a bottom up influence over EU VET policy following the Copenhagen declaration (Chapter 2), this was less evident in the second decade of the study. The natural ebbs and flows of VET policy making in the four countries were not significantly influenced by EU VET policy making, as the purposes were quite different (Chapter 5). Where purposes coincided over time, it might have appeared, that policy convergence was developing, but in the long term, policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) was a more likely theory to explain this phenomenon. In summary, the EU's influence might be deemed to be both one of interfering beyond the limits of subsidiarity but paradoxically, taking an undisputed lead in the absence of VET policies supporting sustainability, for example. This appeared to be affected by whether the EU perceived VET's purpose to be

economic or educational. If it was educational, then the principle of subsidiarity was more likely to be recalled. If, in an economic crisis, VET was seen as an economic solution (particularly iVET) then the EU policy makers stepped forward. This inconsistency left opportunities for member states to pursue their own policy making agendas and was a factor in the non-existence of the EU VET policy space (Chapter 2).

I then considered, in the light of the relationships I had explored, how VET policy making happened. As observed in Chapter 2, the EU assumption was that policy making was top down and this view was supported by some researchers (Ertl, 2006). However, Alexiadou (2019) and Cort (2010) made the case for bottom up policy making by the member states (pages 69 and 79-80), and this was evident in some of my findings. Another factor was peer to peer policy learning, which was observed in the case of Scotland's VET institutions, where these were brought into state control again, facilitating regional planning, and more aligned to the systems in Denmark and Finland than the English system (Chapter 6). The sub-EU layer of VET policy making, with its single focus on VET, created a backwater, where VET policy was negotiated between the member states and the VET ministers, rather than attracting policy making attention within the EU space. Following the Europe 2020 strategy, in response to the global financial recession, VET and skills became more important to economic recovery, and the EU's economic and social goals for VET overrode sub-EU discourse that was more educational in nature (figure 5-2), which would seem to be the reason why the ministerial meetings declined in frequency. When the national discourses of VET purpose were factored in, the very complex nature of VET policy making across different spaces and times became apparent and, in order to better represent these layers of complexity, a three-dimensional model of a gyre was created (section 4.7).

Research question 2

As was clear from Chapter 6, the question of policy convergence between the four countries was not straightforward. I first considered what was converging: was it the policy purpose or agenda, the policy goals or objectives, policy drivers such as social inclusion or economic recovery, policy levers, for example, funding, or was it the actual expressed policy itself?

Convergence of policy outcomes was, of course, outside the scope of this study. Convergence around a common VET policy agenda was unlikely as there was no convergence of VET purpose (Research question 1), nor indeed between VET systems. The differences between VET systems in the four countries were outlined in Chapter 2 and Appendix A. As these differences persisted over the period of the study (Chapter 6), it was reasonable to conclude that there has been little convergence of expressed VET policies, and, in fact, further divergence. The widening differences between Scotland and England, from educational and political perspectives were of interest because a region (from the EU perspective) had aligned more closely with EU VET policies than the member state. Unlike the UK, Scotland had demonstrated some elements of preparedness for VET policies post Brexit as early as 2017, with its Baltic alliance paper (Scottish Government, 2017). Underlying the politics, it was important to recognise that there were also differences in the purpose of VET and an appetite for policy learning that was not evident in England, despite rhetoric that might indicate otherwise (HM Government, 2016). Finland and Denmark, with different VET systems and different national cultures, have neither diverged or converged in VET policy terms over the period but have sought to develop VET policies consistently within their particular social and educational contexts.

A lack of consistency may have been exacerbated by the broad range of VET policies already in existence in member states and a focus, perhaps, on encouraging newer member states (none of which were included in this study) to develop their VET policies, rather than harmonise all policies. In this instance, this created conditions for policy divergence, rather than convergence. Although, after 2016, the EU's tone towards the UK had toughened, the UK (England) was already on a trajectory of extreme divergence. Where the EU attempted to put forward common VET policies, for example a Youth Guarantee (p. 176), those that already had such policies were in a stronger position to influence what was being put forward (Cort, 2008b) so that acted as an incentive for some member states to enhance their VET policy agenda whereas others could continue on their own path. Scotland, in seeking to make VET policies that were distinctive from English policies, has not, perhaps converged towards European models in the sense of Europeanisation but has certainly learned from policies within the EU in a way that was not readily apparent in England,

despite representations to the contrary in the Sainsbury report (HM Government, 2016) and the Augar report (Augar, 2019).

Convergence of policy goals was found to be more widespread across all four nations, particularly post 2010, when a group of VET policies, with the aim of reducing young people's unemployment, was introduced even though this was addressed in different ways in the four countries of the studies. However, there was little convergence around goals relating to lifelong learning (Chapter 7). The drivers of policy bore some relationship to the purposes of VET, for example a social inclusion driver being more akin to social purpose. Thus, convergence of policy drivers, however expressed by the EU, was also affected by the national context and purpose of VET. As has already been stated, the variations of VET purposes did not lead to policy convergence.

However, there was a convergence of some policy levers, for example, funding. The influence was arguably greater following Europe 2020, for example, when the EU recommended specific policy levers to all member states, such as the Youth Contract or Youth Guarantee, although at other times (2014-2020) policy levers such as the European Structural Investment Funds (ERDF and ESF) were assigned to individual member states to negotiate their own programmes. This was therefore a result of convergent policy making, rather than attributable to policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017). Although there was notionally the same policy lever of funding, created by ESIF and deployed towards skills in all four countries, the methods of deployment were, however, different. Additional layers of bureaucratic administration were created in some countries, so that swathes of funding were retained within ministerial departments and co-financed at national level, whereas others centralised the administration and co-financing but encouraged more direct bidding from a wider range of partners (Weber & Pavlovaite, 2018). However, there was no convergence around policy levers such as quality inspection frameworks. There was no evidence for a convergence of expressed policy, even the EU advocated Youth Guarantee took different forms in the countries that adopted it.

Overall, therefore, VET policies in the four countries do not appear to have converged between 2011-2019. The reasons for my concluding this are both theoretical and empirical. I found that the particular European variants of convergence, Europeanisation and Europeification, were not necessarily a good fit for the phenomena I observed in all cases. In any event, when one member state is perversely resistant to any form of harmonisation, it would be difficult to claim a full process of Europeanisation, or, indeed the existence of an extensive EU VET policy space (Chapter 2 and below). The theories of policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) and diffusion (Jakobi, 2012), based on a more random, less managed theorisation of policy change, were not only supported in the gyre conceptualisation (section 4.7) but also by my findings. For example, these theories lent support to my findings that much of the European effort around VET policy had a limited impact on national policy trajectories.

In empirical terms, the mechanisms of the Semester did not support policy convergence as they relied on a one-to-one relationship between the EU and member state rather than the creation of a multi member space open to policy borrowing and learning. The Semester also provided opportunities for communication gaps to be exploited. The CRs, discussed in Chapter 2 and 6 were co-created between the EU and the member state before being issued by the EU, so the policy making teams had access to national policy documents as well as the data that was formally submitted to them. How far this then influenced their views was not explored in this study but gaps in knowledge between the formal policy making in the EU space and within the national space were observed (p. 182) and provided an illustration of the relationship that had formed between the member state and the EU policy makers. In the cases of Denmark and Finland, where the national languages provided a further barrier between EU policy and national policy, there was additional opportunity for divergence of espoused theory and theory in practice although the Danes and the Finns did not seem to exploit it as much as they might have done. National policy time frames did not always fit naturally within the artificial constraints of the European Semester, or its predecessor, the OMC. It was therefore sometimes difficult to evaluate whether a policy was naturally occurring at national level (for example, the Danish policies about drop-out from VET) or was being developed in response to EU prompting or attempts at policy

harmonisation. In the Danish drop-out case, this was naturally occurring although this was harder to judge in the Scottish case of FE college reform. The annual cycle of the Semester would not necessarily achieve good results in an educational setting, where ideally there would be time for policies to be implemented and to assess the impact before making new policies. As this was the case, the EU may have had a disruptive role in national policy making, imposing more short termism over the long-term approach taken in Finland (Sahlberg, 2015), and also in Denmark (Cort, 2010). The UK (England), however, seemed to take a short-term approach to VET policy making, for example, the number of initiatives concerned with apprenticeships in the last five years of the study (Chapter 6), so in that respect it converged towards EU VET policy making rather more than those countries who made policies that they were planning to make anyway. This latter, of course, may have influenced EU VET policy thinking in the first place.

My findings have enhanced those of other researchers (Chapter 2), in that there was a wide disparity of VET systems and VET policies in each member state studied and I concluded that there was VET policy divergence rather than convergence. The countries guarded their VET policies more closely than their HE policies, perhaps indicating that VET was linked more closely to the economy than HE by the member states as well as the EU. Whilst this appeared unlikely, there are very persuasive academic influences in HE that may obfuscate its undoubted links to the economy. Although the EU was considered to be at the very least an economic partnership, Finland's perspective was broader than this (p. 184). Despite this, a failure of governance from the VET policy making perspective (the sub-European level meetings were replaced by the clamp of the European Semester) contributed to a lack of policy convergence (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Divergence was apparent from the beginning of the period studied (2011 for Research question 2) because of the UK's increasingly Eurosceptic approach despite this being less evident in some UK NRPs when Scottish examples were used, since the Scottish examples appeared to demonstrate more convergent EU VET policy making.

Research question 3

Whether or not the EU actively made VET policy or developed its own VET space, there was a further question about its influence on national policy making through the declarations it issued, in particular the Lisbon strategy. The Lisbon strategy (European Council, 2000) promoted VET as a means of addressing both economic and social cohesion imperatives (at least in part). The direct processes of the OMC between 2000-2010 combined with the VET declarations and provided an upsurge of national policy making influence as well as top down directives.

From my findings, the EU's influence on national VET policy making, arising from the Lisbon strategy, was inconsistent, in part attributable to the interpretation of the concepts in relation to VET policy, for example, mobility, and in part due to the national contexts and tendencies to appear compliant or resistant in their own policy making. The EU appeared to select its role in terms of VET policy making, becoming more directive when there was a crisis (for example, the global financial recession) that needed solving, lapsing into periods of policy elaboration when there was greater stability or other matters that more urgently needed policy makers' attention. This also applied to its interactions with individual member states, those perceived to be facing more challenges were more sharply criticised than those that were not (Chapter 6).

Drawn from the surface level of analysis based on themes from the Lisbon strategy (Chapter 7), the mapping I carried out illustrated national VET policy making tendencies. Thus, the Danish preoccupation with drop-out of and completion from VET programmes had given rise to policies that rotated in a gyre (section 4.7), frequently ending up at the same starting point. The Finnish approach to holistic policy making through programme reform sought to draw in all aspects of VET for consideration before making changes, trying to develop as full an understanding as possible of conditions at all levels. In Scotland, on the other hand, the Scottish government deliberately reversed the privatisation of colleges, to draw VET more closely alongside other parts of the education sector as well as to increase centralised

control over VET's contribution to economic recovery in a long-term, strategic approach to VET policy making. The English approach to VET policy making was almost absent minded at times, and seemed to vacillate, for example, in the many attempts to reform apprenticeships (Chapter 6). However, there was a determination to resist either OMC or Semester influence on VET policy making, as outlined in the Balance of Competences review report, which stated that whilst at VET programme level the EU may have been influential in limited circumstances, the UK government had followed a strategy of systematic resistance to EU influence on policy with the result that there had been none (HM Government, 2014).

Although the Danish government claimed ownership of the Copenhagen declarations and process (Cort, 2010), the longevity of Lisbon themes in Danish VET policy was shorter than in Finland. However, in Denmark, an initial review of the influence of EU legislation and directives on national policy suggested that, whilst the Danes were, in general, sceptical about the EU, there was also a high degree of compliance with EU legislation, once in place (Milana & Rasmussen, 2018; West, 2012). In considering the EU influence on Finnish VET policies, I found that the Lisbon themes I had selected for study were threaded throughout Finnish VET policy making. Reasons for this might be that the national view on VET happened to coincide with the EU view, or the fact that one of the sub-EU declarations was devised in Helsinki thereby reinforcing links between Finnish and sub-EU VET policy making, or perhaps that successive Finnish governments were more naturally compliant. However, the Finnish pace of VET policy making was more evolutionary than the volte faces of the UK government and this did not necessarily equate to the subsequent rhythms of the European Semester. I did consider whether this portrayal was due to my text selection but this was mitigated to some extent by also studying Finnish NRPs (Chapter 6).

Overall findings

These three sets of findings have explored VET policy making through three dimensions of space (supranational or EU, functional or sub-EU, and national) and scale as well as a temporal dimension, thereby recognising the dynamic nature of VET policy making. The

evolving relationships between national and EU VET policy making were distinguished by the dimensions, for which I have provided a final definition after exploring them through the study, as follows:

Table 8-2 Final definition of dimensions

Dimension	Explored through	Final definition in relation to study
Spatial	Mapping	The 7 spaces in which VET policy was made: EU, sub-EU, Denmark, Finland, UK, UK (England) and UK (Scotland)
Scalar	Mapping	The relative VET policy making influences exercised within the spaces – top down, bottom up or peer to peer
Temporal	Trajectories	The time periods and frames in which VET policy was made
Dynamic	Gyre	The interrelationship of the spatial, scalar and temporal dimensions of VET policy making

Within the spatial and scalar layers, as representations of structure, there were socio-cultural interactions by policy making agents developing the VET policies that shaped these structures (Archer’s morphogenetic approach, Chapters 3 and 5). As an example, target setting for apprenticeship numbers was intended to address youth employment issues as documented in the English National Reform Programme (Her Majesty’s Government, 2017). At the actual level there were unintended consequences of these policies, for example the ‘gaming’ in England as employers (agents) attempted to reach the target set for 3 million apprentices by using the apprenticeship levy funding to repurpose management training as apprenticeships (Moules, 2018). This has not supported youth employment. At the real level the structure of apprenticeship qualifications in England, and its oversight by the Institute for Apprenticeships, was altered by these agents, with an effect on how easy (or otherwise) it would be for a young person to access an apprenticeship in England (prior to the coronavirus pandemic). This was then likely to have consequences for the structural

organisation of apprenticeship providers (institutions) and, potentially, the latest proposals for the structure of English technical education (HM Government, 2016). These latter consequences may or may not have been unintended but it was certainly the case that at the real level the distinction between what is meant by an apprenticeship in England and in Finland or Denmark (Michelsen & Stenström, 2018) for example, has widened (Markowitsch & Wittig, 2020).

Although VET policy itself has changed over time (from an EU as well as a national perspective), this may have been due to the changes in its purpose and orientation that have been tracked over the period, as well as due to external events such as the global financial recession. What may seem on the surface to be a straightforward development of policy was proved to be anything but straightforward when deeper levels of meaning were considered, because of the complex interrelationships and understandings of the purpose of VET. The differing interpretations by different member states of terms such as parity of esteem, competency and recognition of prior learning in relation to VET illustrate this point. In terms of a policy gyre, the deep-sea currents of both EU and national VET policy making have thrown up elements (VET policy drivers), which the waves and tides have washed about (policy making structures) and the winds (policy making agents) have taken in different directions, depending on temperatures (cultural and social contexts) within the oceans (countries) over time, resulting in complexity and unpredictability of VET policy making.

8.3 Contribution to knowledge

A comparison between VET policy making in the four countries, with divergent approaches to VET (Chapter 2) had not previously been carried out. The Danish and Finnish cases provided more contrast than might be anticipated and Scotland, a country of equivalent population size, added a comparison from the perspective of a country perceived as a region but which also carried a strong national identity into its VET policy making. The tensions between the Scottish and UK governments in respect of Scottish independence,

Brexit and future relationships with the EU gained in momentum over the period of the study and contributed to the increasing polarisation of VET policy making. On the part of Scotland, this manifested as a recognition of the deep significance of VET to the country, on the part of English VET policy making, lacking strategy and cohesion, it appeared as floundering in the shallows.

Since my interest in the EU's relationship with national VET policies arose during the Brexit period (2016-2020) I set out a brief update on the status of VET policy in the UK since 2019, the formal end of my study period, because it became apparent during the study that the divergence of English VET policy from EU VET policies was not, in fact, a consequence of the Brexit referendum, and had not arisen in the years immediately preceding the referendum but had been happening for many years. It was questionable, in fact, whether or not the referendum had accelerated this trajectory. The history of this divergence was relevant to understanding the purposes of VET from an EU and national perspective because of the implication that a wider national political purpose of scepticism and isolationism was heavily influencing VET policy, demonstrating the politicisation of VET policy.

Brexit may have been peripheral to VET policy within the EU, although it should certainly not have been peripheral to the UK's VET policies. It illustrates a major temporal moment in policy making for which no policies were made. There was a marked shift in discourse about the relationships between the countries and the EU from both the UK and Scottish governments over the period, that is also relevant to VET policy:

The EU is vital to the UK's growth and prosperity, with the Single Market accounting for half of the UK's total exports of goods and services (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 23);

This is why the government believes the UK will be stronger, safer and better off remaining in a reformed EU (Her Majesty's Government, 2016, p. 3);

However, the UK Government's intention is to leave the EU, a position contrary to the wishes of the people of Scotland who in 2016 voted decisively to remain. The

uncertainty caused by the failure of the UK Government and Parliament in Westminster to agree how, when or even if the UK should leave the EU and what future relationship it should have places the health of Scotland's economy at considerable risk.

In any case the Scottish Government is clear that no future relationship can replace the benefits currently offered by membership of the world's largest economy. Whether a member of the EU or not, Scotland and indeed the UK are part of Europe and will remain an integral part of the European economy. That is why the Scottish Government will continue to assess and report on the contribution we have made towards Europe's achievement of smart, sustainable, inclusive growth (The Scottish Government, 2019, p. 3)

Despite this rhetoric, there was little of a practical nature about any type of policy, let alone VET policy within the UK national texts. Other policy documents were produced post the 2016 referendum, relating to future VET policies as a result of Brexit. However, these were produced in Scotland and Denmark, and to a lesser extent Finland, but the UK government was silent on the plans for VET policy in the period immediately after the referendum and during the long political process that has led the UK to leave the EU at the end of December 2020. During this entire period, references to skills policy have been vague and unformed.

The contrast between the UK's VET policy making and that of Denmark, Finland and Scotland between 2016 and 2019, further underlined my conclusion that there was not a shared understanding of VET across the EU and that purposes for VET changed depending on both national and EU contexts (Chapter 5). Thus, my approach to considering the different spaces within what constituted EU VET policy over a relatively long period, during which the EU underwent significant political, social and economic changes, has contributed to the understanding of EU VET policy making.

As I explored the dynamics of EU relationships with its member states through a spatiotemporal lens, I relied on a critical realism framework. Critical realism has not been deployed in educational policy research as much as I would have expected (Chapter 3). I have aimed to demonstrate its suitability for this and to demystify some of the complexities, finding it a very valuable framework for disentangling the nuances of VET policy making. Related to this was my choice of three different methods of document analysis, which

aligned to the three ontological domains in critical realism (Chapter 4) and allowed me to view policy making in different dimensions.

I combined three different but complementary methods of documentary analysis in my study. This enabled me to study differing numbers of documents, in response to different elements of my research questions and to explore the discourse within the texts at different levels. Use of all three provided me with a different perspective in keeping with my approach of viewing VET policy making through different lenses. As I was solely reliant on documentary analysis, I found that deploying different methods helped towards reliability (Chapter 4). Although not a conventional mixed methods approach, it is to be recommended as an approach which delves below surface appearances.

Throughout my study, I have drawn together a series of models relating policy change theories (Table 1-2) to critical realism theory and to Archer's morphogenetic approach (Figure 5-1). Together with my findings I developed the concept of a VET policy making gyre as a way of better capturing the nuances of multi-level policy making over time, rather than the policy cycle. The interplay between these led to the conceptualisation of a policy making gyre (section 4.7). This conceptualisation helped me to express the balance between many influences over policy making agents and the structures within which they operate, as this was found to be a fluid process, rather than one that was crystallised. I hope that this contribution will be of interest to future education policy researchers.

8.4 What I might have done differently

My reflections about what I might have done differently are confined to designing research to better understand VET policy making in the EU and its member states. Exploring policy impact would establish a completely different set of studies, not only necessitating different research questions but an entirely different research design and thus are not considered in this section.

The initial consideration is what philosophical or theoretical framework might be used, as an alternative to critical realism. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, following Foucault's work could lead to a study of governance or power and Bourdieu's work might have resulted in an exploration of spaces, rather than the spatiotemporal design that was enabled by my choice of critical realism. Given that I gained an understanding of EU policy governance during the study, a Foucault based study would have been a likely alternative, but would have resulted in a different flavour.

Within a critical realism framework, there were options for different methodologies. Some researchers have used grounded theory as a methodology although this might have resulted in a less critical approach. An alternative that I considered briefly was a qualitative evidence synthesis (or metasyntesis) which can form the basis for a full study or inform a literature review. However, I wanted to develop my interpretations of the texts, rather than my interpretation of others' interpretations. In view of being constrained by language, this was fortunate, as I discovered during my review of the literature that there were comparatively few research papers about Finnish VET policy making. As observed in Chapter 2, less is known about Finland's VET policies than its school systems (although of course its VET operates within a school-based system). Although I have contributed a little more knowledge to this field, it has been through comparison and contrast, rather than directly, and with more time than available to me for this study, I would like to have read more documents in Finnish.

At the start of the study I expected the outcomes of the Brexit negotiations to play a stronger part than they did. When I began, article 50 had been triggered and the UK was due to leave the EU formally on 31 March 2019. This was delayed by changes in the leadership of the governing party and a subsequent general election and then by the Covid-19 pandemic. Any VET or skills policy making arising from Brexit was therefore also delayed. Whilst this could not have been predicted, the earlier delays to Brexit might have indicated that this was to play a lesser role in my research than I had originally planned, but I did not have the benefit of hindsight when I spent time searching for texts about VET policy making

in the event of Brexit. As it was, this search illustrated a lack of policy readiness on behalf of the UK government, that, unfortunately, has been played out in other national scenarios in the last year.

I could have chosen different countries to form part of my study. However, I wanted to offer a contrast and explore VET policy making in countries that were not often compared. By coincidence, all the countries I chose were not founding members of the EU. By design, two were remaining within the EU and two were facing Brexit. Choosing newer members, for example, Croatia, would have provided a different form of contrast.

Had time permitted, I would have liked to extend the study into institutional policy making, to add a further level to the multi-level analysis, although the influence of the Lisbon strategy on an FE college in England 21 years later is likely to be very limited. However, this would again be a useful comparison with the Lisbon strategy influence in Danish, Scottish and Finnish institutions. This might also have been an opportunity to deploy Bacchi's analysis of problems as a further method of analysis, rather than testing it on a limited example (Chapter 6).

8.5 Next steps

One avenue for future research would be to follow up the impact of Brexit on VET policy making in England and Scotland, even though this may be difficult to disentangle from the impact of the pandemic, which has already drawn out the need for more health care staff, because of national shortages exacerbated by a decrease in the number of EU migrants. There has been a VET policy vacuum in that there has been no coherent VET or skills planning. In particular, I would research the exploration of engagement with informal influences from the EU on VET policy making, for example through Cedefop and any wider European initiatives. Both Sainsbury (HM Government, 2016) and Augar (2019) for example, referred to EU, and wider international exemplars, but it is not always the case that policy makers pay any attention to these. It is difficult to envisage that, despite English

exceptionalism, the UK door will be completely closed to any EU influence, even if the influence is subversive.

I am also curious to understand whether EU VET policy making to aid the recovery from the pandemic follows similar lines to those of 2008/2009 or adopts different pathways. As referred to in Chapter 5, sustainability and the climate emergency were part of Europe 2030, but whether these factors will be translated into VET and skills policy making from 2021 onwards is not yet clear. This is an area for further research, both in the short and medium term.

As a longitudinal study, I would want to continue the comparison of VET policy making in the four countries, particularly as the purposes of VET continue to fluctuate. In further developing this, I was intrigued by the spatiotemporal challenges to education policy analysis outlined by Lingard in a recent online seminar (Lingard, 2021) and would suggest that there may be linkage from this study to these approaches, perhaps connected to further development of the policy making gyre, where I hope to gain input and advice from colleagues to perhaps widen its applicability.

8.6 Conclusion

In drawing together this section, I referred to my research aim, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. My assessment of the purpose of VET was originally based on Rizvi and Lingard (2010) who questioned whether VET policy contributed to economic efficiency or social equity, or in fact, both; and Ball (2017) who said 'education per se is viewed as a part of society'. However, I found that VET was perceived differently, incorporating societal and political as well as educational and economic purposes. Taking an instrumental view of VET restricts VET policies to post upper secondary school training with the aim of getting a job after completing education. Viewing VET as a subset of lifelong learning establishes it in the field of education, as a process for developing individuals through different life stages by the acquisition of different skill sets and experiences to achieve a form of growth or development, possibly linked to an economic goal (employment, sustained employment, promotion). If it is viewed as just training, it is short term (and potentially uneconomic

because it may need repeating). If it inspires learning (in the knowledge spiral sense of learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995)) then it is of greater benefit to both society and an economy.

As researchers such as Rizvi and Lingard (2010) have observed, EU policy making did not necessarily align with global policy making and this seemed to be the case for VET policy making. Over the period of the study, it was apparent that the EU had developed and changed its own way of operating when making VET policy (although its role in this was questionable, p. 44). This was not driven by a globalisation agenda as defined by Rizvi and Lingard (2010), nor were Europeanisation or Europeification (Antunes, 2016) found to be substitutes, so that the EU's orientation towards influencing VET policy making was not as significant as it may have wished. As previously stated from my findings, the EU did not make a VET policy space, nor VET policy per se. Even the absence of a policy space around which other policies might coalesce did not, in this instance, constitute a VET policy space, despite the EU's VET policy making efforts. It was also difficult to identify specific EU VET policy, rather than a wider EU policy for which VET or skills policies might be part of the solution. Although some policy drivers (for example, social cohesion) were set out by the EU these resulted in influencing rather than direct engagement in national VET policy making, in line with the principle of subsidiarity. Similarly, whilst at times the EU deployed policy levers, such as funding, these were influential rather than directly a factor in the national VET policies.

However, there has been EU VET policy influence, but not perhaps as intended, where there was an absence of influence, for example, on the sustainability agenda prior to 2010. There was also an absence of claims about Europeanisation in the Riga declaration. It is hard to find evidence that the EU VET policy makers could have thought that this had been achieved, which suggests that it was no longer a priority for VET policy making or they had simply given up. I also considered whether the aims of Europeanisation, to create a form of VET policy space, were perhaps a temporary imaginary, that may have risen to the surface and then sunk into the depths (section 4.7). It is questionable as to whether the EU should have attempted to centralise an approach to VET policy making, given the principle of

subsidiarity and the fragmentation of national VET systems. The EU's perceived overriding of these factors, at least until 2010, suggests that economic and supranational political purposes for VET were perhaps outweighing the educational and national political purposes. There was certainly a conflict of ambition between the creation of an EU VET policy space that might have existed in parallel with the EU, but outside it (Grek et al., 2009) and EU VET policy making in terms of either Europeanisation (Alexiadou & Lange, 2014) or Europeification (Antunes, 2016). Despite the best efforts of the EU, it is not at all clear that VET policy making has been integrated in any way that could be described as Europeanisation or, indeed, Europeification. It is questionable whether, at policy level, there was any sign of a European education space, although it was aspired to in some of the European declarations. It may be that at practice level, this has been more effective (for example, through Cedefop – Chapter 2), but because of the nature of VET policy making, and the interplay of its purposes, there are too many interacting variables for a recognisable VET policy space to occur, although I postulate that there is a policy making gyre, that may give the appearance at times that there is a defined VET policy space (section 4.7).

From my findings, the contributions the EU made to VET policy in the four countries have been not clear, because the purpose was not clear, the sphere of influence was vague and the methods of engagement were ineffectual. However, what was clear, both from the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2 and from my findings, was the importance of context to VET policy making. The relative success in creating Bologna, compared with the absence of an EU VET space (Chapter 2) may be attributed to the very different contexts of HE and VET, so that one sector lent itself more readily to a pan-European approach whereas the different perspectives of the purpose of VET, as well as the different scales, led to a more guarded form of nationalism. This was emphasised by the very different VET policy making structures apparent within the four countries (Chapters 5 and 6).

I have demonstrated the complexity of VET policy making, when there are multiple layers of policy makers. I have shown that the EU has had less top down influence on national VET policies in the countries of study and restricted opportunities for peer to peer learning from 2010 onwards, by introducing the European Semester. It was also clear that the UK was

increasingly resistant to EU influence on its VET policies, for a long period before the Brexit referendum, although below the surface Scotland was pedalling fast in the other direction. With a lack of clarity about the purposes of VET, set against differing national contexts, any common VET policies were unlikely to gain traction, even if the original objectives were the same. The lack of clarity, on the other hand, has served to divert the tide of marketisation of VET, so that within the gyre of VET policy making, deep currents bubble up to bring more socially based VET policy ideals to the surface.

In conclusion, using a critical realism framework, I have developed a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between the EU and some of its member states in making VET policy over the last two decades (2000-2019). In doing so, I have found that part of the complexity has arisen from multiple interpretations of the purpose of VET, leading to confusion about whether EU or national policies predominated, and part from the complex and changing methods of EU policy monitoring, supposedly at arm's length under the principle of subsidiarity. Together, this gave rise to policy drift (Kay & Baines, 2017) and diffusion (Jakobi, 2012) rather than the policy convergence or harmonisation into Europeanisation that might have been the intention. Opportunities for national policy learning, whilst enabled during 2000-2010 became more limited with the introduction of the European Semester, although practitioner learning was still enabled by the many agencies that had been established. The three-dimensional picture created from spatial, temporal and dynamic comparisons (Chapter 1), refined with the addition of the scalar dimension (Chapter 4) gave rise to my concept of a VET policy making gyre (Chapter 4) as a way of explaining the many factors that have combined to influence VET policy making between the EU and Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland. However, it is possible that this model is capable of application beyond this specific field because it incorporates a multi-level approach.

Since I began this study, a further world crisis has emerged, the Covid-19 pandemic. Inasmuch as this has created a global financial recession (as well as deepening social inequalities in many countries) parallels might be drawn with the 2008-2009 recession. I wondered whether there were any lessons from VET policy making in the EU and the four

countries following that recession that may be of relevance to the oncoming recession. From my research, VET policy making solutions to what was perceived as an economic crisis may not serve to address a more far reaching crisis of the order of the pandemic. However, being mindful of the many purposes of VET might result in the development of VET and skills policies that support not only iVET students entering the labour market but also those cVET students who wish to continue learning throughout their working lives and to improve their employment opportunities. In other words, VET policy making for the recovery needs to support both the existing workforce as well as the future one and also to consider the different national contexts in which policy is being made.

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Appendix A Characteristics of National VET systems

	Denmark (As at date)	England (As at date)	Finland (As at date)	Scotland (As at date)
Total Population (millions)	5.8m (2020)	56.3m (2019)	5.5m (2021)	5.4m (2019)
Number of VET institutions	128 (2021))) 237 colleges plus new initiatives	165 (2018))) 27 colleges plus
Number of adult VET centres (where distinct)	129 (2018)	e.g.12 Institutes of Technology plus 50 University Technical Colleges plus private providers (2021)	218 (2018)	357 high schools (2020)))
Number of young people in VET	130,000 (2021)	682,000 (2018/19)	230,100 (2019)	138,000 (2020) Plus 5,216 in high schools (2017/2018)
Number of adults in formal adult education	2,948,000 (2016)	1,400,000 (2018/19)	1,600,000 (2017)	117,000 (2020)
Numbers of apprenticeships	109,208 (2019)	742,400 (2018/19)	57,354 (2018)	42,000 (2018/19) Including 3,500 Foundation apprenticeships delivered in high schools
Examples of types of qualifications	Apprenticeships Hybrid vocational and academic EUX	BTEC National Diplomas T levels Apprenticeships	Vocational upper secondary qualification	Scottish Vocational Qualification

	Denmark (As at date)	England (As at date)	Finland (As at date)	Scotland (As at date)
			Further vocational qualification	Higher National Certificate
State department	Børne-og-Undervisningsministeriet (UVM) Ministry of Children and Education)	Department for Education (DfE)	Opetus- ja Kulttuuri- ministeriö (OKM) Ministry of Education and Culture	Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (supporting Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills)
Funding	Public and private	Individual, employer, public, private	Mainly public	Public and private
VET system definition	Dual system between VET schools and workplace	Market of FE colleges, schools, private providers, community organisations and higher education	Institutionally based, Upper secondary vocational schools, Adult vocational colleges, universities of applied science	Colleges, High Schools, Universities
EU held data				
Early leavers aged 18-24 from education and training - 2000	11.7%	18.2% (UK)	9.0	Not available
Early leavers - 2019	9.9%	10.9% (UK)	7.3	Not available
Percentage of adults aged 25 – 64 knowing 3 or more languages - 2007	13.6%	Not collected (UK)	38.0%	Not available
Adult languages - 2016	24.6%	5.0% (UK)	44.9%	Not available

	Denmark (As at date)	England (As at date)	Finland (As at date)	Scotland (As at date)
Percentage participation of 15 - 24 year olds in education and training in last four weeks - 2010	80.3%	60.8% (UK)	73.4%	Not available
Percentage participation of 15 - 24 year olds in education and training in last four weeks - 2019	75.2%	59.8% (UK)	72.9%	Not available
Percentage participation of 25-74 year olds in education and training in last four weeks - 2010	31.2%	18.1% (UK)	20.9%	Not available
Percentage participation of 25-74 year olds in education and training in last four weeks - 2019	23.4%	13.3% (UK)	25,2%	Not available
Distribution of population with upper secondary vocational education qualification - 2018	37.7%	44.7%	71.6%	47.6%
Percentage of enterprises providing continuing vocational education - 2015	86.6%	83.7% (UK)	83.1%	Not available
Percentage of 18-64 year olds participating in education and training in last four weeks born outside country - 2019	28.9%	19.6% (UK)	36.7%	Not available

	Denmark (As at date)	England (As at date)	Finland (As at date)	Scotland (As at date)
Busemeyer & Schlicht-Schmälze (2014) skills typology	Collective Strong employer involvement/ medium strong public commitment	Residual Weak employer involvement/ weak public commitment	Statist Weak employer involvement/ strong public commitment	Not separately analysed

Data sources: Statistics Finland, Eurostats, Gov.UK, Scottish Government, Statistics Denmark, Cedefop, Eurydice

Appendix B Documents analysed

Denmark policy trajectories – August 2020

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2000	Lisbon Strategy	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2000	Reform – VET establishments separate from gymnasia, focus on personal education plans, flexible starts for VET programmes	Danish government				√	NordVET	Vet – pointed to labour market, gymnasia to HE – separate governance, cultures and requirements for teacher training. Also allowed VET students access to HE with additional subjects
2002	Copenhagen	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2002	AMU – Danish Adult Vocational Programme	Danish Ministry of Education	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2003	Nyt AMU –med brugeren I centrum					√	NordVET	
2004	Maastricht	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2004	Reform – new shorter voc programmes					√	NordVET	For those who can't complete 4 years
2005	Reform – vocational gymnasia (htx, hhx) given same status as gymnasia (stx). Pilot eud (became eux in 2010)					√	NordVET	
2005	Danish Reform strategy – contribution to Lisbon	Danish government	√				Original document (EN)	Early NRP
2005	Denmark – overview of the VET system	ReferNET		√			ReferNET (Cedefop) Online Original document (EN)	Unofficial European analysis of VET system (linked to Lisbon etc)
2006	Helsinki	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2006	Globalisation Council – looking at trade committees roles in employment systems	UVM				√	NordVET	Alignment of vocational programmes and labour market
2006	Reform – encouraging selection of specific occupation when choosing VET					√	Jorgensen – 2018b	

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2006	Fremtidsskring af erhvervsuddannelserne [Ensuring the future of VET]	UVM	√				Original document (EN)	Danish - future of Vocational education
2007	Reform - State and regional gymnasia – moved to state freehold (like voc schools) Streaming in voc based on prior attainment New vocational academies established					√	NordVET	Financial and managerial freedoms on par – but mostly still state funded
2007	Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning (report to EC)	Hedegaard	√				Original document (EN)	
2008	Bordeaux	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2008	30 external studies of voc programmes commissioned	UVM				√	NordVET	
2008	Act on General Adult Education	Danish Government				√	Jorgensen 2018b	
2008	National Reform Programme	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	NRP
2008	Erhvervsakademier [Vocational academies]					√	NordVET	Short style programmes at sub-bachelor level – skilled workers to access lower levels of HE to address intermediate skill shortages

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2008	Danish approach to quality in vocational education	Cort/Danish National Education Authority	√				Original document (EN)	Academic produced for government
2008	Danish VET system	Cort	√				Original document (EN)	Academic produced for government (what stage of policy cycle)
2008	Danish strategy for lifelong learning	UVM	√				Original document (EN)	
2009	Establishment of vocational academies					√	Jorgensen 2018b	Is this the same as 2007?
2009	National Reform Programme	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	NRP
2010	Bruges	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	Euro 2020	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	Act on Adult Vocational Training	Danish Government				√	Jorgensen 2018b	
2010	Reform – introduction of Eux					√	NordVET	New hybrid qualification – access to labour market and HE – equivalent to hf (higher education prep. exam)

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2010	Convergence programme 2009 (published 2010)	Danish Government		√			Original document (EN)	
2011	Act on institutions for vocationally oriented education and training					√	Jorgensen 2018b	
2011	Act on vocationally oriented basic and further education					√	Jorgensen 2018b	
2011	NRP	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	OECD Skills beyond school	Field et al	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	VET in Denmark	Cedefop		√			Original document (EN)	What status do CEDEFOP analyses have (for example compared with OECD reports)?
2012	Danish education - Facts and key figures	Ministry of Children & Education	√				Original document (EN)	Changes in ministries with VET responsibilities over period – cf English ...
2012	NRP	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2013	Reform of SKP to become Praktik centre – training centres – Education guarantee re access to a VET programme	UVM				√	NordVET	49 or 50 – backed by voc schools – work simulation – for those who can't

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
								get actual work placements
2013	Government target for young people completing tertiary education programme shifted from 50% to 60%					√	NordVET	
2013	Unges Dobbeltuddannelse etc [Young people's dual education]	DEA				√	Original document (EN)	Danish - Press release
2013	Evaluering af erhvervsakademistrukturen etc [Evaluation of vocational academies structure]	Ramboll	√				Original document (EN)	Danish – evaluation of VET structure
2013	NRP	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	Reform – general admissions requirements for all VET programmes based on gpa from basic school					√	NordVET	
2014	OECD Education Policy Outlook	OECD	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	Overview of reform of VET system	UVM	√				Original document (EN)	follows from Ramboll
2014	Bekendtgørelse om sociale klausuler om uddannelses- og praktikaftaler i forbindelse med udbud på visse selvejende uddannelsesinstitutioner under Undervisningsministeriet	UVM	√				Original document (EN)	Danish text – social class and voc institutions

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2014	Bekendtgørelse af lov om friplads og stipendium til visse udenlandske studerende ved erhvervsakademiuddannelser og professionsbacheloruddannelser	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	Danish text – student funding – for voc ed and professional bachelors degrees
2014	NRP	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Government target – 95% of young people to complete a post compulsory ed programme					√	NordVET	
2014/2015	Reform of VET system	UVM				√	NordVET	e.g. standardisation of Eux school and work intervals
2015	Riga	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2015	National Reform Programme	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Fra ufaglært til faglært [From unskilled to skilled]	Danmarks Evalueringstitut				√	Original document (EN)	Mostly Danish – with English appendix
2015	Student Financial Aid and Student Behaviour in the Nordic Countries	DEA				√	Original document (EN)	Danish – background
2015	Your child's future	UVM	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2016	Brexit referendum	UK government				√	Online and lived through it	
2016	Cedefop – vocational education and training in Europe	Anderson & Kruse/Cedefop		√			Original document (EN)	
2016	Cedefop – Leaving Education early	Cedefop		√			Original document (EN)	
2016	Danish Education System	Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality and Ministry of culture	√				Original document (EN)	See earlier notes about ministries
2016	NRP	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	Arsskrift 2017 [Annual Report]	DEA (thinktank)				√	Original document (EN)	Danish
2017	Hvordan uddanner vi til fremtidens etc [How do we educate for the future?]	DEA				√	Original document (EN)	Danish – about Danish education system
2017	National Reform Programme	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	National Reform Programme	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2018	Country Report - Denmark	European Commission	√				Original document (EN)	Section only
2018	Convergence Report	Danish Government		√			Original document (EN)	
2018	Better schooling will provide more skilled workers	Danish Arbejdsgiverforening		√			Original document (EN)	Press release – translation from web page – opinion from employers’ association
2018	Companies are in vain looking for apprentices	Danish Arbejdsgiverforening				√	Original document (EN)	Press release – translation from web page
2018	Praktikvirksomheders adfoerd etc [How work placements operate]	Evalueringinstitut				√	Original document (EN)	Danish - Evaluation body – work placements
2018	Eux-elever	DEA	√				Original document (EN)	Danish – EUX pupils
2018	Inspiration from foreign countries VET including Finland	DEA	√				Original document (EN)	Danish
2018	Erhvervsuddannelserne [Vocational education]	DEA & Nordea Fonden	√				Original document (EN)	Danish – state of world about VET. Sponsored by Nordea – impact of influence

Date	Event/document	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2018	Bekendtgørelse om krav til studieadministrative it-systemer for almene voksenuddannelser, erhvervsuddannelser, arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser, de gymnasiale uddannelser m.fl.	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	Danish – IT systems for schools and VET
2018	BREXIT – implications for skills sector	Danish Government/DEA	√				Original document (EN)	Danish
2019	Country Report	European Commission	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	NRP	Danish Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	The work placement continues to progress	Danish Arbejdsgiverforening	√				Original document (EN)	Press release – translation from web page

England policy trajectories August 2020

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2000	Lisbon Strategy	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2000	Learning & Skills Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2002	Copenhagen	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2002	Education Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2002	Languages for All: languages for life	DfES				√	Original document (EN)	
2002	14-19 extending opportunities, raising standards	DfES	√				Original document (EN)	Estelle Morris – Green paper Dera.ioe
2002	14-19 Opportunity and excellence	DfES	√				Original document (EN)	Charles Clarke – Dera.ioe
2004	Maastricht	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2004	Tomlinson 14-19 Curriculum and Quality Review	DfES	√				Original document (EN)	Part of working group on 14-19 reform
2004	Children Act	HM Government				√	Original document (EN)	Post Climbié – legislation.gov
2004	Higher Education Act	HM Government				√	Original document (EN)	Legislation.gov
2004	Opportunity and excellence progress report	DfES	√				Original document (EN)	
2005	14-19 Education & Skills White Paper	DfES	√				Original document (EN)	National Archives
2005	Education Act	HM Government				√	Original document (EN)	Legislation.gov
2006	Helsinki	EC		√			Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2006	Education & Inspection Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	Legislation.gov
2006	2020 vision for teaching and learning	DfES	√				Original document (EN)	Gilbert review – personalised learning
2006	Leitch review	HM Treasury	√				Original document (EN)	Exec summary and foreword – may need full report for PDA
2006	NRP Progress report	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2006	UK overview of the VET system	ReferNet/Cedefop				√	Original document (EN)	
2007	OFSTED merger with ALI							To note
2007	Department for Children, Schools & Families/Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills							DCSF short lived – also DIUS
2007	Building Brighter Futures – Children’s plan	DCSF				√	Original document (EN)	Twee cover Ed Balls Government uploads archives
2007	FE & Training Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2008	Bordeaux	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2008	Education and Skills Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	Leaving age raised to 18
2008	NRP	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2009	Education for All	Nuffield Foundation	√				Original document (EN)	Authors of full document (summary only)

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
								Pring, Keep, Hodgson, Spours et al
2009	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills replaces DIUS							
2009	Apprentices, Skills, Children & Learning Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2009	Lisbon Strategy for Jobs & Growth – NRP 2009	HMG	√				Original document (EN)	
2010	Bruges	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	Euro 2020	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	General election							Conservative/Liberal Democrats coalition – increase in HE tuition fees
2010	DfE replaces DCSF							Shortlived YPLA and plans for local commissioning of young people's VET
2010	Children, Schools & Families Act	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2010	Child Poverty Act	HM Government				√	Original document (EN)	
2010	Browne review of HE	Lord Browne (?)				√	Original document (EN)	Lord Browne – allegedly independent but located on his website – www.independentgov.uk
2010	Skills for Sustainable Growth	DBIS	√				Original document (EN)	Skills strategy
2010	Further Education – New Horizons	DBIS	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2011	Education Act	HM Government				√	Original document (EN)	
2011	Wolf Review of 16-19 education	Alison Wolf	√				Original document (EN)	
2011	NRP	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	Richard Review of Apprenticeships	Doug Richard	√				Original document (EN)	Published very clearly under Richard's name
2012	NRP	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2013	Apprenticeship implementation	DBIS/HMG	√				Original document (EN)	Consultation March
2013	Apprenticeship implementation	DBIS/HMG	√				Original document (EN)	Implementation October
2013	NRP	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	NRP	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Riga	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2015	Apprenticeship reforms	DBIS/National Apprenticeship service	√				Original document (EN)	Progress update
2015	Fixing the foundations	HMT				√	Original document (EN)	
2015	General election							Conservatives
2015	Wolf – final progress report	DfE	√				Original document (EN)	Known as Review of vocational education 2011?
2015	NRP	HM Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Skills Forecast	E Centre				√	Original document (EN)	
2015	Country Report	EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Apprenticeship reforms	National Apprenticeship Service	√				Original document (EN)	NB in England texts – Mirza – House of Commons library briefing on Apprenticeship policy
2016	Brexit referendum	UK government				√		Online

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2016	Updated guidance on ABR	DBIS	√				Original document (EN)	
2016	Sainsbury Review	Sainsbury, Wolf, Robinson/HMG	√				Original document (EN)	
2016	Technical education reform – the case for change	DBIS/DfE	√				Original document (EN)	
2016	NRP	HMG	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	General election							Conservative minority government
2017	Country Report	European Commission	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	Act on Technical Education	HMG	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	NRP	HMG	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Country Report	European Commission	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	NRP	HMT	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Brexit – 6 months to go	Institute for Government	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	Country Report	European Commission	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	NRP	HMT	√				Original document (EN)	Produced with reluctance – 24 April 2019 (others including Scotland already on website) – and technically beyond cut off - literature
2019	Augar review of FE & HE	DfES		√			Original document (EN)	Delivered end of May – much delayed due to Brexit

Finland policy trajectories – August 2020

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2000	Lisbon Strategy	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2000	Formation of UAS					√		Final Act 351/2003
2001	Executive group report on apprenticeship training and working life	Ministry of education						Oppisopimuskoulutuksen ja työelämäyhteyksien johtorhymiä
2002	Copenhagen	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2002	Establishment of performance based funding for VET					√		
2003	Ministry of Education strategy	Ministry of Education	√				Original document (EN)	
2003	Government Programme of Vanhanen	Unattributed	√				Original document (EN)	
2004	Maastricht	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2005	Overview of the VET system	ReferNet Finland		√			Original document (EN)	
2005	Report on youth education pilot							Double education qualification and collaboration between vocational institutions and general upper secondary schools

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2005	Vocational skills demonstration as new method of assessment					√		
2005	3 forms of vocational qualifications – upper secondary, apprenticeships and competence based - recognised					√		
2005	Forecasting skills and market needs	Ministries plus FNBE		√			Original document (EN)	
2005	NRP	Finnish government		√				Not located on internet – requested from Ministry of Finance – not received
2006	Helsinki	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2006	Act on VET							Recognition of prior learning
2007	Government programme of Vanhanen	Prime Minister's Office	√				Original document (EN)	
2007	Guidelines for quality management in VET	FNBE						
2008	Bordeaux	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2008	NRP	Finnish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2009	Act on financing of provision of							

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
	education and culture							
2010	Bruges	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	Government programme of Kiviniemi	Unattributed	√				Original document (EN)	
2010	Euro 2020	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	Vocational education and training in Finland	FNBE	√				Original document (EN)	
2011	Strategy for quality of VET	OKM						
2011	Child and Youth participation review	Council of Europe		√			Original document (EN)	
2011	Government Programme of Katainen	Prime Minister's Office	√				Original document (EN)	
2011	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	VET – admin & finance	OKM						
2012	VET – qualifications & studies	OKM						
2012	Education, training and demand for labour	Finnish National Board of Education (Hanhijoki et al)	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	Results of national project on anticipation of	Finnish National Board of Education	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
	competences and skills needs							
2012	National core curriculum for integration training for adult migrants	FNBE	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	Youth Guarantee	Ministry of Education	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	Education and research 2011-2016 – a development report	OKM						
2012	KESU – ministry development plan (2011-2016)	OKM						Including support for lifelong learning as late as 2014
2012	Strategy 2030	OKM	√				Original document (EN)	Finnish text 2012 (English 2014)
2012	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2013	City of Vantaa – information about the Finnish education system	City of Vantaa	√				Original document (EN)	A guide for immigrant parents
2013	Education Policy Outlook Finland	OECD	√				Original document (EN)	
2013	New implementation models for the integration training of immigrants	FNBE	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2013	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2013	Youth Guarantee	OKM				√		
2014	Government Programme of Stubb	Prime Minister's Office	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	787/2014			√				Law on voc ed curriculum (right to individual study plans, counselling, youth apprenticeships etc Implemented 2015 – as major curriculum reform
2014	788/2014			√				Law on adult quals
2014	801/2014			√				Law on content of voc ed
2014	Formation of KARVI					√		Law 1295/2013 – merger from three evaluation organisations
2014	Vocational qualifications & studies	OKM						
2014	Vocational upper secondary education	FNBE						
2014	Restructuring of network of upper secondary providers					√		
2014	Financing of education	OKM						
2014	Education policy in Finland	OKM						
2014	Strategy 2030	OKM	√				Original document (EN)	2012 strategy in English?
2014	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2015	Riga	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2015	Skill supply and demand to 2025	European Centre for the Development of VET				√	Original document (EN)	
2015	National Education and Training Committees	Finnish National Board of Education	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Sivistyksen suunta	Suomen Kuntaliito	√				Original document (EN)	Finnish text – from Association of Local and Regional Authorities References to elinikäinen oppiminen as late as 2015
2015	Country Report	EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Strategic Programme of Sipilä	Finnish Government	√				Original document (EN)	NB Sipilä resigned March 2019 – over health and social care reforms – next government elections scheduled for April 2019
2015	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Inspiring and strengthening the competence based approach in Finland	FNBE	√				Original document (EN)	
2016	Brexit referendum	UK government				√	Online and lived through it	
2016	Apprenticeship training figures	Kumpulainen				√	Original document (EN)	
2016	VET in Finland	Cedefop/ReferNET				√	Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2016	National Plan for Education Evaluation	Finnish Education Evaluation Centre	√				Original document (EN)	
2016	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	Law relating to Jatkuva Oppiminen					√		Source: Katinka Käyhö
2017	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	Assessment of stability programme	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2017	Education and Training Monitor	European Union	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Finland's NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Finnish Teachers and Principals	Paronen & Lappi				√	Original document (EN)	
2018	Opinion survey on VET	Cedefop/ReferNet				√	Original document (EN)	
2018	Ammatillisen koulutuksen osaamisperusteisuus etc	Räisänen & Goman/ Prime Minister's Office	√				Original document (EN)	Finnish Text
2018	Finnish VET in a Nutshell	OKM	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Amisreformi	OKM				√		Planning began in 2015 according to Stenström & Virolainen
2019	Country Report	EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	JO	OKM	√				Original document (EN)	Finnish Text

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2019	Ammatillisen koulutuksen vaativan erityisen tuen kehittämisryhmän ehdotukset	OKM	√				Original document (EN)	Finnish Text
2019	Study on structures to support Jatkuva Oppiminen	Oosi et al/Prime Minister's Office	√				Original document (EN)	As provided by KK
2019	NRP	Ministry of Finance	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	Strategy 2030	OKM	√				OKM website – original document	
2019	Anticipation of skills and employment needs	OKM	√				OKM website – original document	
2019	Work based learning	OKM	√				OKM website – original document	

Scottish policy trajectories – August 2020

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy Text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
1997	Devolution referendum	UK government/SNP(?)				√	Scottish parliament fact sheet	
1999	Opening of Scottish Parliament	UK government/ Scottish Executive				√	Scottish parliament fact sheet/bbc news 8/9/2017 (online)	Devolved matters include education and training, local government, health, some taxation Reserved matters include trade and industry, foreign policy, immigration, equal opportunities and employment
2000	Lisbon Strategy	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2002	Copenhagen	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2004	Maastricht	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2004	Building a better Scotland	Scottish Executive	√				Original document (EN)	
2005	Further & Higher Education Act Scotland	Scottish Executive	√				Original document (EN)	
2006	Helsinki	EC		√			Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy Text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2007	Scottish Executive becomes Scottish Government	UK government/ Scottish Executive				√	Scottish parliament fact sheet	
2007	Skills strategy in Scotland	EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2008	Bordeaux	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	Bruges	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2010	16+ Learning choices	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2010	Euro 2020	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2011	Roe report	Scottish government/Roe	√				Original document (EN)	Report from commission led by Roe – commissioned by Scottish government
2011	First NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	Why at this particular time? Lead in to independence referendum? Unsatisfied with what being represented in UK NRP?
2012	Cedefop Refernet summary	Cedefop (EC)		√			Online	Reviewing against priorities in Europe 2020
2012	Opportunities for all	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2012	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2013	OECD – Skills beyond school – report and background info	OECD/Scottish government	√				Original documents (EN)	Commissioned by Scottish government

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy Text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2013	College reforms	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	Background to act - explanation
2013	Post 16 education Act	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	Colleges reform legislation
2013	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	Scottish independence referendum	UK government/Scottish government				√	Wikipedia	40% did not back independence (of total voting population, I believe) – a threshold was set before the referendum
2014	Education working for all (Wood)	Wood/Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	Report commissioned by government
2014	Scottish government – implementation of Wood	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	Adult learning in Scotland	Education Scotland	√				Original document (EN)	Statement of ambition
2014	Opportunities for all	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2014	Designating colleges as regional colleges	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	Riga	EC		√			Original document (EN)	
2015	OECD policy review	OECD	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy Text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2015	Scotland's colleges	Audit Scotland	√				Original document (EN)	
2015	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2016	Brexit referendum	UK government				√	Online and lived through it	
2016	Scotland Act	UK government				√	Wikipedia	more powers devolved including full control over income tax (now at differential rates)
2016	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	More devolved employment powers (e.g. Fair Start Scotland)	UK government				√	Employability in Scotland website	
2017	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2017	IPPR/FETL – equipping Scotland for the future	IPPR/FETL	√				Original document (EN)	Check role of government in this report
2017	Audit Scotland – Scotland's colleges	Audit Scotland	√				Original document (EN)	Annual report on the state of colleges 3 years after the reorganisation
2017	All Points North	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	Post Brexit response – reaching out to Baltic nations
2017	Employment and skills review Phase 2	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	

Date	Event	Author/key policymaker	Policy text	Policy Text (background)	Policy activity	Policy context	Source	Comments
2018	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Skills Development Scotland report	Skills Development Scotland/Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Developing the young workforce	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2018	Developments in VET policy	Cedefop		√			Original document (EN)	
2019	AOC– four nations discussion document	AOC/Colleges Scotland		√			Original document (EN)	
2019	Brexit Action Plan for Further and Higher Education	Scottish government	√				Original document (EN)	
2019	NRP	Scottish government/EC	√				Original document (EN)	

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Appendix C Coding structures

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) – Chapter 5

Actors CR Those engaged in VET (may sub divide)
Economic agents Businesses, banks, chambers of commerce, trade unions, workforce, skilled (or low skilled), workers, unemployed - those being defined by economic terms
Business Employer, company, firm, business
Labour market workforce, labour market
Others banks, financial institutions etc
Social partners
Status of employment Employed or unemployed
European institutions EU, European Council, European Commission
Generic individuals Citizens, people
International Candidate countries, other organisations e.g. World Bank
Member states
Specific groups of individuals Women, unemployed, those with disability, young, old
Adult
Disadvantage Actual, perceived or at risk
Educational status
Gender
Ill defined Vague reference - not all encompassing - but who would define who falls in this group?
Young Probably under 24
VET and educational agents Students, teachers
Alternative to future state Options
Claim for action Solution
Clear goal and strategy Claim for action - from Lisbon onwards
Copenhagen and cooperation Developing Copenhagen process - and co-operation
Europe and member states Relationship between Europe and member states
Human skills Human capital and skills requirements
New ways of working New methods of working e.g. tools, networks
Society and welfare Societal aspects of investing in people
Structural changes to VET for example qualifications - rather than people
VET, education and training VE policy and education and training systems
Goal - future state Goal
Economy
Education and skills what education and VET will be like
Europeanisation
Society knowledge based
Institutional context Circumstance
Means Means/Goal
Better quality VET Means that seek to improve VET as an end in itself
Europeanisation Top down - Europe wide

National responsibility Actions at national, regional or local level - left to member states' discretion

Processes and tools Using processes or tools to achieve goals

Teachers Training, mentoring, professional roles

VET as a means Using VET (or proxies e.g. lifelong learning) to achieve other goals

Natural context Natural circumstances - e.g. climate change

Social context Circumstance

Structures CR Institutions, policies - as per Archer

Economy workforce, commerce, business, economy, economic infrastructure

Educational

globalisation globalisation and internationalisation

Organisational meetings, networks, methods of operation e.g. OMC, European Semester

Political EU, national states etc

Society

Values Values

Addressing disadvantage e.g. disabled (sic), illiteracy

Change, innovation Opening up, refreshing, modernising

Competition Standalone

Cooperation, coherence Joint working not specifically partnership

Dual objectives For example competitiveness and cohesion - often 'opposing'

Economic growth

Equal opportunities

Global world wide

Inclusion and society

Mobility

National Diversity

Parity of Esteem

Partnership

People

Positivity about VET

Processes evidence based, types of process

Quality of teachers, of systems

Strength, determination Forceful values

Sustainability

Transparency

Trust

Understanding

Critical Discourse Analysis Themes (Chapter 6)

Adult VET

Dropout from VET

Completion

Employer based training On the job training, employer led training

Apprenticeships

Funding of VET

Language education and VET

National structures Committees, reports, commissions, ministries
Organisation of VET programmes Vocational clusters, qualifications
Purpose of VET
Quality of VET
Reform of VET system
Selection for VET Entry requirements, stretch for talented
Teachers
Unemployed and VET
Unspecified training
VET institutions
VET student places
Workforce development
Young people
Young migrants
Youth Guarantee

Country Specific Recommendation Themes – Chapter 6

Demography Demographic issues
Education
Adult learning
Apprenticeships Intended for young people
Lifelong learning
Participation participation in education
Technical education Post Sainsbury VET in England
Traineeships
Vocational Education and Training voc ed and training
Employability Employability
Disability
Migrants Migrants and refugees
Older workers Employment rates of older workers - or employability in general
Underemployment Part time workers
Women
Young people
Employers
Entrepreneurship
Labour market
Individuals seeking career progression
Those trapped in entry level employment
Poor quality system Poor quality education system
Skills Skills
Basic skills Separating from skills levels - as a different issue
Job relevant skills
Low skilled
Skill levels intermediate, higher, advanced - and also skills progression
Skills demand Future skills mismatch, imbalance or unspecified - either related to workers skills or types of skill

Skills provision Structure and system
Skills updates
Upskilling
Unemployed unemployed or needing employability skills improved
Long term long term unemployed including lower employment prospects
Unemployment Rates
Youth unemployment
Young people references to young people
15-25 year olds Attempts to manipulate stats by using different cohorts?
18-24 year olds
Drop out Drop out from education or vocational education including early school leavers
Educational attainment Educational attainment of young people
Formal arrangements Youth Guarantee or contract
Late finishers Finishing education later than others
Lower secondary Not educated beyond lower secondary level
NEETs Not engaged in education, employment or training (16-24 year olds)

Problematisations – Chapter 6

Apprenticeships - shortage of places Shortage of apprenticeship places
Budget deficits
Demographic issues
Employers - not employing YP Employers not choosing to employ YP
Employers - work placement shortage Shortage of work placements
Employers not engaging with education system
Employers not paying for training
High drop out High drop out rate from VET programmes
Lifelong learning purpose
Low completion rate Low completion rate for VET programmes
Low skilled adults Low levels of skills in adults - basic or job related
Migrants integration into society
NEETs
Perceived educational system or individual failure In earlier part of education system - i.e. compulsory
Poor quality VET programmes
Poverty & social exclusion
Skills shortage & mismatch Present and future in labour market
Students not choosing VET Students not choosing to study VET
Youth unemployment

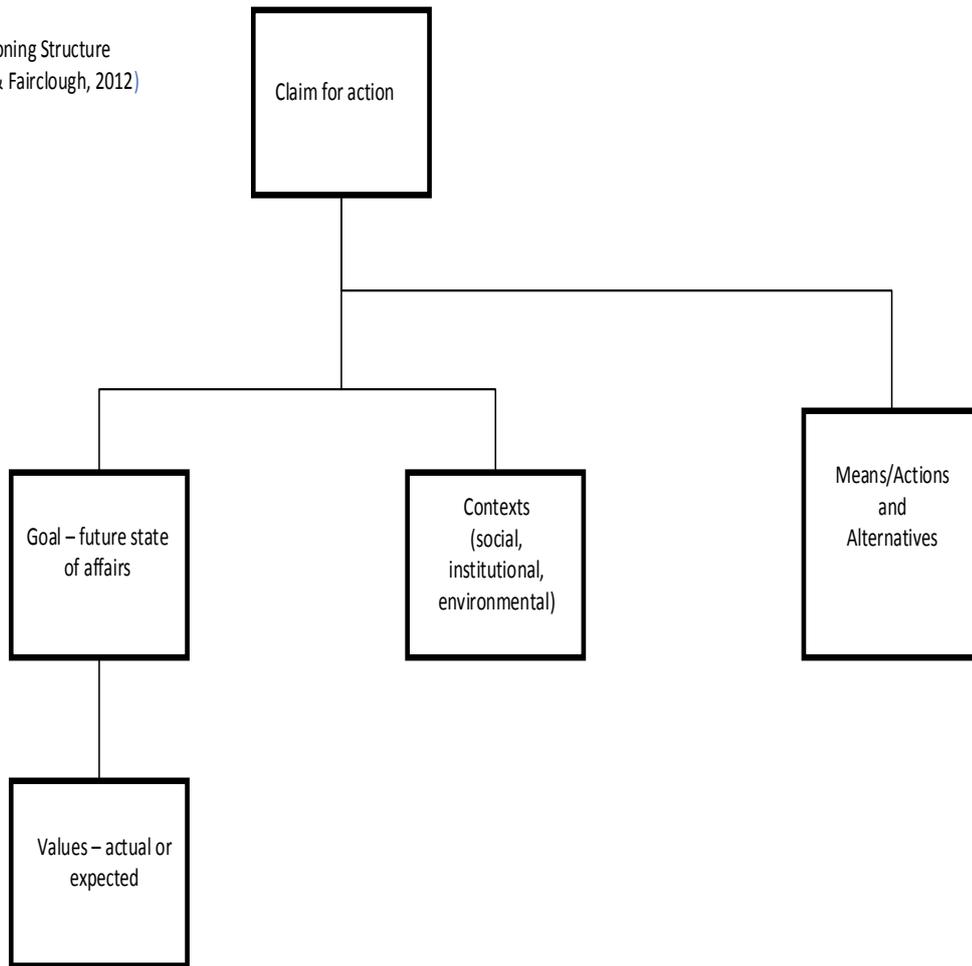
Lisbon Themes – Chapter 7

Accessibility
Digital literacy
IT skills

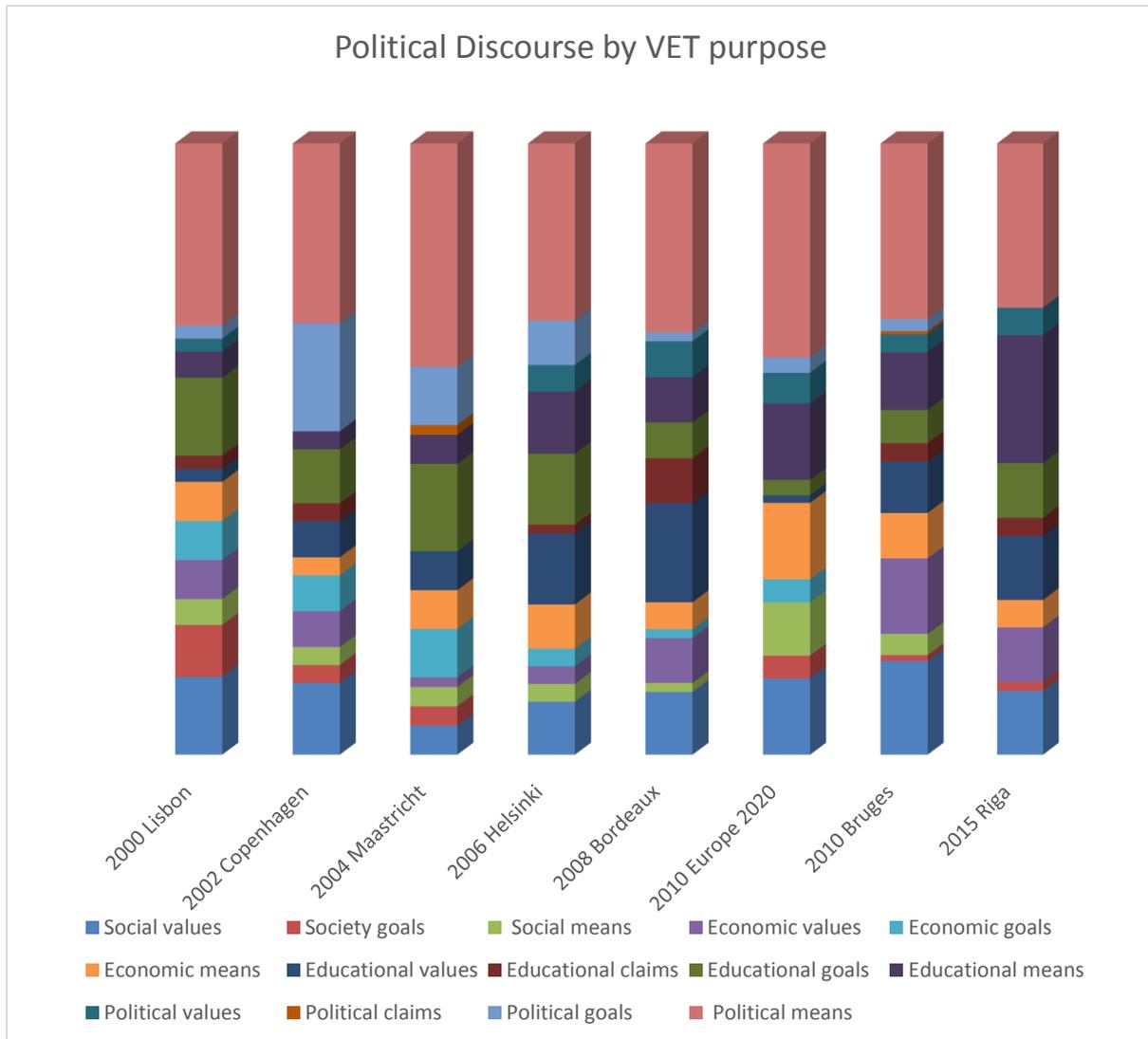
Education and training Education and training references
 Higher education
 Training Training - broad sense
 Employed needing more or better skills Those in employment whose skills may be outdated
 Entrepreneurship
 Equal opportunities
 Europe wide initiatives Europe wide initiatives
 European CV
 European social model
 Foreign languages
 Job creation
 Knowledge society
 Learning partnerships Schools, firms, research facilities, training centres
 Lifelong learning
 Local learning centre
 Mobility
 Modernising education
 New basic skills As specified in Lisbon document - IT skills, foreign languages, entrepreneurship, technological change etc
 Post 16 young people not in further education or training 18-24 year olds with lower secondary education not in further education or training (not necessarily unemployed)
 Recognition of informal learning
 Role of teachers
 High quality teachers
 Skills gap
 IT skills gap
 Skills provision
 Social & economic strategy
 Social cohesion
 Social exclusion Antithesis is social inclusion
 Social inclusion Antithesis is social exclusion
 Social problem of unemployment
 Social skills
 Technological skills
 Transparency
 Unemployed adults
 Unemployment
 Young people

Appendix D Political Discourse Analysis Framework

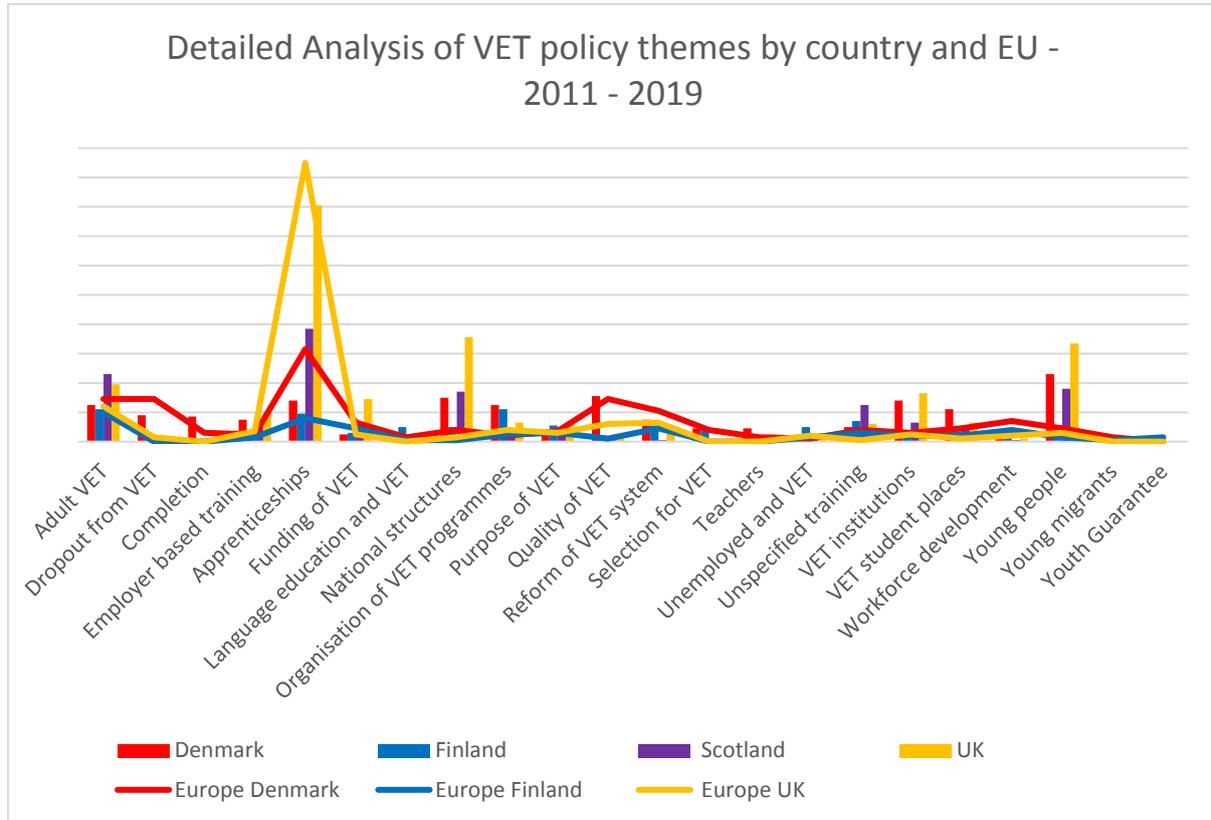
Practical Reasoning Structure
(from Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012)



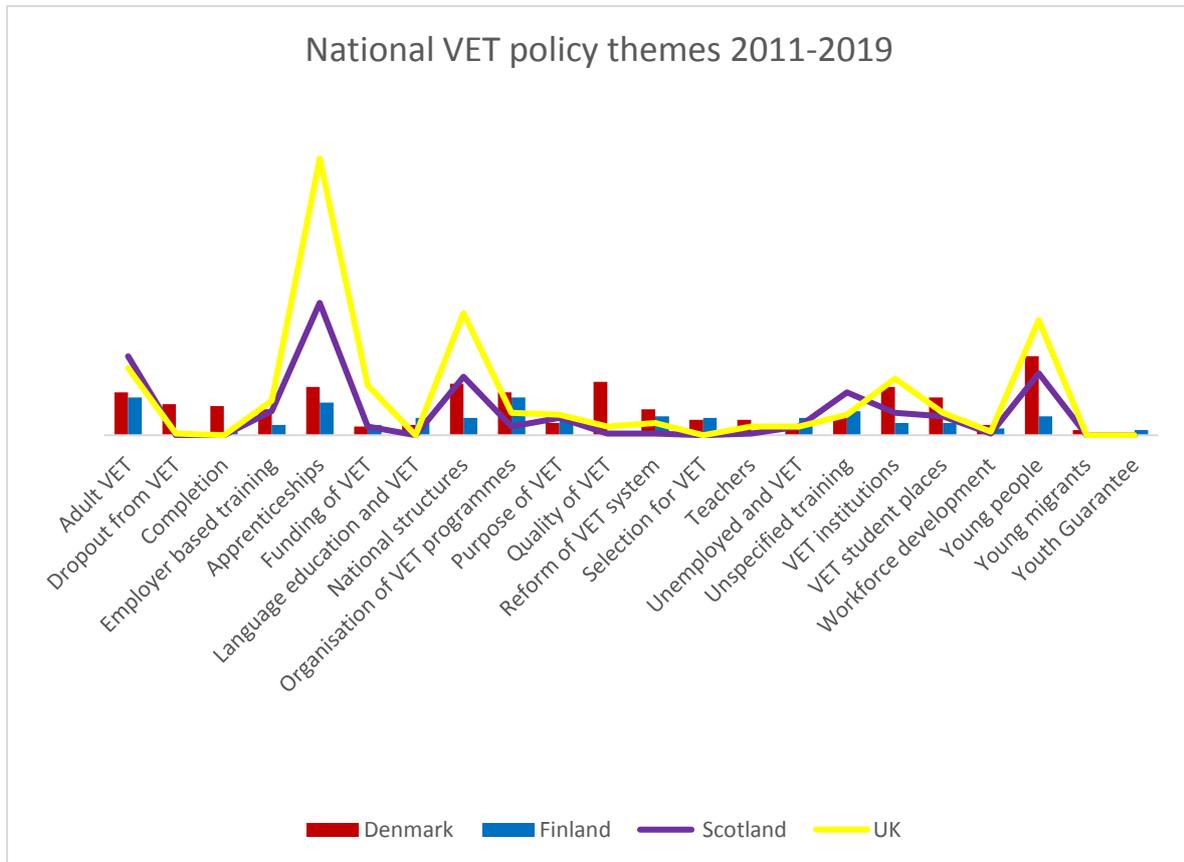
Appendix E Political discourse by VET purpose



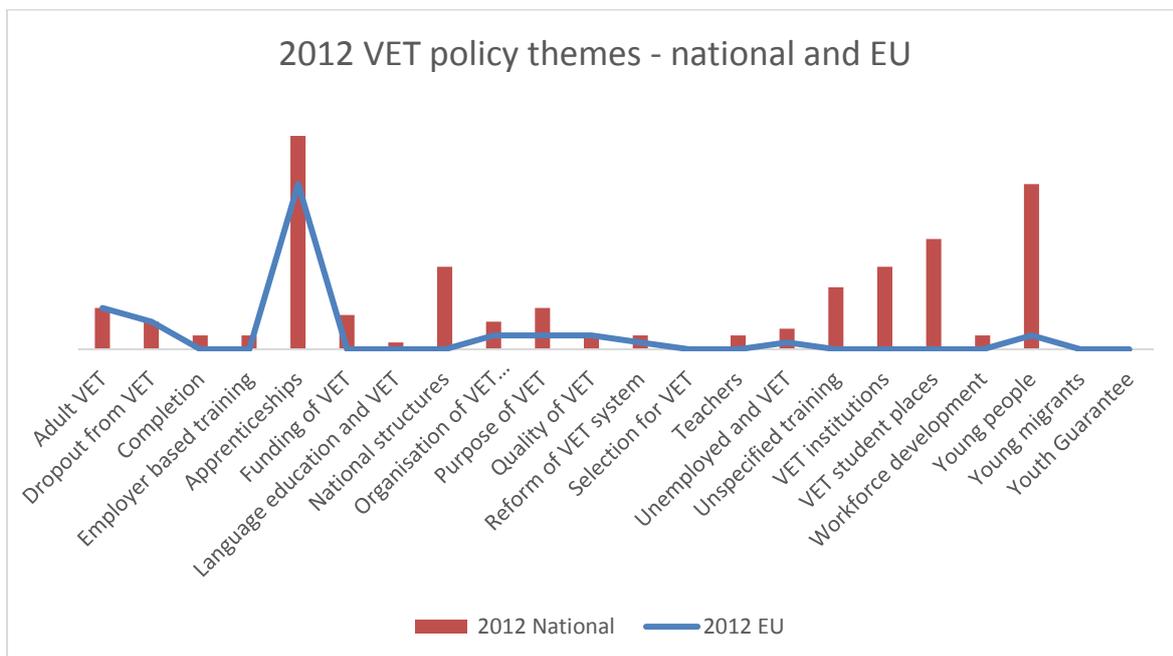
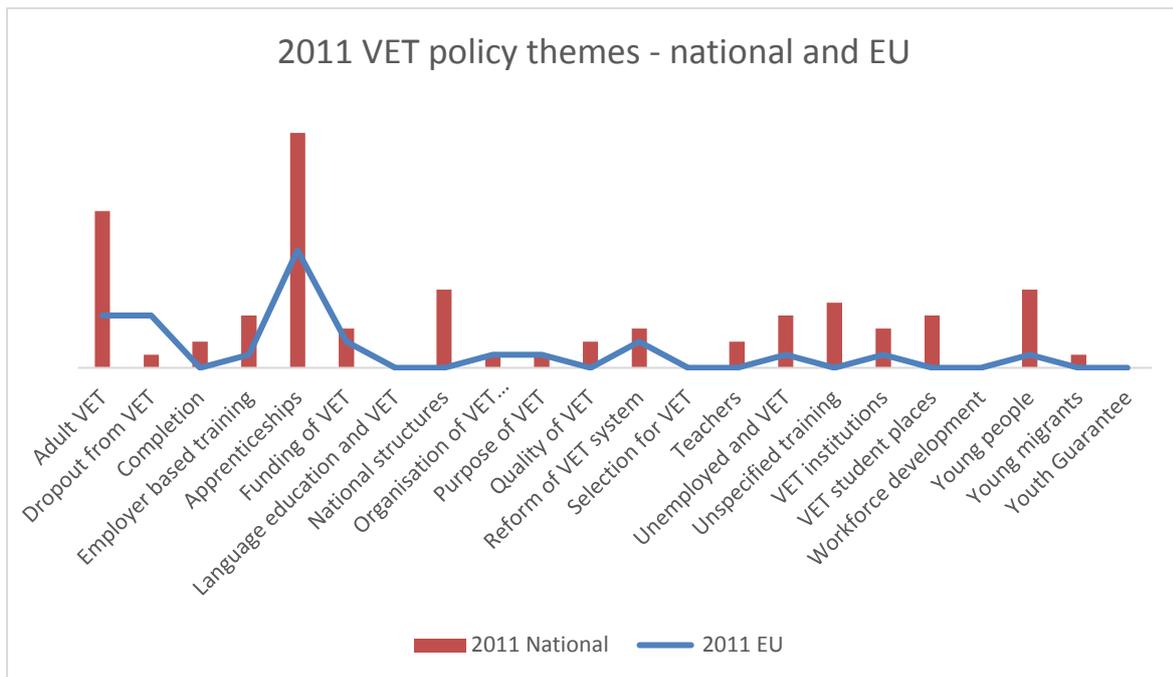
Appendix F VET policies by country and EU representations

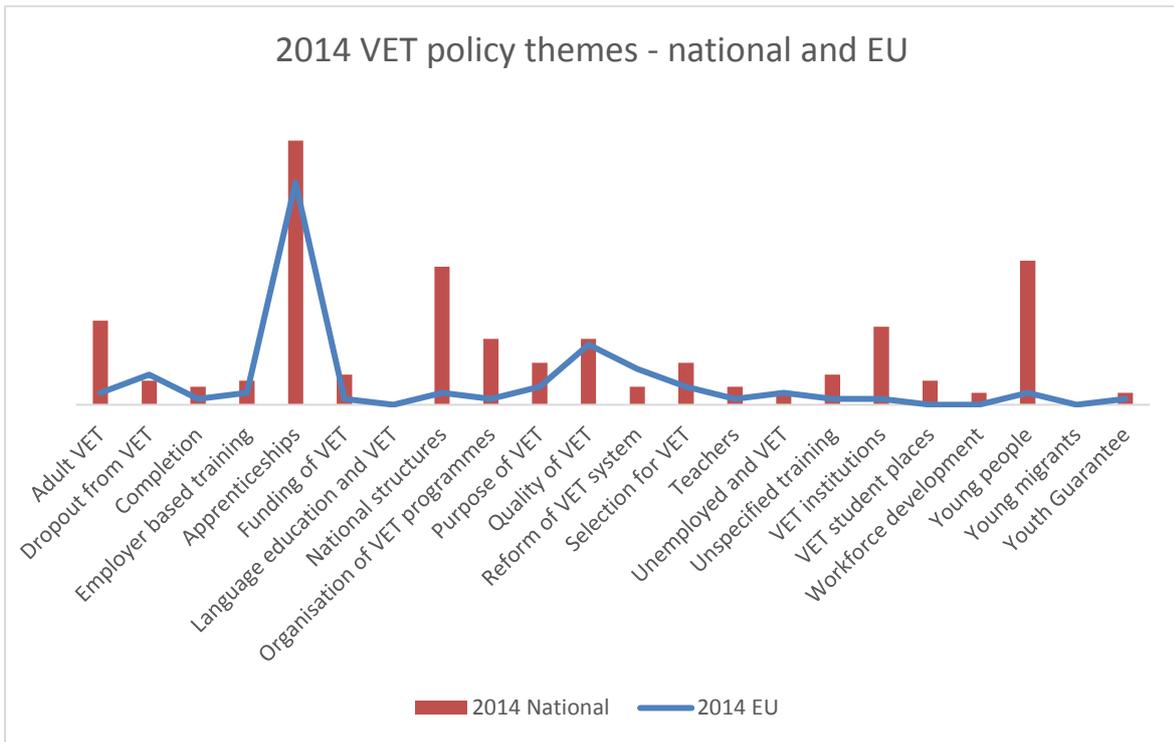
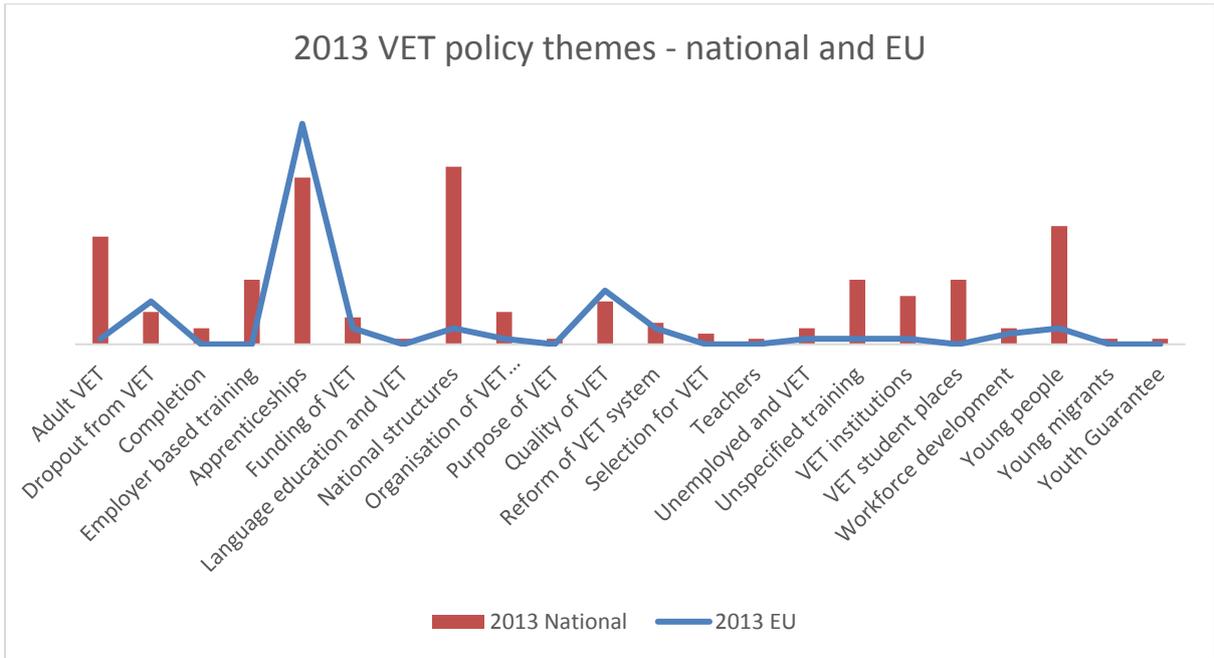


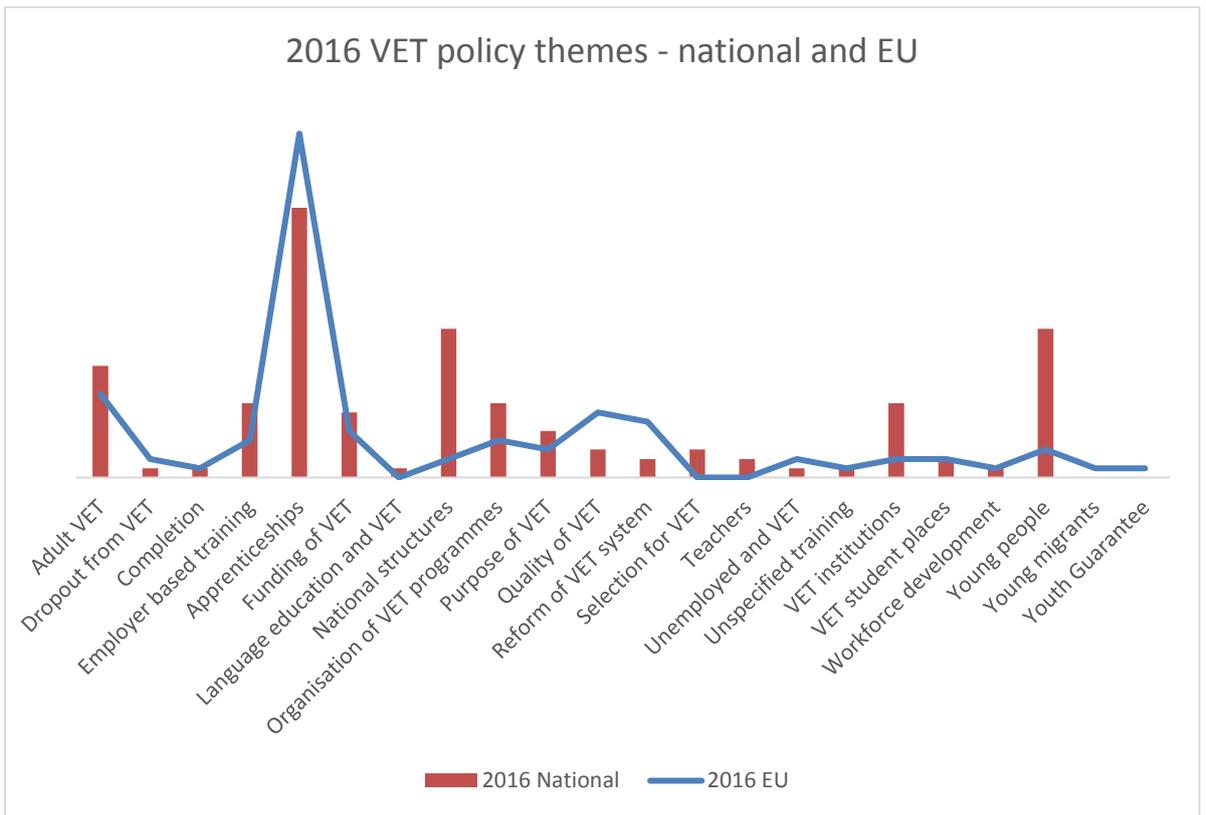
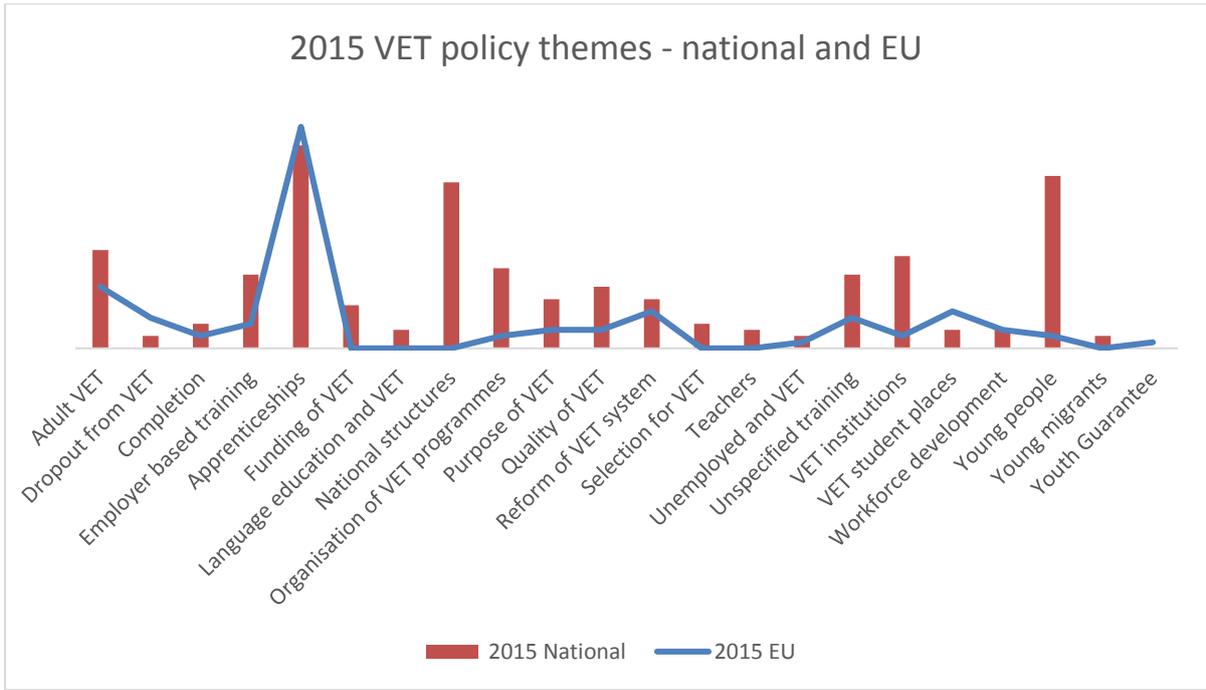
Appendix G National and EU VET policy themes between 2011 and 2019

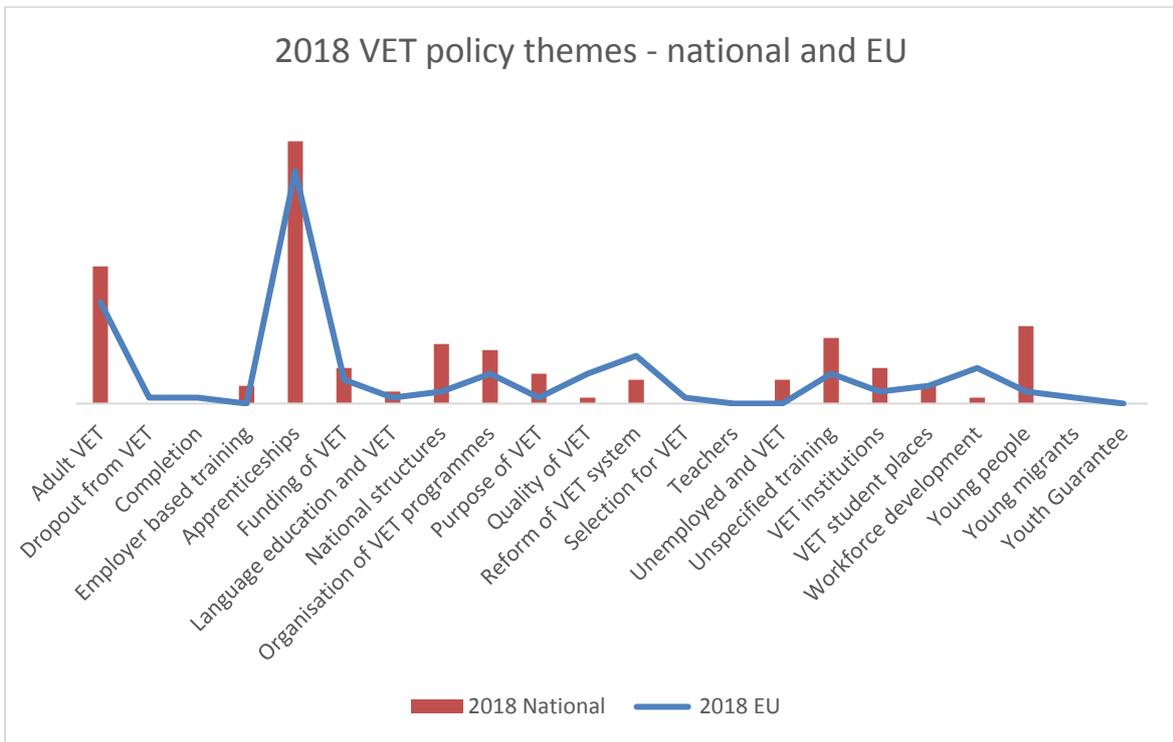
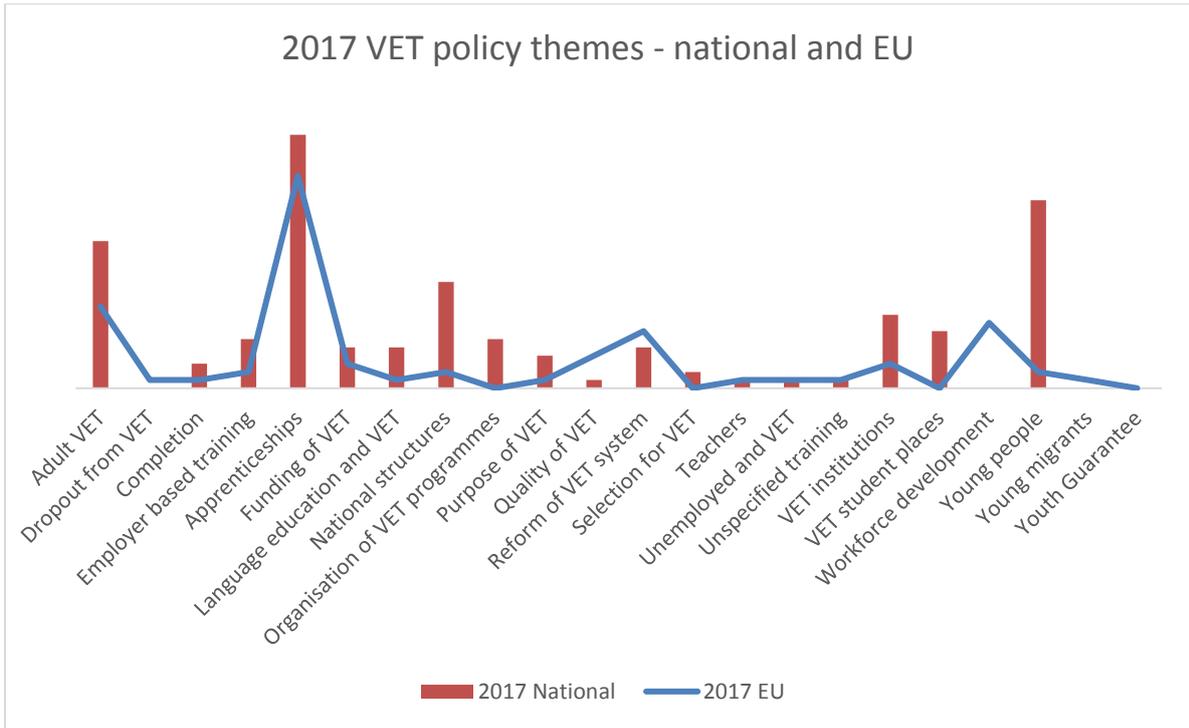


Appendix H National VET policy themes

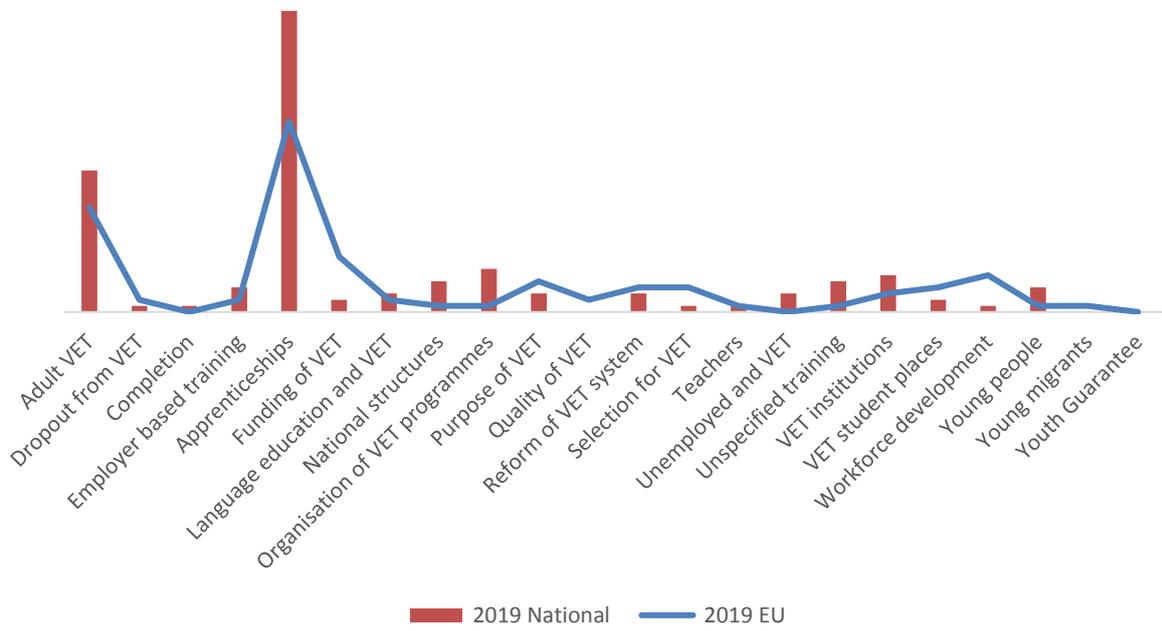




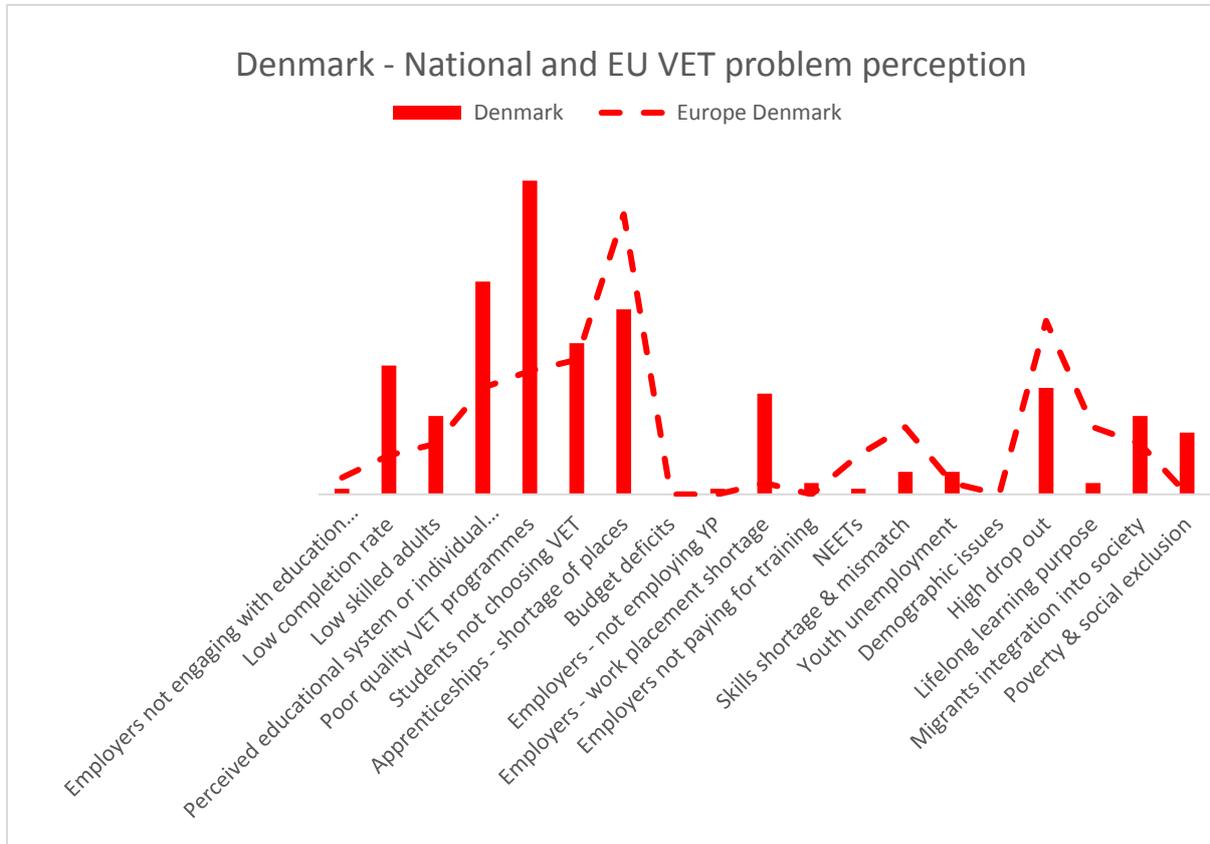




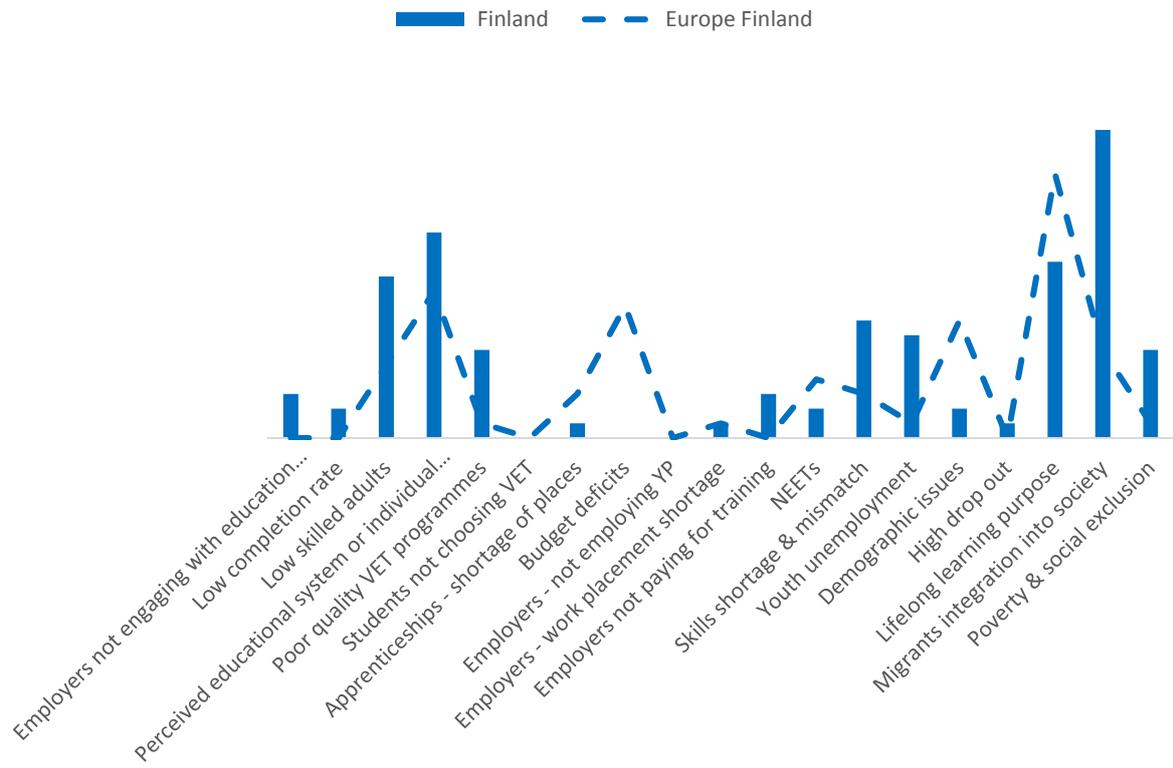
2019 VET policy themes - national and EU



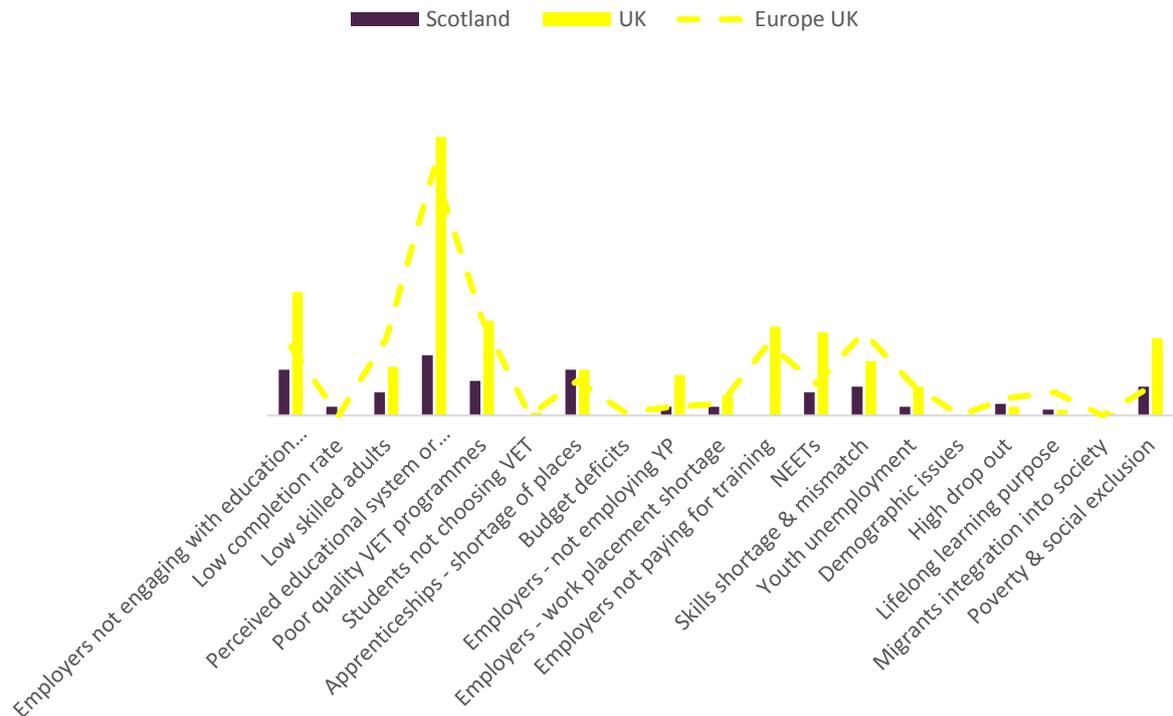
Appendix I Problematisation of VET policy by country and overall



Finland - National and EU VET problem perception



Scotland and UK - National and EU VET problem perception



VET policy problematisations - national and EU

■ A : Denmark
 ■ E : Finland
 ■ F : Scotland
 ■ G : UK
 - - - B : Europe Denmark
 - - - C : Europe Finland
 - - - D : Europe UK

