

# Developing prospective tools for the observation of skill requirements in Spain

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In the last decades various tools have been developed in Spain to observe skill requirements and to translate these requirements into provision of adequate initial school-based training, occupational training and continuing training. Although the tools developed in Spain were at first oriented to the different types of training, different territories and different methodologies, they all played an essential role in the general orientation and modernisation of vocational education and training in Spain.

This paper describes the tools for identifying skills requirements in Spain and informs on an observatory (OBINCUAL) which is now being set up. This observatory is closely associated with the creation of the National System of Vocational Qualifications. OBINCUAL has been conceived as a 'network of networks' which can function as a nucleus of information and exchange on skill requirements and vocational training between the different vocational training subsystems in Spain.

## 1. The subsystems of vocational training in Spain

Vocational training in Spain is divided into three main subsystems:

- (a) initial/regulated vocational training (regulated by legislation on education) given in secondary education schools and organised in middle-level and higher-level training cycles;
- (b) occupational vocational training addressed to the unemployed as part of an active employment policy;
- (c) continuing vocational training addressed people in employment.

Logically, the modes of organising the three vocational training subsystems vary in terms of curriculum design and provision of training courses in different parts of the country.

- (a) The curricula of the middle-level and higher-level training cycles in initial/regulated vocational training are essentially designed on a centralised basis and grouped into ‘occupational families’, that is, they are organised nation-wide (even though, as in the whole educational system, a great deal of latitude in shaping the concrete measures is allowed both to the Autonomous Communities and each school). The training courses in the middle-level and higher-level training cycles, on the contrary, are under the responsibility of the governments of the Autonomous Communities and held in the secondary education centres which, in Spain, are run by the governments of the Autonomous Communities.
- (b) Occupational training has been decentralised in the Autonomous Communities in the last few years. But, at national level, INEM (National Institute for Employment under the Spanish Ministry of Labour) has, in the last decades, set up a central Directory of Certificates of Occupational Proficiency. However, these Certificates of Occupational Proficiency are not binding for the occupational training courses offered by the Autonomous Communities. The Autonomous Communities are the bodies which plan the provision of occupational training in their territories, so it is not surprising that the outcome of this situation has been a high degree of heterogeneity in the nation-wide contents of training provision as, basically, these courses have to satisfy a large number of needs as heterogeneous as the different territories.
- (c) Continuing training resources are administered centrally (for the whole of Spain) by FORCEM (Foundation for Continuing Training) which prepares its curricula and plans its courses mainly on the basis of the requirements of the companies.

## 2. The diversity of the tools for observation of skill requirements and the programming of training provision

The diversity of the target groups and the specific objectives of this type of training, the degree of decentralisation in the definition of its contents, the diversity of programming mechanisms and financing sources, led to the establishment of specific observation mechanisms for each subsystem. The methodology of the observation mechanisms set up for each of the vocational training subsystems was essentially that of ‘functional analysis’.

Other tools for observation at sectoral or local level were also developed, but in a very uneven manner.

Vocational training in Spain, as in other European countries, has to deal with the necessity of creating a common framework of reference for the different vocational training subsystems; this inevitably implies that better integration of the observation tools for skill requirements and training provision is required, as these, up to now, were developed autonomously by the different subsystems and differ from one another even though they contain some elements of coordination.

Up to the present, the measures which have had a major impact in Spain may be grouped as follows:

- Work on the curricula of initial vocational training is undertaken mainly by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities. This work which has the aim of producing the curricula for the middle-level and higher-level training cycles is carried out in conjunction with experts from the companies.
- The observatory set up by INEM (Ministry of Labour), the 'Observatory for Occupations', is structured more in the form of a dynamic network covering the occupational training centres than a traditional observatory. But, as Cachón (2001) says, it is not capable of extending this dynamic development beyond its institutional borders.
- FORCEM (Foundation for Continuing Training which administers the public funds for the financing of continuing training in Spain) has developed observation tools for skill requirements and training needs primarily on a sectoral basis, but this too is not a genuine observatory, and its special interest is only directed to some occupational fields.
- Some Autonomous Communities have developed observatories which mainly observe and identify the specific needs of the territory for which they are responsible. The Basque Country deserves a special mention for its efforts to improve quality, and similar efforts are being undertaken in other Autonomous Communities such as the Canary Islands or Madrid (Cachón, 2001).
- Mention should also be made of a multitude of 'local observatories', often established at municipal level with heterogeneous resources and varying objectives, which are to be found in Spain today. As the municipal administrations are mainly responsible not only for initial training but also for occupational training policies, many of them have created their own tools to help them to identify and provide the vocational training needed in their own territory.

- Lastly, there are other more or less systematic mechanisms for the identification of training needs linked to the 'spontaneous' demand of companies.

All, or almost all, of these tools contain prospective elements for identifying future skills, but they are clearly insufficient to respond effectively to the challenges arising for our economies from the ongoing process of change. Furthermore, the prospective elements developed in the existing mechanisms do not contain a methodology which is appropriate for this type of work.

### 3. OBINCUAL - a stake, a challenge, some questions

Although it is still in the initial phase - which means that we can only describe and evaluate its intentions but not its achievements - OBINCUAL (Observatory of the Spanish National Institute for Qualifications - INCUAL) is now being set up in Spain. This institute, and its observatory, is under the responsibility of the General Council for Vocational Training (CGFP) and has organic links with the Ministry of Labour.

This observatory is closely associated with the creation - also under the technical responsibility of INCUAL - of the National System of Vocational Qualifications. The aim of this system is to be an '... integrated vocational qualification and training system ... which will provide the tools for a system capable of enabling a global, coordinated, coherent and optimal treatment of the problems of the vocational qualification and training of the different groups of persons, organisations and companies' (CGFP, 2000).

By integration the project means: a) integration of vocational qualifications in order to establish a common framework of reference for skills defined in accordance with the current needs of the production system for all types of vocational training; b) integration of the different means of acquiring vocational skills; c) integration of training provision in vocational education.

The project states: 'Therefore, the National System of Qualifications will serve as a framework of reference and orientation for all actions, and especially the training activities of the different administrations, the social partners, other bodies, companies and persons, thus facilitating the necessary cooperation and consensus, so that all those involved may coordinate their objectives and interests in the system of qualifications in a coherent and structured manner' (CGFP, 2000).

For this purpose, OBINCUAL has been conceived as a 'network of networks' which can function as a nucleus of information and exchange on skill requirements and vocational training between the different vocational training subsystems in Spain.

With regard to the early identification of skill requirements OBINCUAL intends to set up 'expertise' networks whose work will '.... enable the early detection of needs for new qualifications by defining (endogenous) scenarios of the future'.

The purpose of OBINCUAL's prospective activities, according to INCUAL's working documents, will be to analyse the key areas of qualification and the economic activities to which they are linked and thus: firstly determine the components and the variables of the production process in which most changes are taking place, and secondly, collect information on trends and forecasts on the future development of these components.

This will make it possible to provide information on development trends and forecasts for the future of the 'observation fields' in which OBINCUAL will be organised. The 'observation fields' (CIREM, 2002) '... may be considered as sub-aggregates of economic/productive activities which have a certain technological and professional affinity, and are based on the horizontal categorisation of the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications'.

In order to carry out these prospective studies OBINCUAL proposes to do the following:

- conduct a preliminary analysis of the observation field and the fields considered to be key areas for its future development;
- select the nuclei of the network of networks which, through their routine activities, will be most suitable to develop the study of each observation field.

The basic methodology used by OBINCUAL will be the Delphi method.

The experts of the OBINCUAL network will be the persons directing the study of each observation field (one of them will be appointed as head of the project) and establishing the subjects and the variables of the Delphi questionnaires.

As INCUAL only initiated this process recently, we will have to wait for some time to collect enough material to evaluate the results of the measures for the early identification of skill requirements. In addition, not enough time has passed to obtain sufficient information for assessing the strong and weak points of its application.

In any case, even though many points relating to the development of OBINCUAL still have to be discussed at length, we can raise some questions today. At least two questions arise in the discussion of methodology:

(1) *What scope does OBINCUAL have to deal with local and sectoral specificities?*

The process of technological and commercial globalisation to which most companies in Spain, and also in other European countries, are now being subjected, has 'upstream' and 'downstream' effects which go beyond the boundaries of the state. In the field of human resources, regional and even local aspects, as several authors indicate (Manuel Castells for example), may be an essential element of competitiveness for companies in a global economy. The question may also be asked from a reverse angle: what scope do national states actually have for the prospective management of skills?

In view of the vital role played today by national states in the establishment of standards for skills management on our labour markets, it seems to be reasonable that the 'national' mechanisms for early identification of skill requirements should also integrate the other two dimensions, the global and the regional, in order to ensure their effectiveness. For example, the skill requirements and training needs of companies in the micro-electronics sector, or even those of a single company, are not the same in Helsinki and in Barcelona.

Another variable (cross-linked with the above) plays an 'inevitable' role in observatories which pursue objectives or targets such as those of OBINCUAL: the sectoral element and its role in the international division of labour in a specific area. Skill requirements for administrative activities in the micro-electronics sector are not the same as those for the hotel/catering sector, not even if they are in the same locality, or if two hotel establishments of different categories and size are involved. Thus, consideration of intersectoral and intrasectoral specificities is required.

(2) *What room will there be for 'the old' and 'the new' in future?*

Early identification of skill requirements presents a dual challenge: we have to include the observation and detection of both 'new' skills and 'old' skills, the latter will continue to exist and/or facilitate the acquisition of new skills.

In the debate on early identification of skill requirements the essential problem may be that we associate 'early identification' only with 'new skills' as an element of the future. In doing this we run the great risk of forgetting the 'old skills' which will continue to be vital in the future. In everyday terms one may say that many of the essential skills needed to cope with the future are skills which, at least in essence even if their form varies, are extremely old. Knowing how to read or express oneself in

writing, or regularly reading the daily or weekly press or books, irrespective of whether they are on paper or electronic.

Because of this, even if it seems very paradoxical, one of the principal challenges of the identification of skills which will be required in the future, consists of identifying and recognising those 'old' skills which will continue to exist or will, at least, be the basis for the acquisition of new skills which are only 'identifiable' in the short term. Therefore, one of the challenges of the future is the ability to recognise the old skills which will continue to serve as the basis of the knowledge society. This is a vital aspect which effects, among other aspects, the contents and efficiency of compulsory education. The human capital of a country can be transformed in the short term only if the working population has a basic training which is not vulnerable to the rapid changes in our economies but is so solid that it can respond to and absorb these changes.

What scope for action does OBINCUAL have in this respect, as this is basically essential for the future?

There is no doubt that for the early identification of skills it is essential to take into account the time horizons of the 'students', the companies and the training systems, all of them essentially different (Planas et al., 2001).

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# Network of national surveys on skill needs in Italy

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In Italy vocational training has been managed by the Regions since 1974. The need to attain integrated education and labour policies at the local level had encouraged research aimed at surveying and anticipating training and occupational needs. This research was intended to guide political choices supporting socio-economic development and employment.

At present the government is establishing a network by creating an information system designed to supply information about:

- sectoral scenarios in which occupational needs are expressed;
- lists of occupational titles by sectors representing needs which have been expressed by companies but which are in very short supply on the labour market;
- descriptions of occupational needs stemming from new skill needs;
- occupational forecasts for the short and medium terms (1-5 years).

This paper presents the project – coordinated by ISFOL – to set up a network of national needs surveys in Italy.

## 1. Introduction

In the past, analyses of skill and training requirements in Italy followed two parallel and separate strands: the local and the national. Local analysis work took root before national analysis work which has gained ground only in the last five years.

The Italian government promoted, between 1997 and 2000, a set of national surveys of skill requirements in various sectors of the economy and is currently preparing an information system networking these surveys with a view to providing information on trends in skill and training requirements in Italy.

In this respect, the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Policy has commissioned ISFOL (Institute for the Development of Workers' Vocational Training) to design this system which, by creating a network of national

surveys, gathers and combines qualitative data on skill requirements with quantitative data on occupational trends.

The purpose of this networked system for the permanent monitoring of skill requirements is to facilitate and improve labour market entry and integration, improve and support employability and promote occupational mobility. As such, it has been included by the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Policy in the Operating Plans of the new 2000-06 programme period of the European Social Fund, among systems measures, as part of Objective 3 of Strand C, Measure C1 and in the 'human resources' strand of Objective 1 of the National Operating Plan which is administered by the Ministry of Labour. Measures planned under Objective 3 must be linked to those planned under Objective 1 in order to promote benchmarking.

At local level, it should be borne in mind that the Italian Regions have been responsible for vocational training since 1974. In recent years, a number of institutional reforms have enhanced and extended local authority education and labour market competences. The need to implement local policies that integrate education and work has paved the way for a whole range of surveys intended to detect/anticipate skill and training requirements whose findings could well be used as a starting point for choices of policy to support development and employment in an area.

The autonomy with which the Regions have conducted their research has meant that their results are not at all comparable, making comparative studies of the various local experiments very difficult. In many cases, different objectives have been pursued, using different approaches and methods, and different instruments have been prepared.

Both nationally and locally, there have recently been attempts to place measures on a less sporadic footing and in both cases to work towards a system configuration.

The regional governments are now clearly aware of the need to reorganise and systemise local needs analysis initiatives. All the Regional Operating Plans for the 2000-06 period include this issue, setting out both specific and horizontal measures.

As part of the overhaul of the institutional scenario, a structural link needs to be found, in the areas of vocational training and labour market policy, between national and local needs analysis initiatives, that does not make one subordinate to the other, but does provide a high degree of consistency. A national system necessarily has to take account of the Regions' needs and experiences as they are responsible for training supply design and labour market management and therefore for human resource development policies. Ex post monitoring of the efficiency and effectiveness of the