

VET POLICY DEVELOPMENT

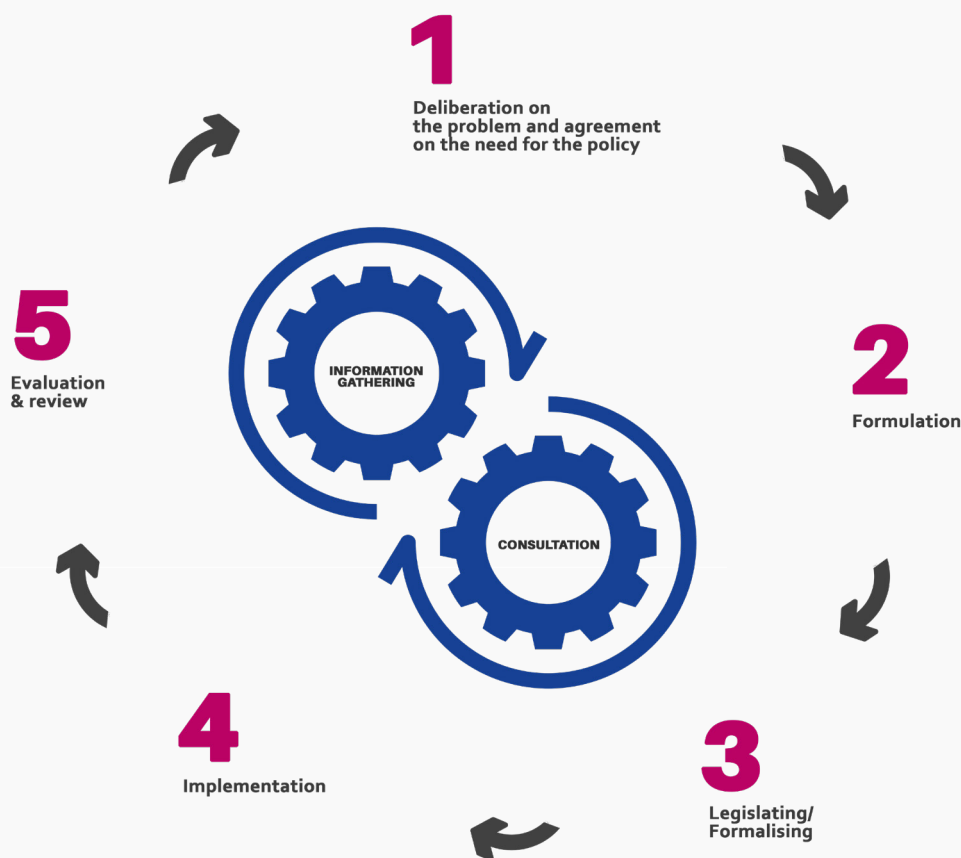
Process, lessons learned & recommendations

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This guiding note gives advice on how to approach the challenge of VET policy development.

It takes up practical experiences and lessons learned from VET stakeholders and inspires the discussion on VET policy development in the global VET community.

VET policy development: an iterative process



In theory, policymaking unfolds in an orderly fashion, following **a series of linear steps**:

1. Deliberation on the problem and agreement on the need for the policy
2. Formulation
3. Legislating/formalising
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation and review

Some essential **steps** are often **forgotten** though:

1. Sufficient **information gathering**, including (international) lessons learned
2. Wide **consultation** throughout the different steps, meaning listening to all the voices: students, youth organisations, teachers, VET-provider management, private sector representatives, industry partners, trade unions...

And in **reality**, especially in complex systems, policymaking:
(Mueller, 2020)

- Can be messy, non-linear and contested
- Has unforeseen obstacles and unintended consequences
- Can be obstructed by stakeholders not keen on change
- Is often unsuccessful

Bottom-up or top-down approaches?

(Gornitzka, Kogan and Amaral, 2005; OECD, 2008; Cerna, L., 2013)

Change happens due to dynamic, iterative processes. Top-down and bottom-up approaches were previously seen as oppositional to each other.

More recent insights however, encourage us to **combine the two approaches** and differentiate strategies adapted to the specific country and sector context (leadership, stakeholders, organisational capacity, political situation, inter alia).

Policy design ideally takes a **systemic approach**, involving all actors in the sector - upstream and downstream - in an oscillating movement between internal and external partners. Broad bottom-up consultation and co-design (e.g. through roadshows, surveys, focus group discussions, civil society group representation at all levels of the policy design,) combined with competent, future-focused, top-down final decision-making and implementation support.

Lessons learned and guidance for successful VET policy development

Topic	Lessons learned	Recommendations
On the set-up	<p>1. Clear political will, commitment and leadership from the top are essential.</p> <p>2. The best policy is useless if the resources are not available for implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinate and engage stakeholders in a policy dialogue, including those who can influence the relevant environment and support opportunities. ▪ Ensure the back-up of policies by solid resource planning. This includes the support from technical and financial partners for policy implementation.
	<p>3. VET policy needs to be aligned to the ever-changing specific country context, including the changing labour market needs.</p> <p>4. Flexibility and autonomy of the VET institution are essential for success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider VET reform in the first place as a strategy to support skills development to increase employment opportunities. ▪ Keep a close eye on the future of the labour market by regularly consulting all relevant stakeholders. ▪ Make use of existing good practices - without simply importing, as adaptation to the specific context is essential.
On the process	<p>5. Policy based on strong local consultation, and ideally co-creation, and thorough information-gathering has better chances of acceptance and thus success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include information gathering and broad stakeholder consultation, and ideally co-creation, early on and throughout the process of VET policy development.
	<p>6. Divergent stakeholder views may delay decision processes, but decisions are needed to progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include international examples, results from pilot projects, scientific data etc. in the information gathering. ▪ Manage stakeholder' expectations and ensure a transparent process of decision making.
	<p>7. It is important to have a plan, but the plan needs to remain flexible for revision.</p> <p>8. When advice and consultation are not taken seriously by policymakers, policy reversal is likely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integrate regular advice and consultation sessions for reviewing plans and activities throughout the policy development process. ▪ Be ready to change the approach, instruments and expectations, if it is clear that the initial plan is not working.
	<p>9. Less is more, but the (policy) context matters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When developing a particular policy consider whether any additional policies or any policy updates are required to allow implementation of the new policy.
On stakeholder involvement	<p>10. Stakeholders, especially practitioners, often have a very good insight into what works and what does not.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involve a diverse network of public institutions, as well as private partners, public and private VET-institutions, civil society organisations etc. in the policy development process.
	<p>11. No matter how wide the consultation process, there will always be those who feel excluded.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build trust between the stakeholders as a foundation for collaboration.