
CEDEFOP OPINION SURVEY
ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

BULGARIA





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More information on the survey at: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/opinion-survey-vocational-education-and-training-europe>

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Introduction

In the last years VET became more visible in national education policy and in the public perceptions. However, there are still stereotypes and negative thinking of part of society, in particular of parents, that vocational high schools are second category schools that are associated with unattractive and low paid work.

The official statistical data show that VET as an education path has become less attractive for Bulgarian students. In the period 2011-2016 along with the drop of the total number of students in secondary education due to demographic decline and emigration, the number of vocational education graduates decreased by 32.4%, compared to decrease by 23.8% of general education graduates. The share of VET graduates in the total number of secondary education graduates also decreased - from 49% in 2012 to 45.8% in 2016.

However there is statistical evidence of better labour market outcomes of VET graduates. Thus, the employment rate of the population with vocational education (aged 15 years and above) in 2016 was 61.1% and outpaced that of persons with secondary general education (47.8%) by about 14 percentage points. The unemployment rate of labour force with VET (6.5%) is lower compared both with the total unemployment rate and the unemployment rate of those with general education at 7.1% and 7.6% correspondingly.

In the last few years VET is gaining momentum in the political and academic discourse. In the course of reform the VET system in Bulgaria underwent significant changes, including legislative amendments and institutional changes. Recent (2014, 2016) amendments to the Vocational Education and Training Act (1999) broaden the access to VET through validation of non-formal and informal learning; provide for better matching between the competences acquired and labour market needs; restructure the state educational standards for VET qualifications; strengthen the quality assurance; and introduce dual training. The government has adopted also several strategic documents aiming at supporting the development and improvement of the quality and image of vocational education in the country, including Strategy for VET development 2015-20⁽¹⁾.

(1) See for more details: NAVET (2016). Vocational education and training in Europe – Bulgaria. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports; 2016. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_BG.pdf; Bulgaria: VET in Europe – Country report 2014. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/vet-in-europe-country-reports> [assessed 9.11.2017].

The participation in VET is encouraged by information campaigns. Since 2009, the 'National VET panorama' event promotes VET and enhances learners' motivation. A national VET portal, National Agency for VET (NAVET) information system, centres for information and vocational guidance are also engaged in promoting participation in VET.

There is very scarce evidence on citizen's perceptions about VET in the academic literature in the country. There are only few surveys that explore the attitudes of the main stakeholders – students, employers and teachers (2), as well as links of VET and labour market (3). In the framework of projects implemented by MES some surveys (4) and activities including students' practices were realised.

This article summarises findings of the Cedefop's Opinion Survey on VET in the specific Bulgarian context. The multistage, random sample includes 35 646 citizens of the EU-28, including 1001 Bulgarians. In Bulgaria the face-to-face interviews were conducted in the period 02 to 21 June 2016. The survey is mostly focused on initial vocational training (IVET) at upper secondary level.

The Cedefop survey appears at a key stage of the school education reform in the country and provides timely and relevant insights into current state and perceptions of VET. These findings added value to the existing surveys and help gain a deeper understanding of the VET system itself in the country as a base for further analysing its successes and shortcomings. The survey show more positive assessment of various aspects of VET than expected. Probably we can relate this to the mentioned above legislative and institutional changes in the VET system.

The main issues that need attention relate to further promoting dual VET as an opportunity to acquire and enhance professional qualifications in a real work environment; improving school-business relationship; addressing early leaving from VET as it is higher than from secondary education as a whole; ensuring

(2) Ministry of Education and Science. Center for control and evaluation of quality of education (2006). Comments and assessments of the quality of VET in Bulgaria. Analysis, Sofia, 2006 (in Bulgarian). http://www.ckoko.bg/upload/docs/2013-01/ANALIZ_1POO.pdf [assessed 9.11.2017]

(3) IME (2015). *Vocational education and labour market. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and treats* (in Bulgarian). www.bednostbg.info/var/docs/reports/VocationalEducation-Employment.pdf [assessed 9.11.2017].

(4) MES (2014) Analysis of the state of VET system under the MES project "Governance for Effective Vocational Education", based on a survey on attitudes and expectations related to VET (in Bulgarian). <https://mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=5248> [assessed 9.11.2017].

better match of VET with regional labour markets and economy needs and with the sector skills needs forecast. A serious challenge the VET system faces is professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors, including training and involving young teachers.

In further discussions VET development should be seen through the lifelong learning perspective as the knowledge and skills the worker has initially acquired in VET and general education may not be up to date in the rapidly changing labour markets and work environments due to globalization and ongoing digitalisation. Lifelong learning emphasizes the need to invest in the development of skills and competences throughout the lifecycle providing the necessary adaptability, flexibility and higher employability.

CHAPTER 1.

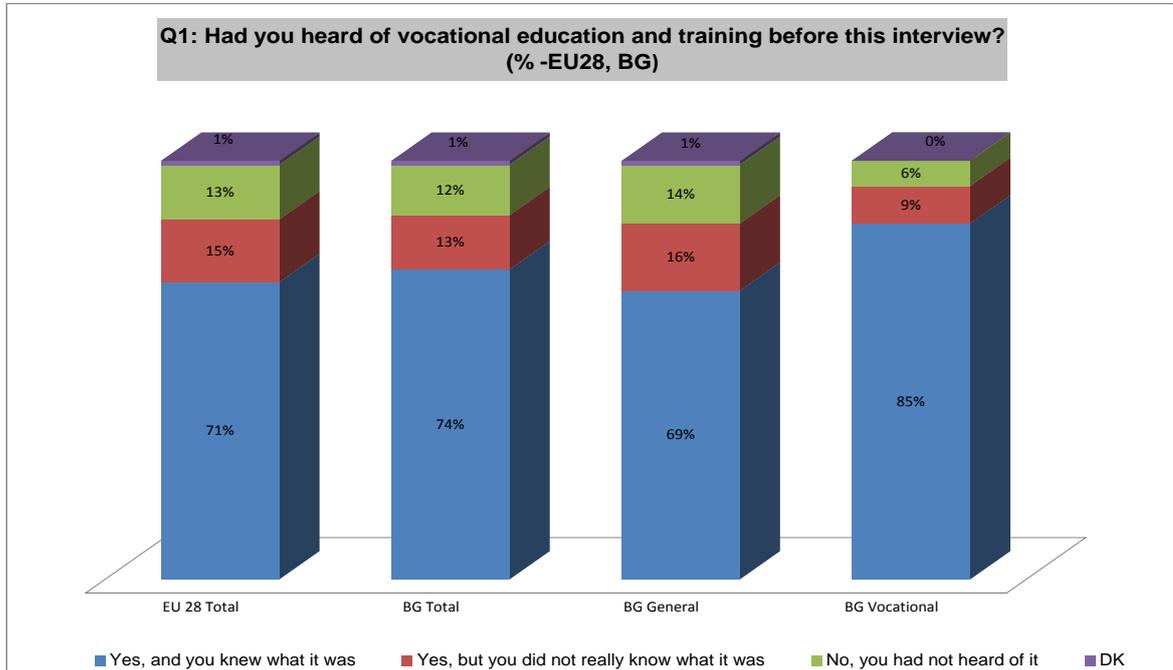
Awareness and knowledge of VET

Vocational education and training (VET) in Bulgaria has historical traditions and plays an important role in the educational system, although its development as a combination of theoretical and practical learning is uneven and inconsistent over time. In recent years, with the increase of the interest towards learning foreign languages and ICT, VET is considered less attractive, but still close to half of the upper secondary school graduates are students in vocational schools.

1.1. Knowledge and information on VET

The Cedefop study outlines a positive picture of awareness of respondents following general and vocational education. A slightly higher proportion of Bulgarian respondents (74%) compared to the EU28 average (71%) say they know what vocational education is and they have heard about it before the interview. The breakdown by type of upper secondary education supports the firm position of the vocational education participants that they knew in advance what is VET (85%) and how it relates to their future professional career. Respondents with general education (GE) are less likely to say they have heard of VET before interview (69%).

Figure 1. Awareness of vocational education and training



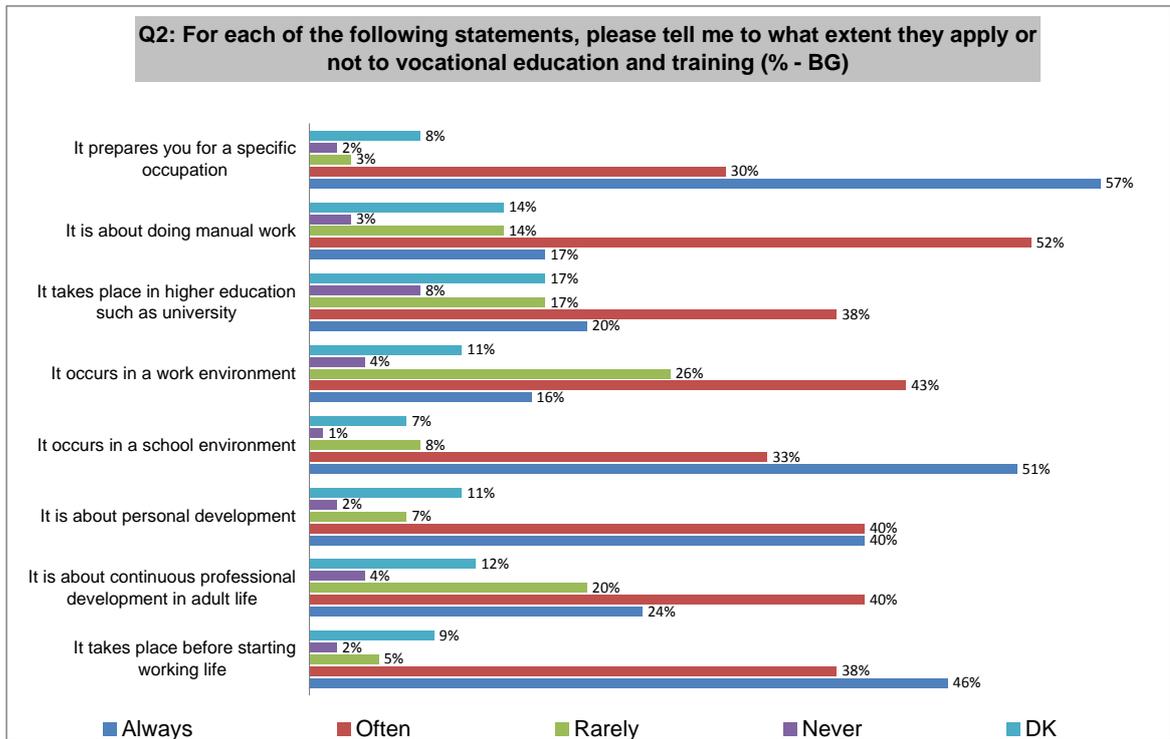
Base: All respondents (EU28 n = 35646; BG n=1001).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey, 2017.

Raising awareness of VET, both of young people and their parents, consolidate the attitudes and visions on this type of education. Awareness of achievements and opportunities in VET is crucial to increasing its attractiveness.

The Cedefop survey explores the aspects of knowledge and understanding of VET. The most characteristic aspect of VET, according to almost nine out of 10 Bulgarian respondents (87%), is that it prepares for a particular profession. Respondents also tend to associate VET almost always or often with school environment (84%) and to relate it to personal development (80%) and continuous professional development in adult life (64%). But they are less likely to associate it with work environment (59%) which is related to the fact that IVET in Bulgaria used to be mostly school-based, with dual-training form introduced just some years ago.

Figure 2. Factors associated with VET (BG)

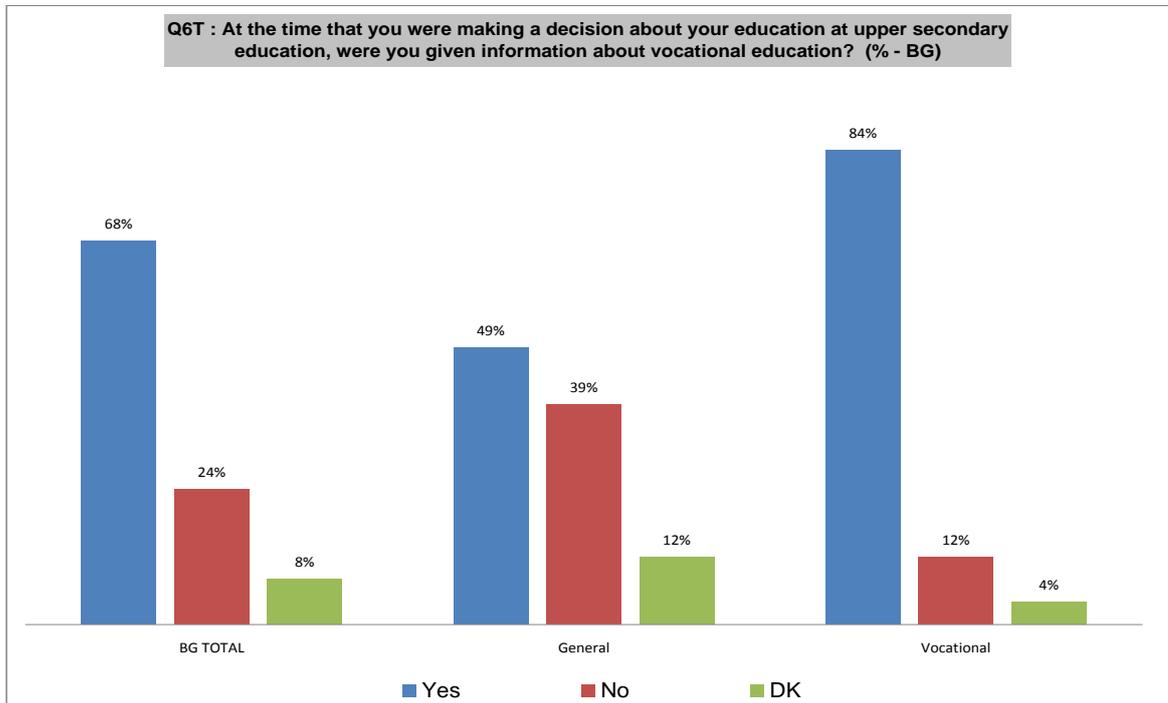


Base: All respondents (BG n= 1001).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

A key element motivating the choice of vocational educational path is to raise awareness and information on various aspects and opportunities of VET, and on how it differs from general education. Most of the respondents (68%) who have decided to complete upper secondary education have received information on VET. This awareness rate exceeds the average European level (57%), suggesting that Bulgaria already has developed information system on different aspects of VET. However, there is a difference in awareness between participants with general and vocational education. The proportion of VET respondents that have received information on VET (84%) is well above the proportion of those with general education (49%).

Figure 3. Provision of information (VET versus GE participants)



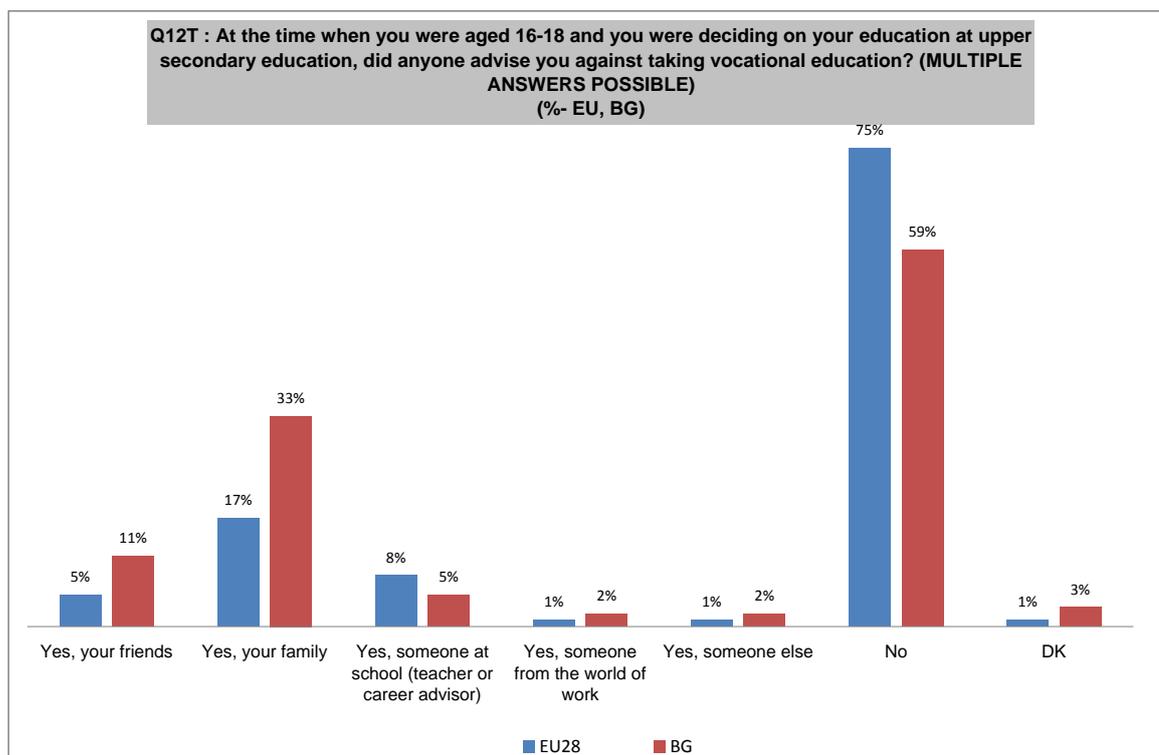
Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (BG n= 871).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

The survey also explores whether students that did not participate in VET were advised against VET. The average EU28 proportion of respondents that say nobody advised them against VET is 75% compared to 59% of Bulgarian respondents. Each third of respondents with general education cited family members (33%). This is also common for EU28, but with a share almost twice as lower (17%).

Since the beginning of 2000, 13 regional qualification centres have been opened under the Ministry of Education and Science, mainly aimed at students and teachers. They use the EU member states best practices in vocational guidance. The aim is that career guidance and counselling become an integral part of the existing education and labour market systems. However the results are still mixed.

Figure 4. Advising against VET



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (EU28 n= 14242; BG n= 380).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

1.2. Factors influencing the decision on education path

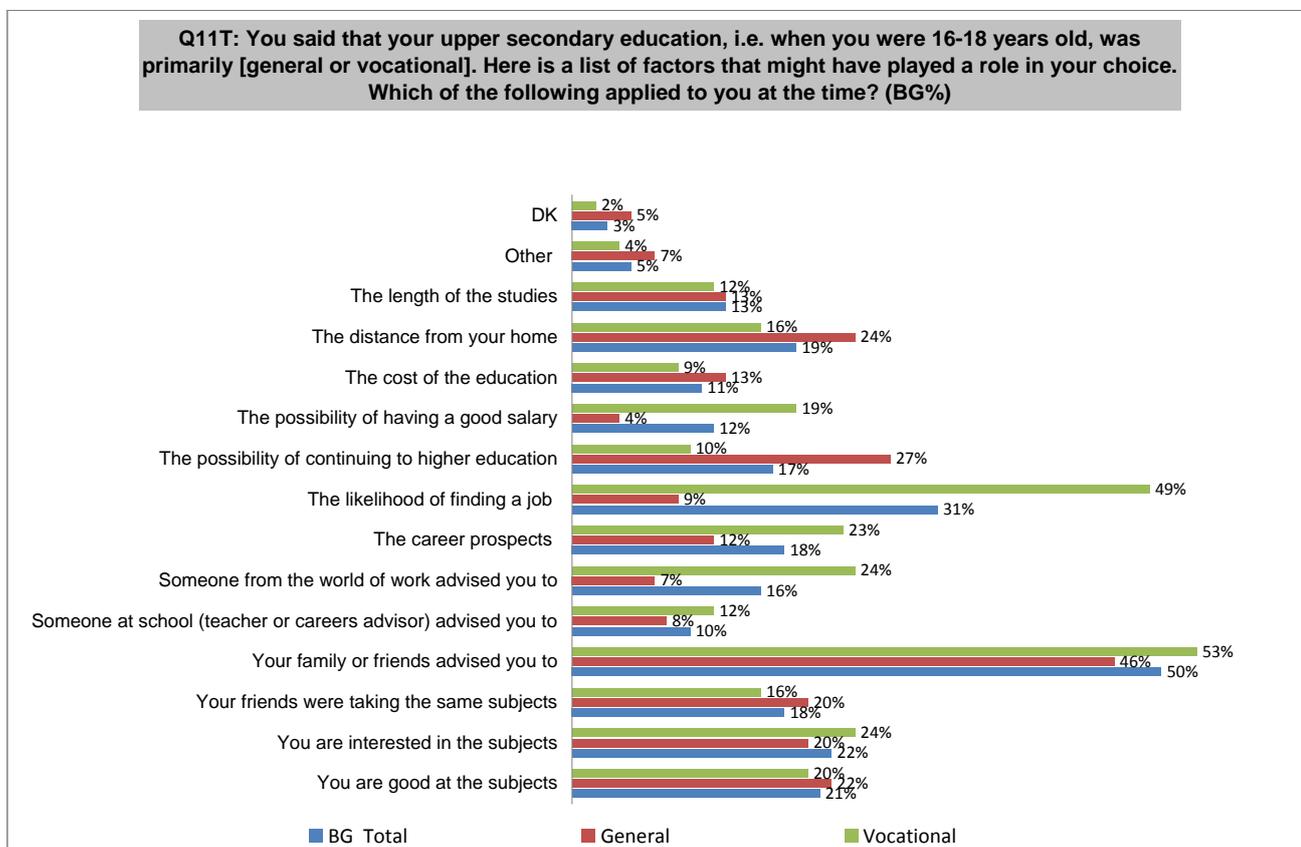
The Cedefop's survey findings outline three main factors that influence the choice of the type of upper secondary education at EU level. While EU28 averages rank the "interest in the subjects" first, in Bulgaria the greatest influence has the "family and friends advice" (50%). This proves that in the country the meaning and importance of vocational guidance is still underestimated, while the priority has the influence of family and friends, whose opinions some times are rather biased and rely on stereotypes than on accurate information.

The "likelihood of finding a job" is ranked second both at EU level and in Bulgaria with similar proportions (36% and 31% correspondingly). In Bulgaria, the "interest in the subjects" is ranked third, while at EU28 level at third place is the "influence of family and friends" advice. Significant differences are observed in relation to the importance of the factor "the possibility of continuing to higher

education" mentioned by 32% of respondents average for EU28, while the proportion of Bulgarians is almost twice as lower (17%) ⁽⁵⁾.

Significant differences are observed in the reasons mentioned by Bulgarian respondents from the two groups. Every second of VET respondents considered as a determining factor the „likelihood of finding a job" (49%), whereas this is true only for 9% of those with general education. More than twice as high is the share of VET respondents, which mentioned “career prospects” (23% compared to 12%) and “having a good salary” (19% compared to 4%). The "possibility of continuing to higher education" is a reason that is more likely for the respondents with general education (27% compared to 10%).

Figure 5. **Factors that influenced decision on education path**



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (BG n= 861).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

The factors that influence the choice of educational path are complex. The data show that VET is primarily related to the profession and is seen as a bridge

⁽⁵⁾ Cedefop (2017), pp. 29-30.

between education and employment. Consequently, awareness of the possibilities for early orientation of children in choosing the type of education is a continuous process that should start from primary education and involve professional information and counselling of the individual in deciding on an option and realisation under a certain profession and related career development.

CHAPTER 2.

Attractiveness and access to VET

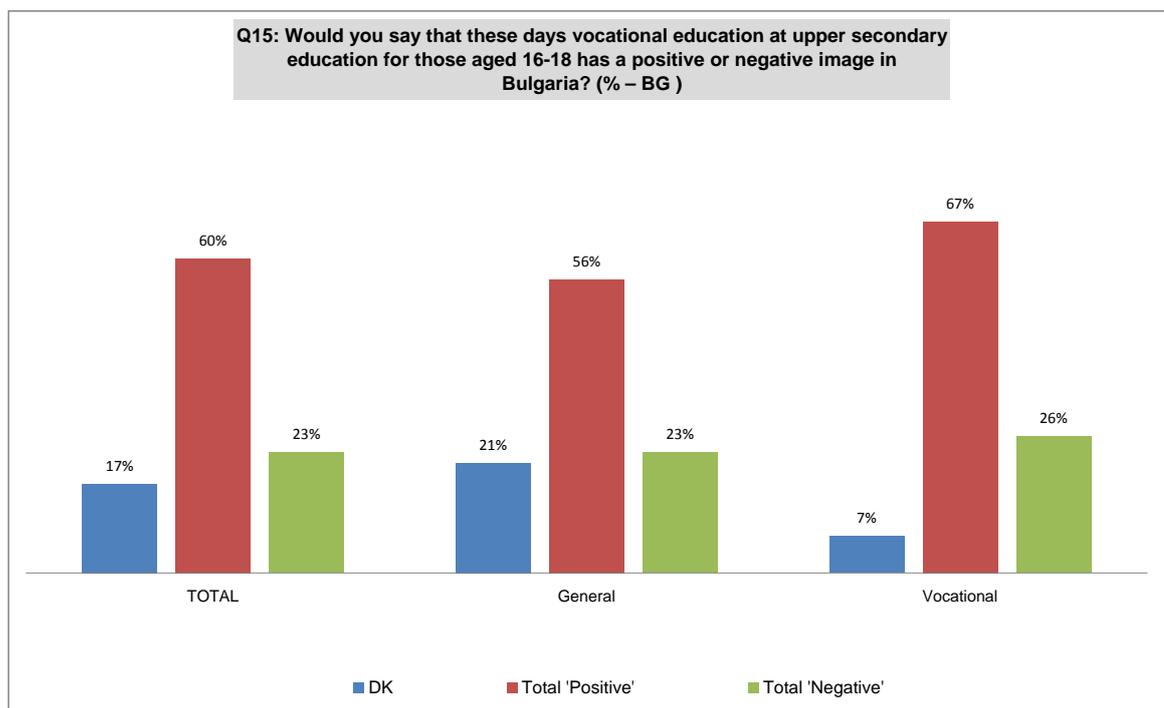
2.1. Perceived image of VET in Bulgaria

Increased attractiveness of VET could be measured by increasing number of students in VET, as well as with their effective labour market outcomes. Vocational education therefore has a number of potential advantages - higher employment and lower unemployment, higher labour productivity and potential growth of the economy as a whole.

Overall, the findings show that VET has a positive image and disprove the still popular negative public discourse in the country considering it as a 'second category' education associated with non-prestigious work. More than half of Bulgarian respondents (60%) believe that vocational education has a positive image. This proportion is slightly below the EU28 average at 68% ⁽⁶⁾, but far below that in most other member states. The VET respondents are more likely to stress on the positive image of VET (67%) than those with general education (56%). However, we must not underestimate also that almost a quarter of respondents (23%) believe that it has a negative image.

⁽⁶⁾ Cedefop (2017) European Public Opinion Survey on vocational education and training, Figure 11.

Figure 6. Perceived VET image in Bulgaria (% general education participants)



Base: All respondents (n= 1001).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

For better understanding of the perceived VET image the participants in the survey were asked to compare general and vocational education through three statements.

The survey findings are very interesting as compared to all other EU member states in Bulgaria the level of disagreement with all three statements is highest and the level of agreement is lowest. While most EU citizens agree that general education has a more positive image than vocational education (74%), this is true for less than half (46%) of Bulgarian respondents. Twice as high is the proportion of Bulgarians (35%) who express disagreement compared to 16% EU-28 average.

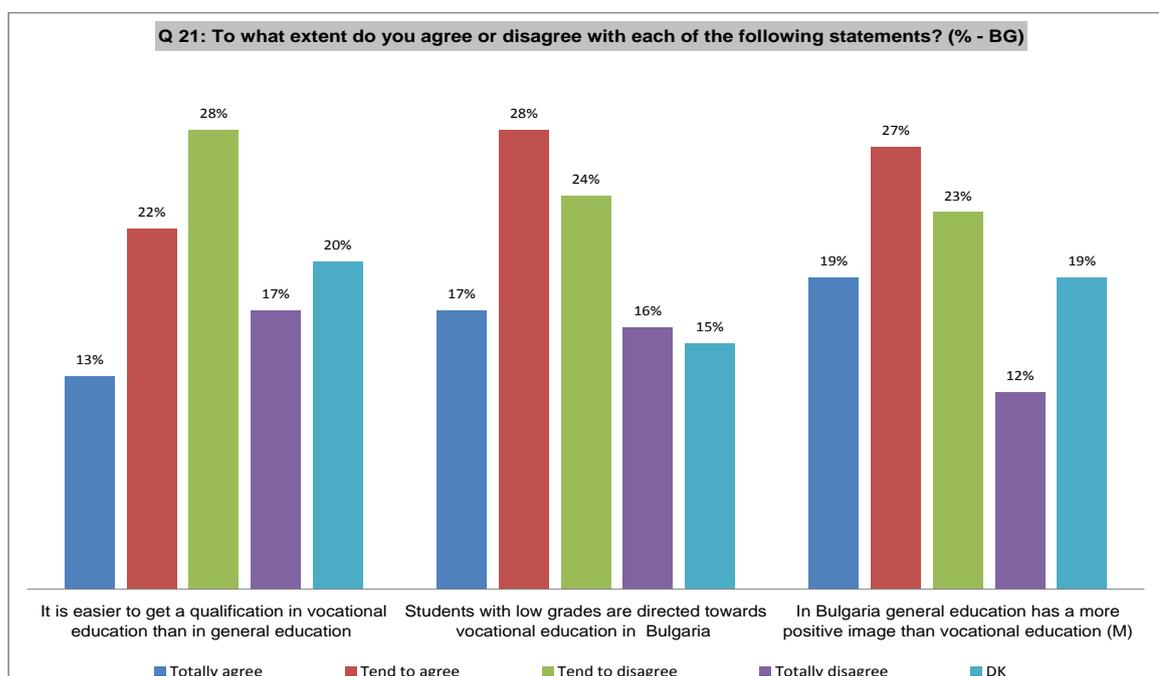
Highest level of disagreement in EU28 is registered in Bulgaria concerning the statement that students with low grades are directed towards VET with share of those that disagree nearly three times higher (40%) than the EU28 average at 15%. Despite the higher proportion of respondents in Bulgaria that are more likely to agree than to disagree (45% compared to 40%) with this statement, this proportion is significantly lower than the EU28 average at 75%.

The pattern of divergence with the average EU-28 level is maintained also concerning the statement that it is easier to get a qualification in VET than in

general education (45% disagree compared to 24% for EU28). Only about a third (35%) of Bulgarian respondents agrees with it compared to 63% at EU-28 level.

Overall, these findings give grounds to assume that in Bulgaria VET at upper secondary level has a positive image and is not perceived as less qualitative or easier to follow than the general education. The perception of vocational education as not less prestigious than the general education revives and the public opinion begins to overcome the existing stereotypes towards the VET.

Figure 7. **General perceptions of VET (EU)**



Base: All respondents (BG n= 1001).
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

2.2. Labour market outcomes of VET

The survey looks also at the expected outcomes of vocational education in the labour market. The most common reason for choosing vocational education is the perceived likelihood of finding a job quickly, which is also well paid and prestigious one.

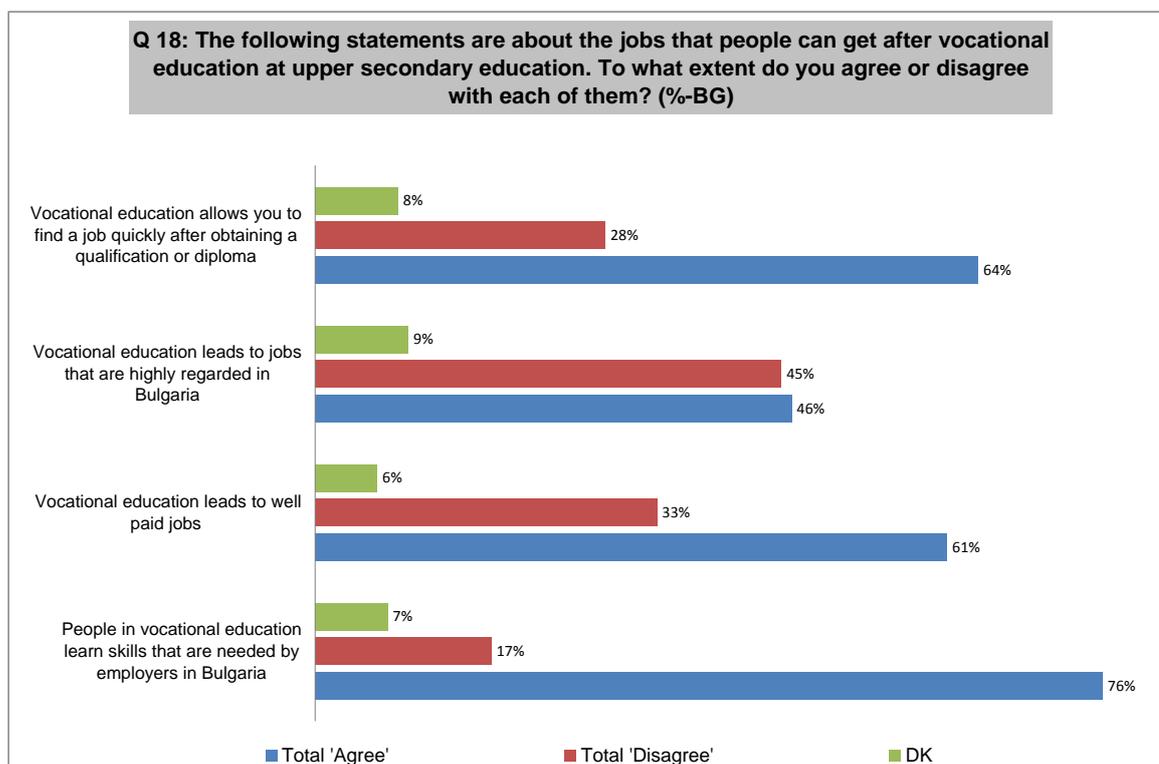
More than 2/3 of the respondents in Bulgaria (76%) agree with the statement that people with vocational upper secondary education acquire skills that are required by employers. However, the level of agreement is by 10 percentage

points lower than the EU-28 average. VET graduates (84%) are more likely to agree with this statement than those with general education (69%).

61% of Bulgarian respondents (similar to EU28 average) agree that vocational education leads to finding a well-paid job, and this agreement is shared by 2/3 of vocational graduates (66%) and every second with general education (53%).

Skills that match the labour market needs acquired in VET ease the transition from school to work. This is proved by the agreement of 64% of respondents with the statement that VET leads to finding a job quickly after graduation. The level of disagreement is similar for EU28 and Bulgaria (26% compared to 28% correspondingly). The VET respondents (72%) are more likely to agree compared to respondents with general education (56%).

Figure 8. **Core benefits of VET in relation to labour market issues**



Base: All respondents (BG n= 1001).
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

Relatively smaller is the proportion of Bulgarians (46%), who agree that VET leads to jobs that are highly regarded compared with EU-28 average (60%). However, there is also a large difference in the proportion of respondents from

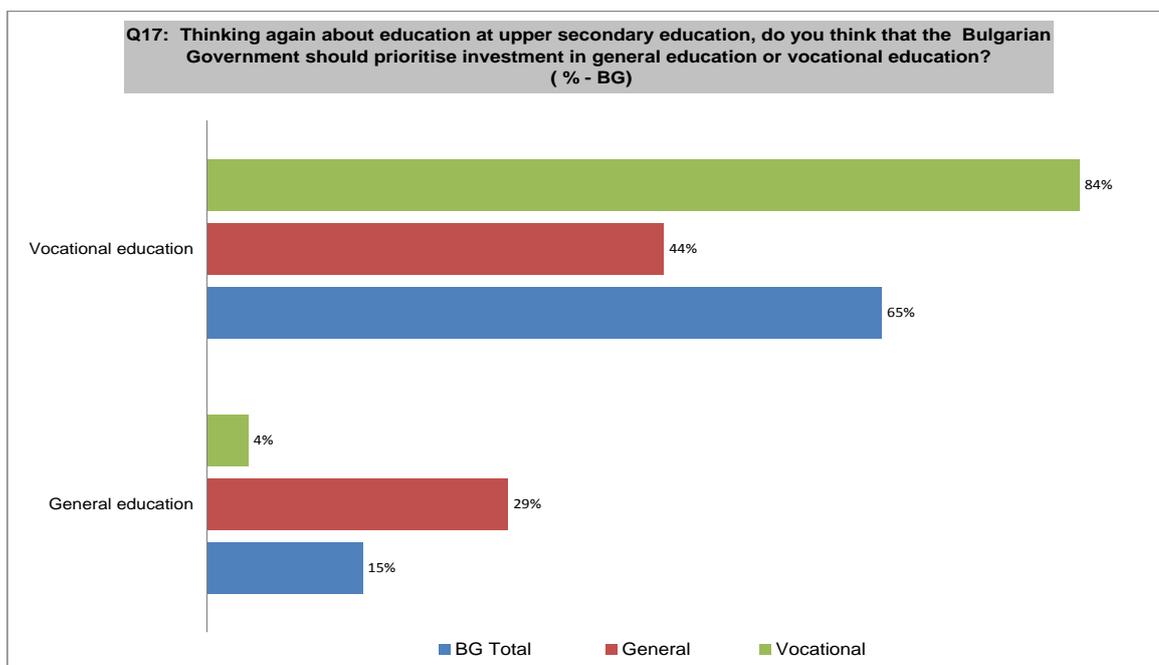
the two groups with VET respondents more likely to agree with this statement (52%) than those who follow general secondary education (38%).

Overall, these findings confirm the overall positive image of vocational education in Bulgaria. Although the employers complain against shortage of skilled workforce, according to the public attitudes and perceptions, vocational education and training helps to fill the gap and meet the needs of employers. The introduction of a dual learning system in the country contributed to this transformation of public opinion.

Investments in education are one of the main drivers of economic development. Overall, nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) in Bulgaria believe that government should prioritize investment in vocational education, while only 15% say priority should be given to general education. At EU level a smaller proportion of respondents believe that investment should be mainly allocated to vocational education (49%), while the share of those who favour general education (28%) is almost twice as high as in Bulgaria.

Understandably, 84% of VET respondents consider that VET should be a government priority, and just 4% say that priority should be given to general education. The views of respondents with general education are also in favour of VET, with about half of them (44%) saying that VET needs to be prioritised, while just a third (29%) believes that priority should be given to the general education.

Figure 9. **Priorities for national investment (VET vs. GE participants)**

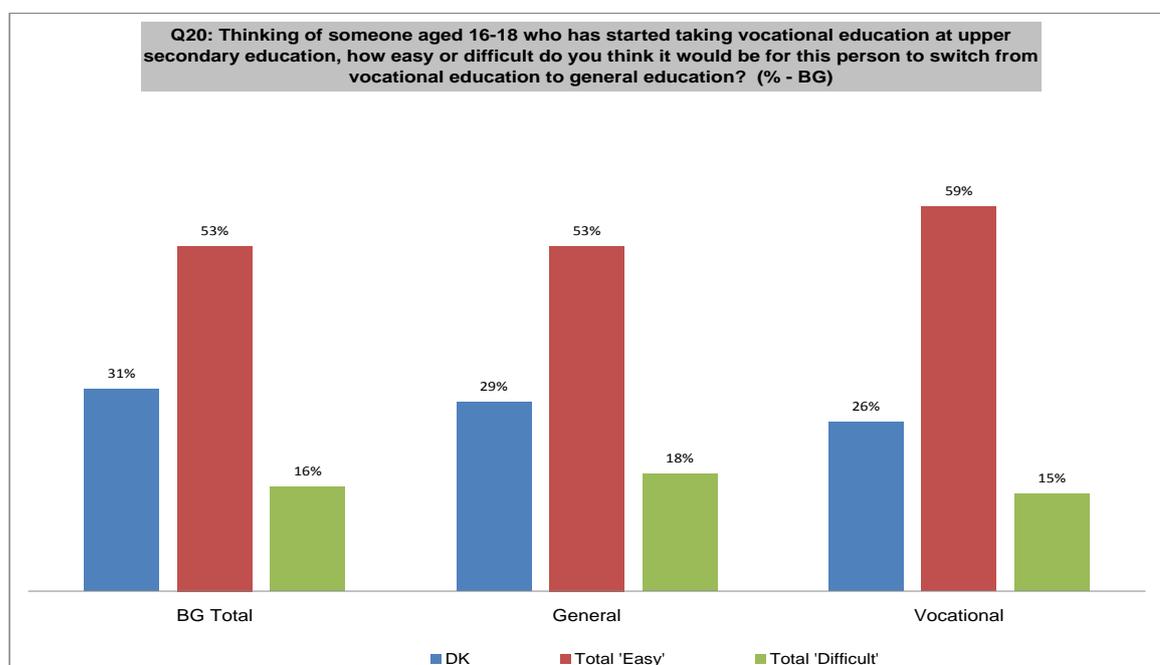


Base: All respondents (BG n= 1001). Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

2.3. Transitions from VET to general and higher education

The study explores the respondents' opinion on the ease of transition from vocational to general education. For more than half of the respondents (53%) this transition is easy, while only 16% say it will be difficult. These views probably are based on the assumption that VET curriculum includes all the compulsory subjects from the general education curriculum (the so called “educational minimum”) which could provide an easier transition to general education⁷. There are not significant differences in the opinions of the two respondent groups. However, we must consider the very high proportion of the “don’t know” answers at 30%.

Figure 10. Ease of switching from VET to general education



Base: All respondents (BG n= 1001).

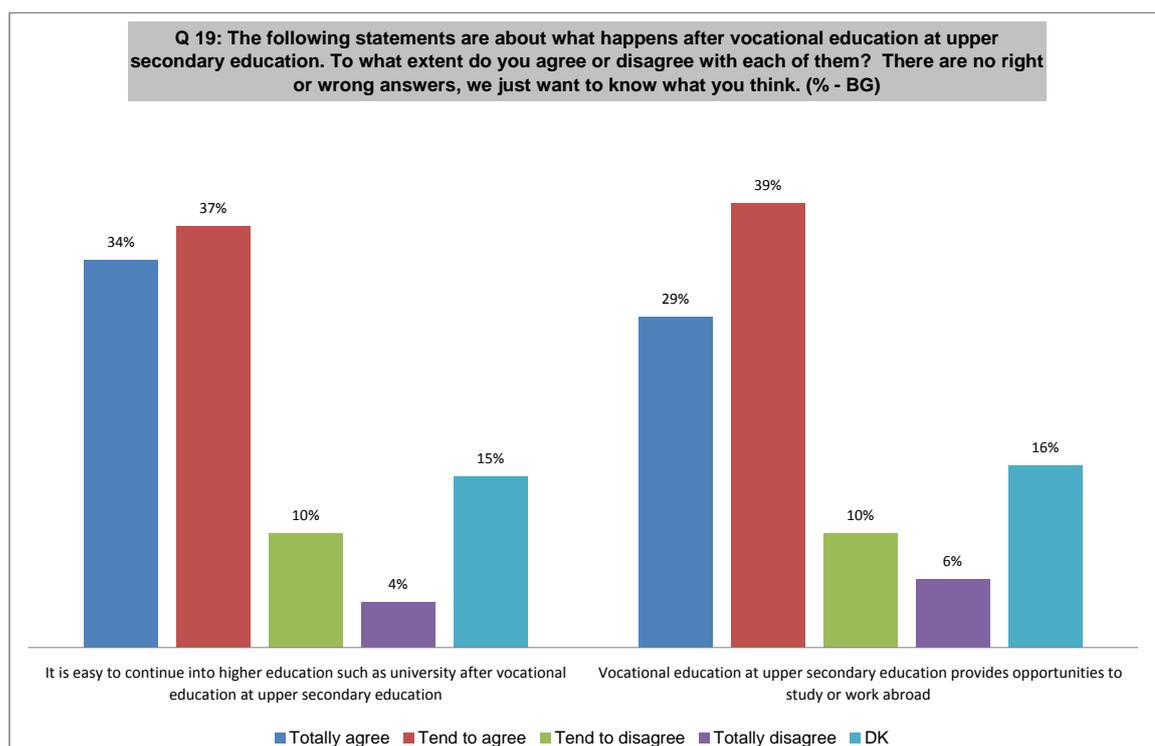
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

The attractiveness of vocational education is also measured by the opportunities for continuing education into higher education and the opportunity for training and working abroad.

⁽⁷⁾ In Bulgaria after graduation VET learners receive both a diploma for secondary education (giving access to higher education) and a certificate for vocational qualification.

Survey findings show that the proportion of Bulgarians that are more likely to agree with the statement that vocational education makes it easy to continue into higher education after upper secondary vocational education (71%) is larger than the EU28 average at 54%. Significant differences appear also in the level of disagreement with this statement (14% of Bulgarians compared with 31% EU28 average). Differences are registered among Bulgarian respondents by the type of education. While 83% of respondents with VET consider it easy to continue to higher education, of same opinion are 66% of respondents from general education. These views are based on the equal quality in providing secondary VET and secondary general education, reflecting also the assumptions that higher education is a natural continuation for both general education graduates and VET graduates, as they receive the same type of secondary education diplomas.

Figure 11. **Ease of continuing to higher education and for training and work abroad after VET**



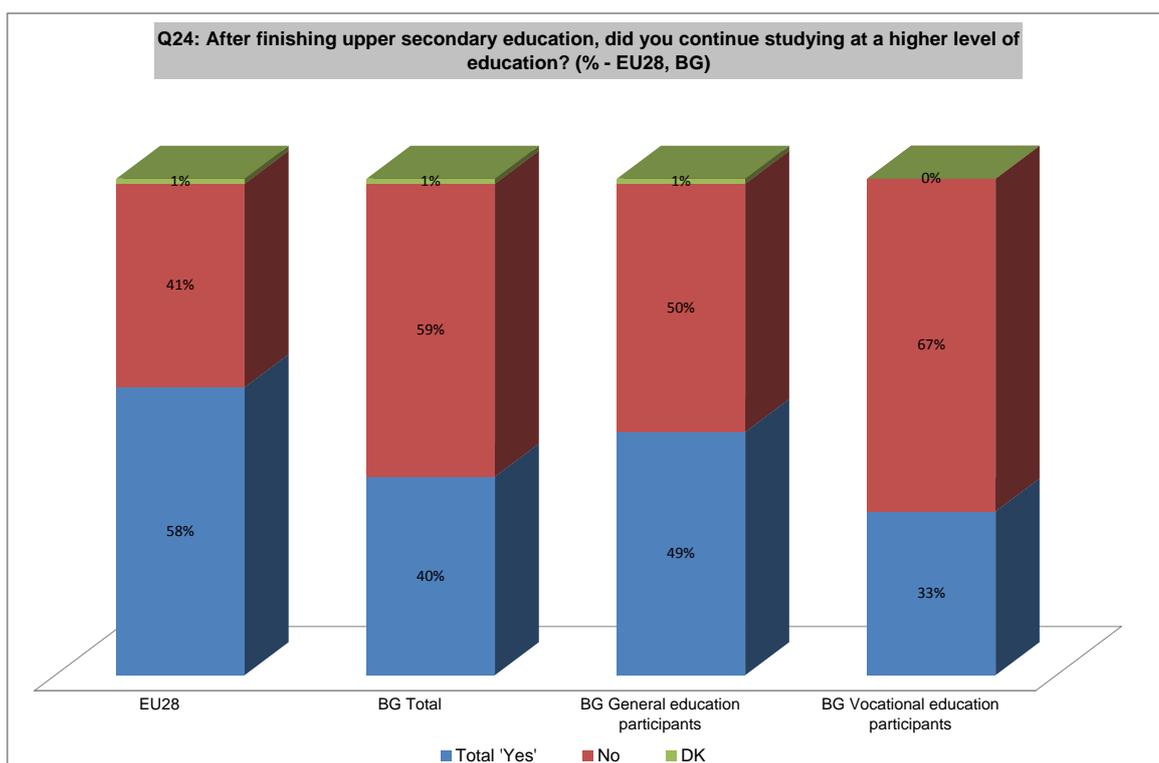
Base: All respondents (BG n= 1001).
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

More than two-thirds of Bulgarian respondents agree that VET provides also opportunities for studying or work abroad, while about ¼ disagree with this statement. The data for Bulgaria are almost similar to the EU-28 average. Higher

level of agreement is more likely for respondents involved in vocational education (78%) compared with 59% of respondents following general education.

Respondents with upper secondary general education (49%) are more likely to continue to a higher education than those with VET (33%), proportions that are lower than the EU28 average for the same groups ⁽⁸⁾ at 72% and 39% correspondingly.

Figure 12. **Progression into higher education**



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (EU28 n= 20226, BG n=795).
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

The survey findings show that in further education Bulgarians follow similar pathways and proportions as that at the EU-28 level ⁽⁹⁾ – the pathway to the same type of education after super secondary level is more likely. Thus, 88% of Bulgarian respondents with vocational education (82% for EU-28) move to higher vocational education compared to just 8% (17% for EU-28) moving to general education. Similarly, 62% of respondents with upper secondary general education (63% for EU-28) continue their general education. However, the path

⁽⁸⁾ Cedefop, p.87.

⁽⁹⁾ Data for EU-28 are from the Cedefop study, Figure 59, p. 88.

from general to vocational education is also popular with 33% (36% for EU28) of respondents with general education continuing their studies in higher vocational education. The findings also show that it is more likely to move from general to vocational than from vocational to general education after upper secondary stage, which could be also related to the fact that after graduation from general secondary education students have a “second chance” to choose higher VET as a professional career.

CHAPTER 3.

Experience and satisfaction with vocational education

3.1. School versus work-based components of upper secondary education

The main purpose and advantage of vocational education at upper secondary education is its ability to ease youth transitions from school to work. The quality and practical component of vocational education and training at upper secondary stage support the adjustment of skills to the labour market needs thus directly affecting both the people's employability and potential for economic growth.

One of the proven approaches to improving the quality of VET in many EU member states is a more direct link between education and practice. The importance of practical training on a real workplace is widely recognised in Bulgaria ⁽¹⁰⁾. In the last years, there has been some progress in the country with regard to the introduction of the learning-by-work approach (dual training).

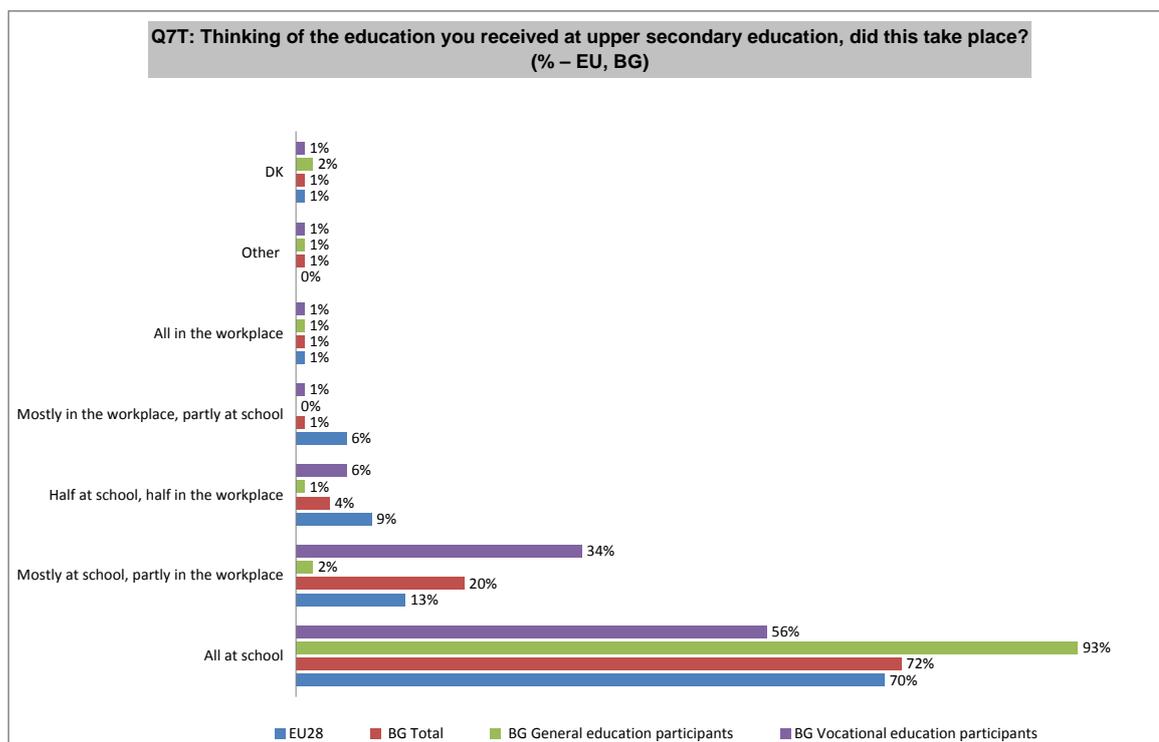
The Cedefops' survey provides valuable insights into the respondents' experience at upper secondary education in this direction. As expected, there are some differences in the experience of participants with general and vocational education as far as the mode of delivery of education, satisfaction and skills developed are considered.

The survey findings show that in the country upper secondary education is generally school based. According to the general education respondents the all education took place at school (93%) and a negligible proportion say it took place mostly at school and partly in workplace (2%) and half at school half at workplace (1%).

⁽¹⁰⁾ A survey conducted under the MES project "Governance for Effective Vocational Education", 2014 shows equal desire both on the part of students and employers to increase practical, job-specific training, including work in a real workplace, even at the expense of general education (70% of students and 70% of employers) while, on the contrary, about 60% of teachers think it is not right to reduce general education at the expense of more practice.

<https://www.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelid=2&subpagelid=2160>

Figure 13. **School and work-based components of upper secondary education**



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (EU28 n= 24 146; BG n=871).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey, 2017.

In contrast, just 56% of VET respondents say their education took place entirely at school, while 34% say it took place mostly at school and partly in the workplace, 6% – half at school and half in the workplace; and 1% – mostly in the workplace and partly in school. Comparisons with the EU28 average show that the country is still lagging behind in the proportion of workplace based education in VET ⁽¹¹⁾. The lack of practical training mentioned by already half of the VET respondents and above 90% of the general education respondents is an alarming shortcoming of the upper secondary education in the country.

⁽¹¹⁾ See Table 43 in Cedefop (2017). *Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 62, p. 67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/264585>

3.2. Satisfaction with upper secondary education

The survey studied also the respondents' satisfaction with some aspects of their education, namely the quality of teaching, the general and work related skills obtained and the equipment available.

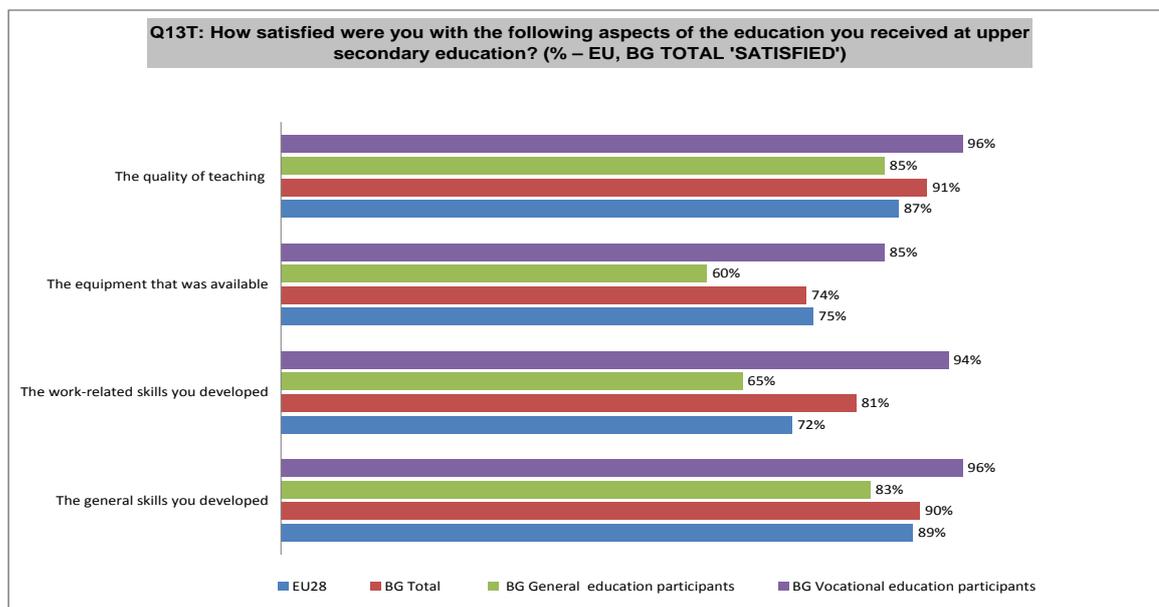
It is worth mentioning that unexpectedly Bulgarian VET respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the four aspects of upper secondary education covered in the survey featuring the country among the highest ranked countries by the overall index of satisfaction. The proportion of Bulgarians and especially of VET participants that are very satisfied with all four aspects of education is well above the EU-28 average ⁽¹²⁾.

However, the findings show also large differences in satisfaction of the two groups of Bulgarian respondents with remarkably higher satisfaction of VET respondents with all four aspects. In detail, the proportion of VET respondents satisfied with the developed general skills is 96% compared with 83% of general education respondents. 96% of VET respondents and 85% of respondents with general education expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching that they received.

The largest difference between the two respondent groups is observed in satisfaction with the work related skills developed in the education process and the available equipment. Respondents with general education were significantly less likely to be satisfied with the work-related skills they developed (65%) compared with 94% of VET respondents. Compared to other aspects of education, the lowest for both groups is satisfaction with the equipment available – just 60% of the general education participants and 85% of the VET participants are satisfied.

⁽¹²⁾ Cedefop (2017).Cedefop *European public opinion survey on vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 62, p. 77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/264585>

Figure 14. Overall satisfaction with aspects of education



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (EU28 n= 24 146; BG n= 871).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey, 2017.

3.3. Satisfaction with skills development

The Cedefop survey explores also more in-depth the self-perception of acquisition of the eight key competences as defined by the European Commission Recommendation 2006/962/EC on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽¹³⁾ during the upper secondary education.

The findings show that the perceptions of Bulgarian students at upper secondary education follow a similar trend with the EU average. The VET respondents are more likely than those with general education to report acquiring such competences as communication skills (88% compared with 82%); the ability to work with others (87% compared with 75%); the ability to pursue and organise own learning (80% compared with 74%); and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (68% compared with 60%).

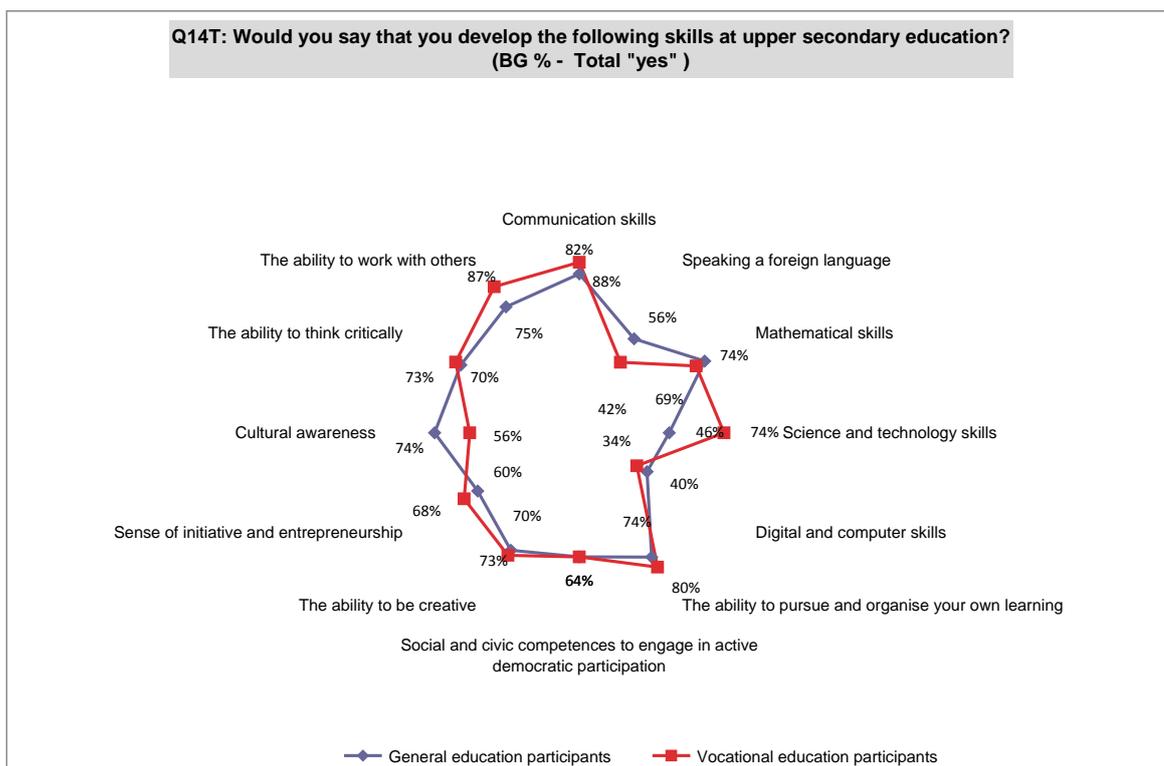
A higher proportion of general education than VET students reported that they acquired foreign language skills (56% compared with 42%); mathematical skills (74% compared with 69%); digital and computer skills (40% compared with 34%). Major differences between general education and VET respondents are observed in relation to cultural awareness (74% compared to 56%), while science

⁽¹³⁾ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32006H0962>

and technology skills mentioned by just 46% of general education respondents compared with 74% of VET respondents.

Almost similar proportions of the two respondent groups say that they acquired such competencies as social and civic competences (64% from both groups); the ability to be creative and the ability to think critically (73% compared with 70%).

Figure 15. **Personal views on development of key competences in education (VETVs. GE participants)**



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (EU28 n= 24 146; BG n= 871).
 Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

CHAPTER 4.

Outcomes and effectiveness of VET

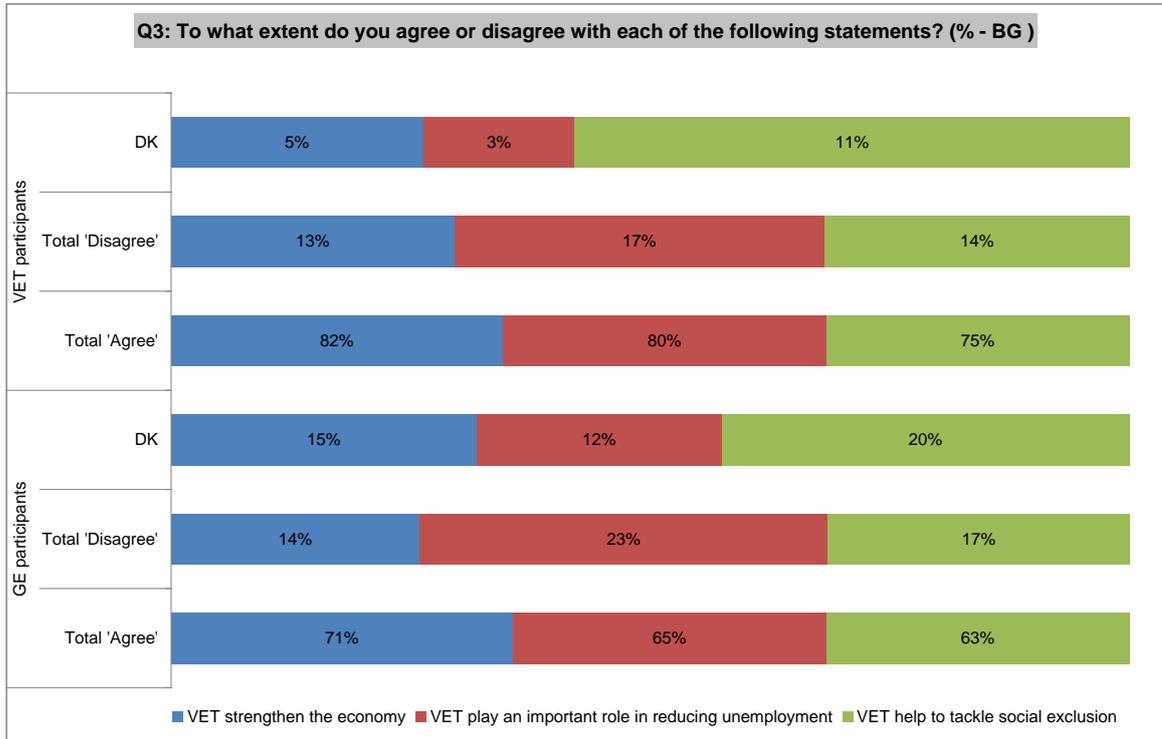
4.1. Role of VET

Very important part of the Cedefop survey was the exploring of outcomes and effectiveness of VET related to labour market participation, economy and social inclusion.

The surveys conducted in the country as well the statistical data presented in the Introduction of this article proved that VET gives real labour market benefits to VET graduates. Students that acquired professional qualifications have higher economic activity, higher employment and lower unemployment rates.

Figure 16 summarises the findings related to the three statements about vocational education and employment. VET respondents are more likely to agree with each of the statements with significantly higher share of those answering “totally agree”. Thus, 82% agree that VET strengthens the Bulgarian economy, compared with 71% of those from general education, 80% agree that VET play an important role in reducing unemployment compared with 65% of the general education respondents, while 75% agree with the statement that VET help to tackle social exclusion. However, this difference is mainly due to a higher proportion of respondents from general education answering ‘don’t know’, as the levels of disagreement of the two respondent groups do not differ significantly.

Figure 16. Role of VET



Base: All respondents (BG n=1001).

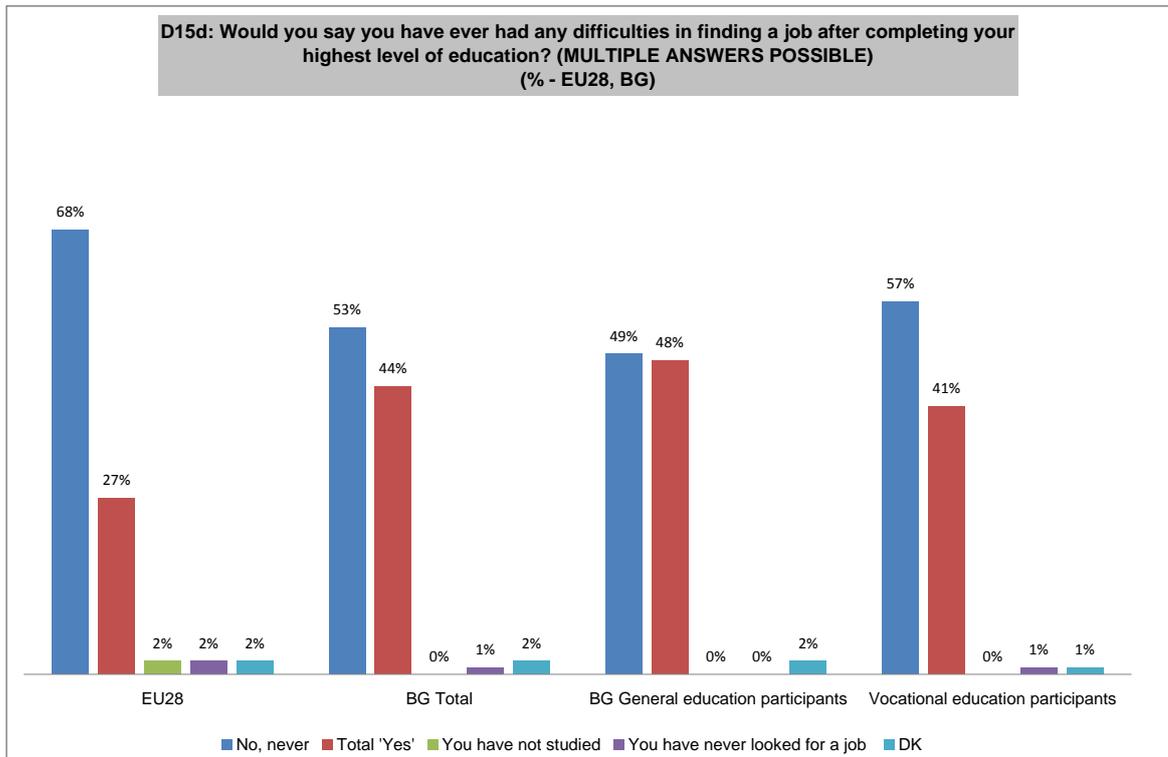
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

4.2. Difficulties in finding a job after studying

The survey findings show that the share of Bulgarians having difficulties in finding a job (44%) is higher than the EU average (27%) and this is evidenced in the high youth unemployment and NEETs rate in the country. Comparisons between the two respondent groups in Bulgaria reveal that the VET respondents are more likely to report that never had difficulties (57%) in finding a job compared with those with general education (49%).

The most frequently reported reason for having difficulties is the lack of relevant work experience (21% of GE and 18% of VET respondents). General education respondents are most likely to say that the difficulties they face were due to lack of required qualifications or diplomas (11% compared to just 5% of VET respondents), while VET respondents relate the difficulties mostly to the consideration that their skills are too low (9% compared with 6%). However, the large share of respondents managed to find job within six months. The findings of the survey show that VET respondents found work more easily.

Figure 17. Difficulties in finding a job (VET vs. GE participants)

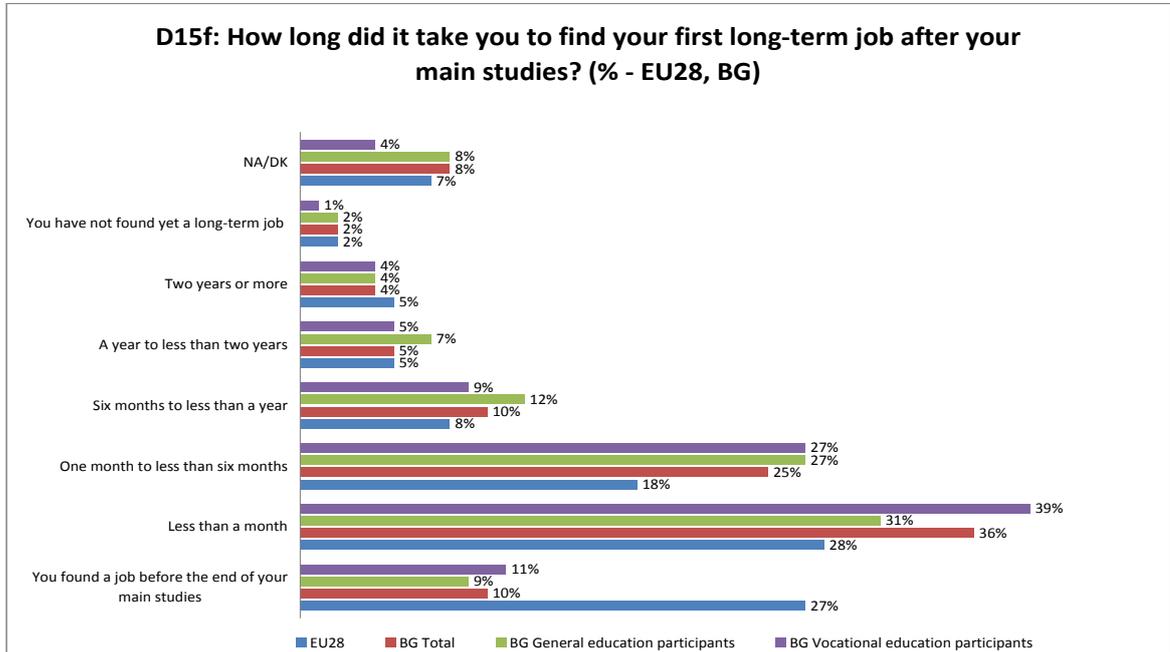


Base: Respondents who are currently working, unemployed or retired (EU28 n= 29 975, BG n= 902).
 Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

More specifically, most VET respondents reported that they found first long-term job within a month (39% compared to 31% of those with general education). Similar proportions of both groups say that they found a job before the end of their education (11% and 9% correspondingly) or within six months (27% in each group). The findings show that Bulgarians took less time to found first job after graduation compared with the EU-28 average.

It is interesting to mention also that Bulgarian graduates are less likely to start working before the end of the studies, a trend that is more widespread in the rest EU-28 countries. Every third student in EU28 but just every tenth Bulgarian student make use of this option.

Figure 18. Time spend for finding a job (% – EU, BG)

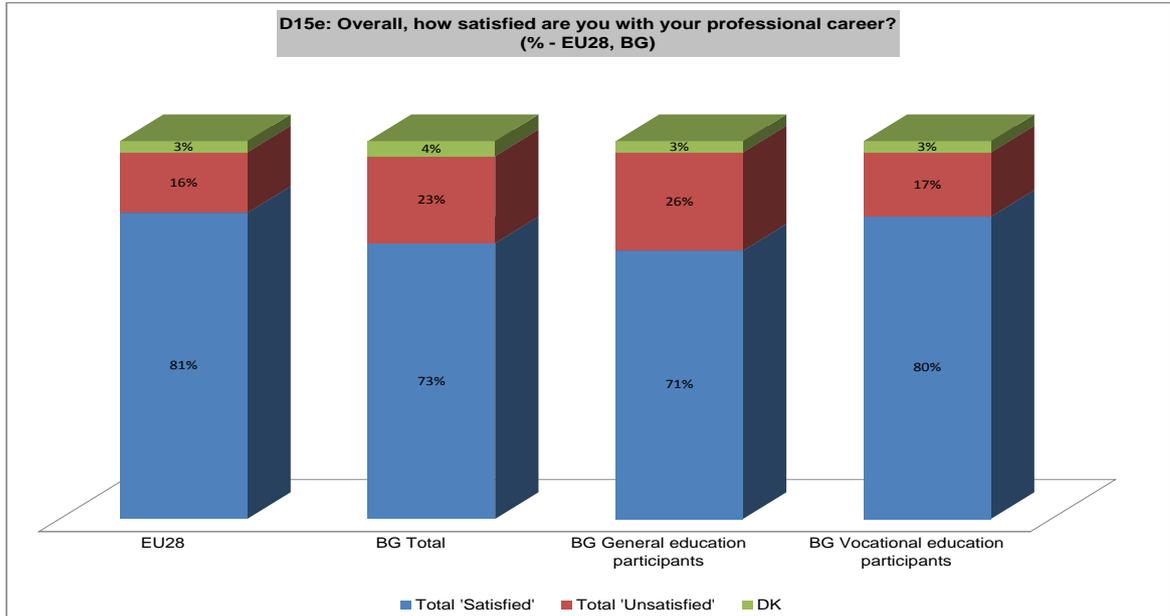


Base: Respondents who are currently working, unemployed or retired (EU28 n= 29 975, BG n= 902).
 Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

4.3. Satisfaction with the professional career

The VET respondents are more likely to say they are satisfied with their professional career (80%) than those from general education (71%). This higher satisfaction is probably due to the workplace experience of the VET respondents providing for more informed carrier choice.

Figure 19. Satisfaction with the professional career

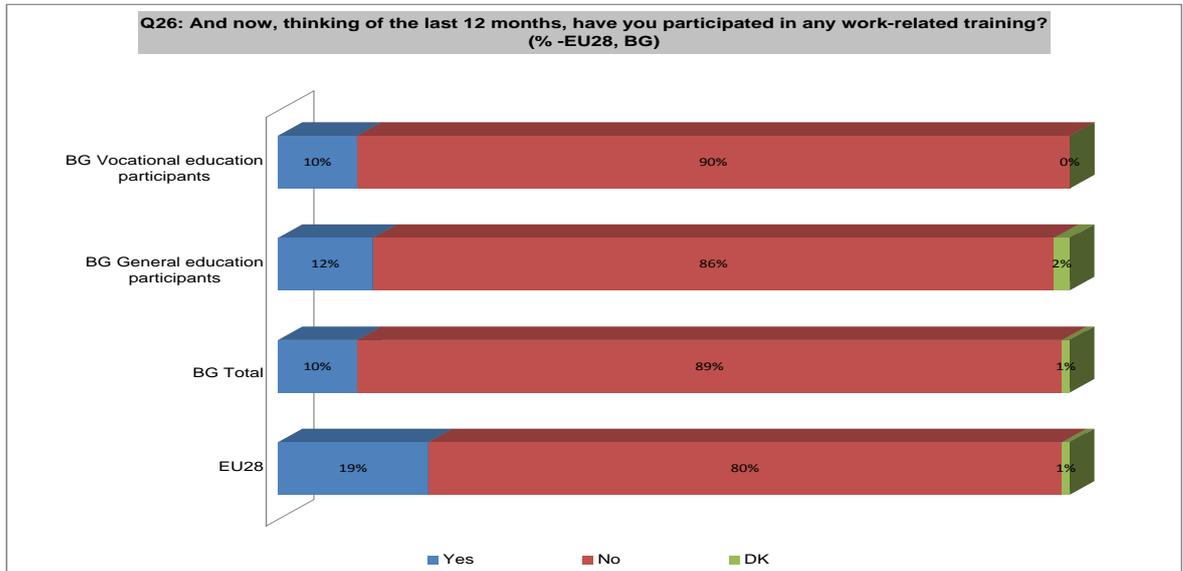


Base: Respondents who are currently working, unemployed or retired (EU28 n= 29 975, BG n= 902).
Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

4.4. Further education and training

The survey proved the alarmingly low levels of work-related training as recorded in other surveys in the country. Just about 10% to 12% say they have participated in work-related training in previous 12 months. This proportion is twice as low as the EU-28 average.

Figure 20. Participation in work-related training



Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education (EU28 n= 20226, BG n=795).

Source: Cedefop VET opinion survey.

According to the respondents with general or vocational education, the work related training aimed mainly at acquiring new skills (48% and 66% correspondingly); career development (36% and 32%); and updating their existing skills (24% and 13%). A smaller proportion mentioned that training was related to changing career (16% and 3%).

CHAPTER 5.

Main conclusions and further research needs

This article summarises findings of the Cedefop's Opinion Survey on VET in the specific Bulgarian context. The survey findings are important since they provide sound evidence in support of the policy making and help Bulgarian stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of the VET system, its characteristics and dynamics.

At the background of government policies and initiatives developed over the last years, the positive image and attractiveness of vocational education started to restore. The findings disprove the still popular negative public discourse in the country considering VET as a 'second category' education associated with non-prestigious work. About 60% of respondents believe that vocational education has a positive image. However, we must not underestimate that almost a quarter of respondents believe that it has a negative image.

It is worth mentioning also that the survey findings give all grounds to consider that in contrast to the respondents from other EU member states Bulgarians have overcome the prejudice and stereotypes related to VET, as they are more likely to disagree that general education has a more positive image than VET, that it is for students with low grades and that it is easier to get a qualification in VET than in general education. Bulgarian respondents that follow VET are also more likely than the respondents from other EU member states to say that it is easy to switch from VET to general and higher education.

Bulgarian VET respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the four aspects of upper secondary education explored in the survey, namely the quality of teaching, the general and work related skills acquired and the equipment available, featuring the country among the highest ranked countries by the overall index of satisfaction. The proportion of Bulgarians and especially of VET participants that are very satisfied with all four aspects of education is well above the EU-28 average.

The survey findings outline three main factors that influence the choice of the type of upper secondary education. According to Bulgarian respondents the greatest influence has the "family and friends advice". The „likelihood of finding a job" is ranked second, followed by the "interest in the subjects". The "possibility of continuing to higher education" is not among the most important factors that influence the choice of education path.

Bulgarian respondents generally agree that VET plays an important role in strengthening economy, reducing unemployment and tackling social exclusion. VET ease the transition from school to work. Among the main benefits of VET in relation to labour market benefits the respondents mentioned at first place acquisition of skills that are required by employers. The VET respondents are more likely than those with general education to report also acquiring such competences as communication skills; the ability to work with others; the ability to pursue and organise own learning; and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Among the benefits of VET they mentioned as well finding a job quickly after graduation, in most cases within a month of finishing their studies, and that is a well-paid job.

The respondents both with VET and general education support the prioritising investment in vocational education at upper secondary stage.

Proposals for further research on the topic:

- (a) In order to provide a complete and credible picture of the state, quality and challenges VET faces, it is necessary to explore opinions and assessments of all stakeholders, focusing namely on students, teachers, and employers. Exploring the attitudes of parents is also important as the survey findings show that family has a strong influence on the choice of their children's education path.
- (b) Research is also needed on the opinion on dual training, including on employers role in education and training process, namely in developing curricula and programs in accordance with the learning outcomes (which need to be in compliance with the State educational requirements for acquiring a qualification for profession ⁽¹⁴⁾ and labour market requirements. It will be interesting to explore the issues related to VET and the changing world of work due to technological innovations and digitalisation (new professions, new skills) and whether VET systems are prepared to address these new challenges.
- (c) Exploring to what extent the students are aware of requirements of employers, do they know what are the real working conditions and the requirements of the given profession, etc.
- (d) Studying the outcomes of VET graduates with upper secondary education, i.e. transition pathways from school to labour market or education.

⁽¹⁴⁾ The State educational requirements for acquiring a qualification for profession (in Bulgarian – „държавни образователни стандарти за придобиването на квалификация по професия“ are stated in the Pre-school and School Education Act and regulate the training requirements for each profession.

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