



## Effective Education for Employment: Madrid, Spain Interview Series



### Isabel Cousa Tapia

Isabel Cousa Tapia's role as Deputy General Director of Professional Training for the Education Council of the Community of Madrid places her at the heart of Spain's vocational debate with a great understanding of the development of competency-based learning and how the perception of vocational education is being transformed at regional level.

This interview provides evidence of the ambition and vision of those developing vocational education programmes in Spain.

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#### Key Findings

- Spain has over fifty thousand students in vocational education at any one time, operating within twenty-two distinct vocational sectors.
- Government structures in Spain need to change in order to bring education and employment together.
- Addressing issues of employability are the main focus of changes taking place in vocational learning.
- Vocational education is now showing the way forward for broader education in Spain: it is widely recognised as flexible, modern, practical and pioneering.
- The Community of Madrid has developed a de facto characterisation of the ideal 21<sup>st</sup> century employee.

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*“Vocational training is not important for the family, but it’s very important for business and for society”*



**There is widespread acknowledgement of the need for change in vocational education:**

*The academic content of our vocational training is very good... But we need to address other issues to ensure employability.*

**Employers play a vital role in the development of competency based learning programmes:**

*We’ve worked with [companies like] Manpower - as well as running an international exchange programme with Chambers of Commerce - to understand the competencies needed [for the modern employee].*

*“After three years, we have full employment from vocational training.”*

**The Community of Madrid has made a considerable investment in infrastructure over the last few years, the results of which can be seen in modern, technology-led schools of vocational learning. With better facilities comes better teaching methods and improved results.**

**Spain’s sectoral approach to vocational education has reaped the rewards of having facilitated the development of strong relationships with business and industry:**

*Historically, we have around 70% professional insertion from vocational training within the first year [after graduation]. After three years, we have full employment from vocational training.*

**The influence of parental stigmas regarding the value of vocational education is waning:**

*Vocational training is not important for the family, but it’s very important for business and for society.*

**The Community of Madrid has developed a ten point core competency list towards de facto characterisation of the ideal 21<sup>st</sup> century employee:**

*...Enterprising spirit; oral communication; understanding the customer; adaptability to change; teamwork; critical thinking; interpersonal skills; quality of service; decision making; commercial ability... we don’t see these skills as ‘soft’ – they are very important.*

**Currently, these employability focussed competencies are taught largely through complementary programmes. They are not core to the curriculum. Developing these core competencies requires full engagement with stakeholders across the board:**

*To introduce these competencies, we need teachers who are convinced about the need. And we need managers who have the sense to introduce these competencies. And we then need support from the national administration. We need these three conditions otherwise it’s not possible to introduce these [competencies] into the curriculum.*

**The structures of government in Spain need to change in order to bring education and employment together – the link between the two should be explicit in terms of government and administration.**

**Vocational education is now showing the way forward for broader education in Spain: flexible, modern, practical and pioneering – vocational education at its best prepares young people not only for the workplace but for modern life.**

*“We want to improve and we’ve introduced new [national] laws recently to do this.”*