



## Effective Education for Employment



# Spanish Interview Series and Workshop

Spain, as with many countries in the EU, has not proved immune to anxiety concerning levels of sovereign debt. Tough decisions have been made, with economic growth in the first two quarters of 2010 curtailed, in part, by austerity measures. However, increased international confidence in the Spanish economy is emerging and education is considered key to building the human capital that will make Spain a competitive player in an ever more uncertain global marketplace.

As part of the ongoing international Effective Education for Employment project, Edexcel International and Pearson Education commissioned qualitative research into the effectiveness of Spain's vocational education system with a view to better understanding key issues facing employers, educators and learners.

This research consisted of a series of interviews with stakeholders from major national employers, those charged with regional education strategy and the teachers and learners who display a growing understanding and proactive approach to addressing the challenges of the modern labour market.

*“When you are looking for technical people, you are looking for some specific things... motivated, creative and action-oriented, committed, open to change and able to learn.”*

# Vital Findings

*“At the moment, with the crisis, the reality is that when students finish, no one gets a contract.”*



*“We go out into universities and schools – we have relationships with them. They have to know who we are, what we do. Then they become motivated to work here.”*

- Despite high unemployment, competition for good people remains fierce. That said, many students are aware of the extreme difficulty of finding a job in their chosen field upon graduating.
- The structures of government in Spain need to change in order to establish explicit links between education and employment.
- Some non-vocational teachers are unhappy about falling under the influence of government departments other than the education ministry, and don't like to see themselves as being explicitly connected to the role of 'generating the workforce'.
- Vocational education at its best prepares young people not only for the workplace but for modern life.
- 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.
- The Community of Madrid has developed a core competency list towards de facto characterisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century employee.
- Many vocational schools are fully supportive of the drive towards building curriculums around competency-based learning.
- Quality assurance is a real issue. There is too much local interpretation in the way competency based learning qualifications are delivered, leading to varying success.

Graduates from Spain's education system are facing a tough task, with high unemployment rates creating fierce competition for jobs. Meanwhile, many companies faced with a tough, uncertain financial climate are reluctant to invest in training and internships for raw graduates. In this context, it is becoming increasingly important for prospective employees to be able to demonstrate the full range of employability skills and competencies that employers increasingly say they need.

The task of ensuring that those entering the job market are equipped with these competencies is delivered through a complex ecosystem of interconnected stakeholders. In a largely decentralised political



landscape, regional bodies such as the Education Council of the Community of Madrid play a key role in identifying these competencies and ensuring that education systems are able to incorporate them effectively. Vocational Institutions sit at the coalface of education and are charged with the task of instilling graduates with the competencies that they need to find employment in an uncertain job market.

Major employers such as Indra, one of the biggest companies in Spain, need employees with the employability skills and behaviours which will allow them to maintain their competitive edge and are making considerable efforts to collaborate with the education sector and play their own part in training and preparing graduates for the workplace.

*“We are always trying to close the gap between what we’re doing and what the schools are doing.”*

Although the need for more employability focused, competency based learning approaches is now widely recognised throughout Spain, these competencies are yet to be woven into national curricula; there seems to be a pressing need to connect the different agents responsible for driving policy in this area.

In many ways vocational education in Spain is showing the way forward for the broader education sector in Spain. Described as flexible, modern, practical and pioneering, vocational education at its best prepares young people not only for the workplace but for modern life. However as with many countries consulted through the Effective

Education for Employment project, wider society is yet to be fully convinced of its merits, with many parents preferring an academic route for their children.

*“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..”*

Many vocational institutions also rely on financial support from industry at times when many in the private sector struggle to free up the funds for such investment. Communicating the increased tangible returns that the private sector will get from investment in practical and competency based learning programmes (in the form of better prepared graduates) and working with industry to ensure employability needs are met is a complicated issue.

Whilst Spanish companies are facing increasing global competition, the country’s forward thinking approach to vocational education and the commitment of major employers such as Indra to nurturing talent and providing long-term employment opportunities for graduates certainly bode well for the future.

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