



VETInnovate

Transformation of VET Centres to become
regional leaders of inclusive, sustainable
and digital skills ecosystems

PILLAR 7: INTERNATIONALISATION OF VET INSTITUTIONS



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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Version History

Revision	Date	Author/Organization	Description
v0.1	03.03.2026	CESOL	Initial draft



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1. Internationalisation in European VET Policy

Internationalisation is an increasingly important dimension of vocational education and training (VET), supporting the development of learners, staff, and institutions in a globalised economy (Council of the European Union, 2020; European Commission, 2020a).

For VET institutions, internationalisation is not limited to mobility activities. It involves a broader institutional strategy that integrates international partnerships, curriculum development, intercultural learning, language competence, participation in international projects, and engagement with global networks.

Through internationalisation, VET centres can:

- Enhance the quality and relevance of training programmes (European Commission, 2020b)
- Strengthen learner and staff competences
- Expand cooperation with international partners
- Contribute to innovation and regional development

In this context, internationalisation should be understood as a systemic institutional process rather than a set of isolated mobility activities (Cedefop, 2022).

At the same time, mobility opportunities remain a key practical expression of this process, especially when they are embedded in training pathways and linked to learning outcomes, institutional development, and wider regional impact (European Commission, 2023).



2. Scope of the pillar

This pillar assesses how effectively a VET institution integrates internationalisation across its organisational structures, learning activities, and relationships with international and regional partners.

It focuses on two interconnected dimensions:

1. Institutional Internationalisation Capacity

- Strategic planning and governance
- International partnerships and networks
- Participation in international projects
- International visibility and positioning
- Contribution to regional development

2. International Learning and Mobility

- Learner and staff mobility opportunities
- Internationalisation of curriculum
- Language competence development
- Intercultural learning and global skills

Together, these dimensions enable institutions to move from isolated international activities toward a more strategic and sustainable model of internationalisation that enhances institutional performance, learner development, and regional innovation.

To support practical implementation and self-assessment, this pillar is operationalised through a set of measurable indicators in the VETINNOVATE platform. These indicators focus on observable elements such as learner and staff mobility, international partnerships, joint curriculum development, language competences, intercultural training, international projects, visibility abroad, strategic integration, and regional impact.

These indicators should not be interpreted as isolated metrics. Rather, they serve as practical entry points for assessing the broader institutional capacity for internationalisation described in this pillar.



3. Why Internationalisation Matters in VET

Internationalisation in VET operates across interconnected dimensions that define the depth, quality, and strategic integration of international activities. These dimensions reflect how internationalisation evolves from isolated mobility initiatives to a structured and embedded component of institutional development.

3.1 Globalisation of Skills and Labour Markets

Labour markets increasingly require workers who can operate in international, multilingual, and multicultural environments (European Commission, 2020b). VET learners must therefore develop not only technical competences, but also language skills, intercultural awareness, and adaptability.

Internationalisation helps ensure that training programmes remain relevant in a global economy and that learners are prepared to engage with international standards, practices, and mobility opportunities.

3.2 Mobility as a Learning Experience

Mobility activities provide learners and staff with opportunities to experience different training systems, workplaces, and cultural contexts (Cedefop, 2022). These experiences can strengthen technical skills, confidence, independence, and employability.

However, mobility should not be understood as an isolated activity. Its value depends on how well it is prepared, supported, recognised, and connected to institutional learning.

3.3 Institutional Development and Innovation

Internationalisation also supports institutional learning. International partnerships and participation in cross-border projects enable VET institutions to exchange good practices, co-develop curricula, strengthen pedagogy, and improve quality assurance processes (European Commission, 2020a).

Participation in European and global projects can help institutions move beyond mobility towards innovation, cooperation, and long-term development.



3.4 Regional Impact of Internationalisation

VET institutions play an important role in linking local economies with global developments. International partnerships can contribute to regional innovation, strengthen collaboration with local stakeholders, and increase the visibility and attractiveness of VET provision (Council of the European Union, 2020).

Internationalisation therefore benefits not only learners and staff, but also the wider regional ecosystem.



4. Key Dimensions of Internationalisation

The following dimensions provide a framework for understanding and assessing internationalisation in VET institutions. In the VETINNOVATE tool, these dimensions are translated into practical indicators that capture specific features of institutional practice, such as mobility participation, partnerships, joint curriculum development, language competences, intercultural training, project participation, international visibility, strategic integration, and regional impact.

The indicators therefore serve as measurable expressions of the broader dimensions described below.

Dimension 1 – Strategy and Governance of Internationalisation

Internationalisation requires a clear institutional strategy and leadership commitment. A robust strategy should:

- Define long-term internationalisation objectives
- Align with institutional priorities and quality assurance processes
- Establish responsibilities and coordination mechanisms
- Include monitoring and review of international activities

Without strategic integration, internationalisation risks remaining fragmented and dependent on short-term projects.

Dimension 2 – International Partnerships and Networks

Sustainable internationalisation depends on strong partnerships and active participation in international networks. These may include:

- VET centres
- Universities
- Companies
- Sector organisations
- European or international associations

Partnerships should go beyond formal agreements and support active cooperation, knowledge exchange, and long-term development.



Dimension 3 – Mobility of Learners and Staff

Mobility is a central component of internationalisation. Institutions should ensure:

- Access to mobility opportunities for learners
- Staff participation in international teaching or training activities
- Preparation, mentoring, and follow-up support
- Formal recognition of learning outcomes where relevant

Learner and staff mobility should contribute to both individual development and institutional improvement.

Dimension 4 – Internationalisation of Curriculum

Internationalisation should be embedded in curricula rather than treated as an external add-on. This may involve:

- Joint curriculum development with international partners
- International case studies and collaborative projects
- Alignment with international standards or practices
- Integration of international learning outcomes into training programmes

Dimension 5 – Language Competence Development

Language competence is essential for participation in international activities and employability in global labour markets. Institutions should support:

- Foreign language learning relevant to vocational fields
- Opportunities for certification of language competences
- The practical use of languages in international mobility and collaboration activities



Dimension 6 – Intercultural Competence and Global Skills

Internationalisation requires learners and staff to operate effectively in multicultural environments. Institutions should promote:

- Intercultural communication
- Awareness of different working cultures
- Openness, adaptability, and collaboration across borders
- Workshops or training activities that develop global competences

Dimension 7 – Participation in International Projects

Participation in international projects strengthens institutional capacity and innovation. Examples include:

- Erasmus+ cooperation projects
- Innovation alliances
- Cross-border sector initiatives
- European or global collaborative projects beyond mobility

These activities can support curriculum innovation, staff development, and knowledge exchange.

Dimension 8 – International Visibility and Positioning

Institutions should actively position themselves in international contexts, not only to increase visibility, but also to strengthen partnerships, attract opportunities, and contribute to international knowledge exchange. This may include:

- Participation in international fairs and events
- Presence in European and international networks
- Dissemination of project results abroad
- Visibility in cross-border cooperation platforms and associations



Dimension 9 – Monitoring and Evaluation of Internationalisation

Monitoring and evaluation should support continuous institutional improvement rather than only tracking activities. Monitoring may include:

- Learner and staff mobility participation and outcomes
- Quality and impact of partnerships and projects
- Development of language and intercultural competences
- Effectiveness of curriculum internationalisation
- Contribution of internationalisation to strategic objectives and regional development

Evaluation results should be used to inform decision-making, improve practices, and strengthen the strategic integration of internationalisation across the institution.

Dimension 10 – Regional Impact of Internationalisation

Internationalisation should contribute to the wider development of the region. This may involve:

- Transferring knowledge and practices from international cooperation into local training and industry
- Supporting regional innovation, competitiveness, and skills development
- Strengthening collaboration between international partners and local stakeholders such as companies, clusters, and public authorities
- Enhancing the attractiveness and relevance of local VET provision within global value chains



5. Self-Assessment Dimensions

The VETINNOVATE self-assessment tool evaluates internationalisation in VET centres through a set of practical indicators linked to the broader dimensions presented in this pillar. These indicators focus on observable features of institutional practice, such as mobility participation, partnerships, language competences, intercultural training, project involvement, international visibility, strategic planning, and regional impact.

The following dimensions provide the conceptual structure behind the self-assessment tool:

1. Strategy and Governance of Internationalisation
2. International Partnerships and Networks
3. Mobility of Learners and Staff
4. Internationalisation of Curriculum
5. Language Competence Development
6. Intercultural Competence and Global Skills
7. Participation in International Projects
8. International Visibility and Positioning
9. Monitoring and Evaluation of Internationalisation
10. Regional Impact of Internationalisation

Together, these dimensions and indicators provide a practical picture of institutional internationalisation capacity while remaining connected to the wider transformation framework described in this chapter.



6. Self-Assessment Statements for Pillar 7

The following statements can help VET institutions reflect on the current level of internationalisation within their organisation.

These statements are designed as broad reflection prompts aligned with the key dimensions of this pillar. In the VETINNOVATE platform, these areas are operationalised through more specific indicators and scoring items, such as mobility participation, international partnerships, curriculum development, language competences, and international project engagement.

The statements should therefore be interpreted as a complementary tool to support reflection and discussion, rather than as a direct scoring instrument.

Strategy and Institutional Integration

- Our institution has a documented internationalisation strategy that is linked to institutional development plans and quality assurance processes
- Internationalisation objectives are integrated into strategic planning and regularly reviewed

Mobility of Learners and Staff

- Learner mobility opportunities are integrated into vocational training pathways and supported through preparation, mentoring, and follow-up evaluation
- A significant proportion of learners participate in international mobility or placements
- Staff participate in international mobility or cooperation activities that contribute to curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, or institutional capacity building

International Partnerships and Projects

- Our institution maintains stable and long-term cooperation with international partners that extends beyond individual project cycles
- The institution actively participates in European or international projects that support innovation and knowledge exchange
- Partnerships contribute to joint activities such as curriculum development, training programmes, or collaborative initiatives



Internationalisation of Curriculum and Learning

- International perspectives are incorporated into vocational curricula through joint projects, international case studies, or collaboration with partner institutions
- Training programmes are co-developed or adapted in collaboration with international partners, where relevant

Language Competence Development

- Learners are supported in developing foreign language skills relevant to their vocational fields
- The institution promotes and, where possible, certifies language competences of learners participating in international activities

Intercultural Competence and Global Skills

- The institution provides training activities, workshops, or learning experiences that support the development of intercultural competences
- Learners and staff develop skills to operate effectively in international and multicultural environments

Digital and Blended Internationalisation

- Digital tools and platforms are used to support international collaboration, including virtual exchange, blended mobility, or online project work
- International activities are not limited to physical mobility but include digital and hybrid formats

Recognition of Learning Outcomes

- Learning outcomes acquired through international mobility or cooperation activities are formally recognised and integrated into qualification pathways
- Recognition processes are aligned with institutional procedures and, where relevant, European transparency tools (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2017)



International Visibility and Positioning

- Our institution is actively involved in international networks, partnerships, or associations
- The institution participates in international events, projects, or dissemination activities that increase its visibility abroad

Regional Impact of Internationalisation

- Internationalisation activities contribute to strengthening learners' employability and their understanding of international labour markets
- International partnerships and projects support regional development, innovation, or collaboration with local stakeholders

Monitoring and Evaluation of Internationalisation

- The institution monitors internationalisation activities using data such as mobility participation, partnership outcomes, and project results
- Evaluation results are used to improve internationalisation strategies and decision-making

These statements should be considered together with the maturity matrix presented in the next section. While individual statements focus on specific aspects of internationalisation, they collectively contribute to a broader understanding of institutional internationalisation capacity.



7. Using the Maturity Matrix

To support institutional reflection, internationalisation maturity can be assessed across the key dimensions identified in this chapter. Each dimension is evaluated using a five-level maturity scale, ranging from initial participation in international activities to fully embedded strategic internationalisation.

Institutions should review each dimension and determine which level most closely reflects their current practices. It is common for institutions to show different maturity levels across dimensions. For example, learner mobility may be well developed, while curriculum internationalisation or partnership depth may still be emerging.

The maturity matrix should be used as a tool for structured reflection rather than precise measurement. It helps institutions understand the progression from isolated activities toward a more strategic and integrated approach to internationalisation.

8. Maturity Matrix

The following maturity matrix provides a structured interpretation of internationalisation across institutional dimensions. It complements the indicator-based assessment used in the platform by helping institutions understand how individual results relate to broader organisational development.

Internationalisation Maturity Matrix

Dimension	Level 1 – Initial	Level 2 – Emerging	Level 3 – Developing	Level 4 – Advanced	Level 5 – Transformational
Strategy and Governance of Internationalisation	No formal internationalisation strategy exists. Activities are ad hoc	Early initiatives or discussions exist but lack coordination	A strategy exists but is only partially implemented or monitored	Internationalisation is integrated into institutional planning and coordination mechanisms	Internationalisation is fully embedded in governance, regularly reviewed, and aligned with institutional and regional priorities
International Partnerships and Networks	Few or no international partnerships exist	Occasional partnerships linked to specific projects	Several partnerships support mobility or cooperation activities	Stable and long-term partnerships support curriculum development and institutional collaboration	Strategic international networks actively contribute to innovation, knowledge exchange, and institutional development
Mobility of Learners and Staff	Very limited or no participation in mobility activities	Occasional mobility opportunities with low participation	Mobility is regularly implemented with increasing participation	Mobility is integrated into training pathways with structured preparation and recognition	Mobility is widely accessible, systematically embedded, and contributes to institutional and learner development
Internationalisation of Curriculum	No international elements in curricula	Some international activities or case studies in isolated courses	International elements integrated into several programmes	Curricula updated with international input and collaboration	Programmes are co-designed with international partners and aligned with global standards
Language Competence Development	Limited support for foreign language learning	Some language training available but not linked to mobility	Language learning supports mobility preparation and participation	A significant proportion of learners develop and demonstrate language competence	Language competence is systematically developed and formally certified across programmes
Intercultural Competence and Global Skills	No structured intercultural learning activities	Occasional workshops or activities are offered	Intercultural learning included in some programmes	Intercultural competences developed systematically across training	Intercultural learning is fully embedded across the institution and all relevant programmes
Participation in International Projects	No participation in international projects	Occasional participation, mainly as partners	Regular participation in European or international projects	Active involvement in multiple projects supporting innovation and development	The institution leads international projects and uses them strategically for transformation
International Visibility and Positioning	No presence in international networks or events	Limited participation in international networks or activities	Regular participation in networks, events, or dissemination activities	Strong international presence through partnerships and activities	The institution is highly visible internationally and contributes to global VET networks and initiatives
Monitoring and Evaluation of Internationalisation	No monitoring of international activities	Informal monitoring of some activities	Structured monitoring of mobility and partnerships	Data is used to evaluate and improve internationalisation strategies	Monitoring is fully integrated into institutional decision-making and continuous improvement
Regional Impact of Internationalisation	No visible link to regional development	Limited impact on local stakeholders	Some activities contribute to regional collaboration	Internationalisation supports regional innovation and stakeholder engagement	The institution acts as a key connector between international networks and regional development ecosystems



9. What Internationalisation Looks Like in a VET Centre

Internationalisation in VET should be visible in everyday teaching practices, mobility pathways, partnerships, and institutional development. The following examples provide practical illustrations across different forms of international activity.

Learner Mobility in Practice

A VET centre organises cross-border apprenticeship placements in collaboration with partner institutions and companies in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, or construction.

- At lower maturity levels, mobility is occasional and depends on project participation.
- At intermediate levels, mobility is regularly organised with preparation, mentoring, and follow-up activities.
- At higher maturity levels, mobility is integrated into training pathways, formally recognised, and accessible to a broad range of learners.

Curriculum Internationalisation

Learners participate in joint projects with partner institutions abroad, working on shared technical challenges or case studies relevant to their vocational field.

- At lower maturity levels, international content appears sporadically in selected modules.
- At intermediate levels, international elements are integrated into several programmes.
- At higher maturity levels, curricula are co-developed with international partners and include joint training activities.



Language Competence in Practice

Learners receive targeted language preparation linked to their vocational field and mobility activities.

- At lower maturity levels, language support is optional or general.
- At intermediate levels, language training is linked to mobility preparation.
- At higher maturity levels, language competences are systematically developed and formally certified.

Digital International Collaboration

Learners and trainers collaborate with international partners through virtual exchanges, shared digital platforms, or online project-based learning.

- At lower maturity levels, digital tools are used mainly for communication.
- At intermediate levels, virtual collaboration and blended mobility are introduced.
- At higher maturity levels, digital internationalisation is embedded in learning activities and partnership structures.

Staff Mobility and Institutional Learning

Trainers participate in international exchanges to learn new pedagogical approaches, technologies, or sector-specific practices.

- At lower maturity levels, staff mobility is occasional and individual.
- At intermediate levels, mobility is linked to professional development.
- At higher maturity levels, staff mobility contributes to curriculum development, institutional innovation, and partnership strengthening.



Strategic Partnerships and Networks

The institution participates in European networks, cooperation partnerships, or Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs).

- At lower maturity levels, partnerships are project-based and short-term.
- At intermediate levels, partnerships show continuity and support mobility and exchange activities.
- At higher maturity levels, partnerships drive joint innovation, curriculum development, and long-term cooperation.

International Visibility and Positioning

The institution participates in international events, networks, and dissemination activities to share results and build partnerships.

- At lower maturity levels, visibility is limited or project-dependent.
- At intermediate levels, institutions participate regularly in international activities.
- At higher maturity levels, the institution is recognised as an active contributor to international VET networks.

Inclusion in Internationalisation

The institution implements measures to support participation of learners who may face barriers, such as financial constraints, language limitations, or accessibility needs.

- At lower maturity levels, participation is limited to a small group of learners.
- At intermediate levels, some support measures are introduced.
- At higher maturity levels, inclusive strategies are embedded, ensuring broad and equitable access to international opportunities.



Recognition of International Learning

Learning outcomes acquired through mobility or cooperation activities are formally recognised and integrated into qualification pathways.

- At lower maturity levels, recognition is informal or inconsistent.
- At intermediate levels, institutional procedures support recognition.
- At higher maturity levels, recognition is fully integrated into quality assurance systems and aligned with European frameworks.

Regional Impact of Internationalisation

International partnerships contribute to local innovation, skills development, and collaboration with industry.

- At lower maturity levels, impact is limited to individual mobility experiences.
- At intermediate levels, some activities benefit local stakeholders.
- At higher maturity levels, internationalisation supports regional ecosystems and innovation strategies.

Impact on Employability and Institutional Development

Internationalisation contributes to strengthening learner employability and institutional capacity.

- At lower maturity levels, international activities have limited connection to labour-market outcomes.
- At intermediate levels, learners gain relevant international experience.
- At higher maturity levels, internationalisation strengthens employability, industry collaboration, and institutional reputation.



10. Evidence Indicators

When conducting the self-assessment, institutions should consider the following sources of evidence:

- Institutional internationalisation strategy documents
- Mobility participation records for learners and staff
- Partnership agreements or memoranda of understanding
- Curriculum documents showing international or jointly developed elements
- Language certification records
- Documentation of intercultural workshops or training activities
- Participation records in European or international projects
- Evidence of participation in international fairs, networks, or associations
- Institutional reports showing contribution to regional development or innovation

Institutions are encouraged to triangulate evidence from multiple sources, including documents, observed practices, and input from learners, staff, and international partners. This helps ensure that the self-assessment reflects actual institutional practices rather than individual perceptions.

Institutions should consider not only the existence of activities, but also their quality, outcomes, and impact on learners, staff, and regional stakeholders.



11. Assessment Tips

When conducting the self-assessment, institutions should consider the following principles.

Use evidence-based reflection

Assess maturity levels using documented evidence such as strategy documents, mobility records, curriculum materials, partnership agreements, and project documentation.

Involve multiple stakeholders

Internationalisation affects the whole institution. The assessment should therefore involve management, coordinators, trainers, administrative staff, and, where possible, external partners.

Consider differences across programmes

Mobility, language preparation, and international collaboration may vary across departments or vocational sectors. The assessment should reflect these differences.

Focus on improvement

The purpose of the assessment is not to rank institutions, but to identify strengths, gaps, and priorities for development.

When assessing internationalisation maturity, institutions should consider not only the existence of mobility activities but also their quality and outcomes. Feedback from learners, trainers, and employers can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of international experiences. Institutions may also review indicators such as learner satisfaction, employability outcomes, and participation of underrepresented groups to ensure that internationalisation activities remain inclusive and impactful.



12. Transformation Pathways

The self-assessment results should support institutional reflection and strategic planning. Internationalisation is not a one-time activity but a continuous cycle of assessment, improvement, and evaluation.

VET institutions can follow a structured transformation pathway:

Step 1 – Assess current internationalisation maturity

Use the self-assessment framework to evaluate the institution's performance across the key dimensions described in this pillar.

Step 2 – Identify priority areas

Analyse the results to determine which dimensions show the lowest maturity levels and therefore require immediate attention.

Step 3 – Collect supporting evidence

Gather documentation and examples that illustrate current practices, including mobility data, partnership records, curriculum materials, language certification evidence, and project participation.

Step 4 – Define responsibilities

Assign responsibility for internationalisation initiatives to specific teams or institutional units, such as management, international coordinators, mobility coordinators, or curriculum teams.



Step 5 – Prioritise actions

Develop an action plan identifying short-term and medium-term priorities, such as:

- Increasing learner and staff mobility participation
- Strengthening strategic international partnerships
- Embedding international elements in curricula
- Improving language preparation and certification
- Developing intercultural training opportunities
- Increasing participation in international projects
- Strengthening institutional visibility abroad
- Enhancing the regional impact of internationalisation

Step 6 – Monitor and review progress

Institutions should regularly review progress and update their internationalisation strategies based on evidence, institutional priorities, and changing regional or global contexts.

Through this continuous improvement cycle, VET institutions can progressively strengthen their internationalisation capacity and contribute to the development of regional and international skills ecosystems.

13. Conclusion

Internationalisation is an ongoing institutional process that requires strategic commitment, strong partnerships, and continuous learning. VET centres that successfully integrate mobility, curriculum development, language learning, intercultural competences, and international cooperation are better positioned to respond to the evolving needs of learners, labour markets, and regional ecosystems (European Commission, 2020a).

By applying the VETINNOVATE self-assessment framework, institutions can identify their strengths, address areas for improvement, and develop strategies that support the development of inclusive, innovative, and internationally connected VET ecosystems.



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