

Russia: Embedding global standards

About the research

This case study is lifted from a global research project by the RSA and WorldSkills UK. The project identified innovative skills systems across the world and sought to identify key lessons and insights for the UK. The role and potential of skills competitions was a key area of focus.

Lessons for the UK

- **Using WorldSkills standards to enrich skills systems.** Russia has used WorldSkills International standards to transform its systems, from end-point assessments and employer engagement through to the training of educators, development of curricula and benchmarking against global competitors. A key success factor has been the ability to compare skills standards in international competitions. This has generated energy and enthusiasm for the reforms as Russia has progressed up the WorldSkills medal table in successive international competitions. There are opportunities for the UK to do the same, which WorldSkills UK has already started to do.
- **A comprehensive approach to improving perceptions of VET, with skills competitions playing a key role.** The rapid growth in brand recognition of WorldSkills and engagement with VET in Russia highlights the benefits of comprehensive and coordinated efforts to promote the status of VET. The Junior Skills programme which was introduced four years ago for students from 13- 15 years has significantly changed the perception of VET. Its main purpose is to expose every school child with the opportunity to discover vocational skills as well as to introduce them to future skills.
- **Anchor skills systems in the future needs of the economy.** Another key takeaway for the UK is Russia's investment in analysis of the future skills needs of different branches of the economy, as exemplified by the Future Skills programme, which uses competitions to help prepare Russia's workforce for future careers.



Russia: Embedding global standards

The shift from centrally planned to market-based economy in the 1990s was the driving force behind major changes to the Russian skills system. The responsibility for planning and delivery of vocational skills broadened from the state alone to focus much more on employers. Further reform took place in the 2010s with a more evidence-based approach to VET policy, developed through participation in the Torino Process (TRP), a holistic policy and system analysis, facilitated by the European Training Foundation (ETF). This led to a strengthening of standards, teaching and training.

The current system is underpinned by legislation from 2012, which regulates the whole Russian education system, its structure, principles and operation. A comprehensive strategy, adopted in 2013, sets out Russia's key goals for its VET system, including to meet the country's economic and social needs, to respond to socioeconomic change, to expand opportunities for different sections of the population to gain vocational skills throughout their working lives, and to consolidate the resources of employers, government and training providers. Underpinning the strategy are three key principles: the leading role of public-private partnerships in VET delivery; the strengthening of the role of non-governmental organisations in the system; and the internationalisation of VET.

The VET system is now administered at a federal and regional level, and delivered by state providers, non-profit autonomous organisations, and private sector organisations. The current system centres on two types of vocational institution. Technical schools and colleges teach programmes at both secondary and post-secondary levels. Post-secondary vocational diplomas can provide access to both higher level vocational learning, and university for those with some general education as well as technical training. Advanced vocational learning is the route into skilled careers such as nursing and accountancy, again with the potential to move into Higher Education.

Innovation through internationalisation

The ongoing modernisation of VET in Russia has a strong focus on internationalisation, with Russian standards being benchmarked against best practice globally, including through participation in WorldSkills, which Russia joined in 2012. There is also a strong emphasis on future-proofing the VET system, through anticipating future challenges and proactively preparing for them. There is, for example, a target to deliver training for the 50 most in-demand or growing vocations, and for this training to be in line with the best standards from abroad.

WorldSkills Russia runs a dedicated digital skills competition, which aims to identify future digital skills requirements, develop educational programmes to address these needs and a model of skills assessment to verify learning outcomes. Skills in the programme include machine learning, virtual reality, AI and cloud computing.

The anticipation of future skills needs applies not just to young people entering the labour force, but also to older workers, as lifelong learning has become a key element of the overall skills system.

There has been significant change and modernisation in vocational standards and qualifications, with a new national framework developed, covering a range of qualification levels, as well as the production of professional standards in over 1000 professions, overseen by 30 sectoral councils.

WorldSkills as a driver of change

WorldSkills standards have been central to the reform of standards and training within the VET system in Russia, informing assessments, qualifications and training for workers, educators and trainers. Comparison and benchmarking against the best global standards has been both a practical tool, with WorldSkills standards being embedded in the VET system, and has also generated energy and enthusiasm for change and reform. Improvements in the training of educators and trainers involved in the delivery of VET aim to ensure that the best international practices are delivered in Russia. The WorldSkills Academy in Russia trains thousands of teaching staff each year, through a cascade system whereby global benchmarks are learned at national level, before being filtered down to regional level.

One of the additional aims of Russia's WorldSkills participation, alongside embedding global standards in the skills system, is to strengthen the links between training providers and employers. In most sectors employer investment and engagement in vocational training is low, and WorldSkills provides a platform to develop greater cooperation and expand employers' roles and responsibilities.

Reform is not just driven from the centre, but also through regional activity, and at company and institution level. Regional centres have been created to promote key skills and competencies, and regional economic systems are integral to VET reforms. Regions can develop new WorldSkills competencies specifically to address a key regional sector or industry. Individual companies and academic institutions compete to prove their excellence, and companies use WorldSkills standards to develop their own staff. University participation in the WorldSkills movement has helped to break down barriers between academic and vocational learning.

“WorldSkills paves the way to organise close contact between industry and vocational educational institutions: this is one of the key objectives of WorldSkills Russia.”

— **Senior WorldSkills Russia official**

Since 2012, legal and strategic reform and commitment to using WorldSkills as a tool for improvement have increased participation amongst young people in vocational education from 42 percent to 59 percent. A JuniorSkills programme, designed to expose 13-15 year-olds to vocational learning, has contributed to raising the profile and prestige of vocational skills. In development is a Skills Passport for WorldSkills competitors, which will record the learning completed as part of their WorldSkills training, and how they performed according to WorldSkills benchmarks. Recognition of the WorldSkills brand, which has helped to elevate the status of VET, has increased from virtually zero in 2012 to 30 percent in 2018. Employer investment in some sectors of the economy, namely gas, oil and civil engineering, has increased, with the creation and funding of vocational schools.



CASE STUDY SUMMARY

Russia

As Russia transitioned into a liberal economy, its skills systems and programmes — which had been created to serve Soviet era state industries — became fragmented. In recent years, the country has used skills competitions to transform its VET system, integrate it with the economy and anticipate future challenges.

Category

Innovator

Population

144 million

WEF Human capital index ranking

16

WEF Inclusive development ranking

19 (among emerging economies)

Impact Stories

- In 2012, only 42 percent of school children opted to pursue vocational education. By 2018, this increased to 59 percent.
- Brand recognition of WorldSkills went from virtually 0 percent in 2012 to 30 percent in 2018. Competitions have elevated the status of VET.
- In 2018 250,000 adults and children were aware of WorldSkills; 1200 participated in some way; and 50 leaders — change makers — were established in the national education system.
- Finished 5th in WorldSkills 2017; a vast improvement from 2013, where it finished close to last.

Key strengths and innovations

- VET is undergoing a process of 'modernisation', enshrined in key laws. A key element of this is 'internationalisation' and orienting the Russian system to the best foreign practices (eg WorldSkills, below).
- Effective use of cross-sector, holistic, evidence based and strategic review of VET systems and policies through the Torino Process, modelled on EU Copenhagen Process.
- Development of regional economic systems with integration of regions into VET reforms.
- Strong emphasis on anticipating future challenges and responding proactively; eg target of implementing training for the 50 most demanded and promising vocations in line with the best foreign standards.

Overview of the system

- There are two main types of VET institutions in Russia, technical schools (teknikum) and colleges, which teach programmes at secondary and post-secondary levels. Basic programmes at secondary level can last between 1-4 years, and contain both specialised technical training and more general secondary education. At the higher level, a Diploma of Vocational Education can be taken, giving access to higher level programmes, as well as entry to university.
- Advanced vocational learning, lasting 2-3 years after upper-secondary school, provides access to skilled trades including nursing and accountancy. Again, students can in some circumstances progress from advanced vocational learning into Higher Education.
- VET system administered at federal level (Ministry of Enlightenment) and regional levels.
- A variety of educational organisations play a role, including state providers, non-profit autonomous organisations and private sector organisations.

Approach to skills competitions

- Skills competitions have been used as a platform to transform the entire skills system, across age groups (lifelong learning and future proofing has been a key component);
- WorldSkills global standards have been embedded into the VET system, including end point assessments and advanced training (based on WorldSkills standards) for workers, educators and trainers; this has been supported by a national framework to improve qualifications and ensure independent quality assurance.
- Advanced training for educators, directors and masters of vocational education seeks to ensure the best international practices are transferred into Russia.
- Benchmarking regions against global standards created energy for change and reform.
- 185 regional centres have been established.
- Introduction of competitions between companies and between academic institutions (including higher education institutions) have strengthened the incentives for improvement and excellence; at company level WorldSkills standards were used as a tool for staff development.
- Using competitions to anticipate future skills needs, including for older workers.