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**NIJHOF, Wim J. / HEIKKINEN, Anja / NIEUWENHUIS, Loek  
F. M. (ed.):  
Shaping Flexibility in Vocational Education and Training.**

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**Review by Dietmar Frommberger, University of Jena**

In many European countries the political reputation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) is gradually increasing towards its deserved status: The last two decades have brought extensive measures of redefining the status of VET. Meanwhile VET-politics are embedded in other politics to support the socially demanded advantages.

Additionally, a growing amount of European researchers are occupied with the questions of VET. To find an international and European “science community” used to be a problem for researchers in the field of VET from German universities. Researchers’ initiatives to install platforms of regular exchange and discussion of results in the field of VET led to a further increment.

In the past years one of the main platforms was the project Action A 11: “Flexibility, transferability, mobility as targets of vocational education and training” ([www.cost11.org](http://www.cost11.org)), as part of the European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST), Domain: Social Sciences and Humanities. This project stopped running in 2002 and so the main results were summarised and published to the respective audience. One of the working groups of this project was concerned with “the systems’ level of Vocational Education and Training systems” (p. xxi), especially with the concepts and realities of “flexibility” of VET in different European countries. The main outcomes of this working group are presented in the reviewed volume.

20 authors of 11 different nationalities are dealing with the question of “Shaping flexibility in Vocational Education and Training”. “Flexibility” is treated as a system characteristic of VET and the volume is divided into three main parts to analyse key conditions for “Flexibility”: Section II deals with the changing economic conditions, VET is confronted with (“Institutional and Organisational Aspects of Flexibility”); Section III is supposed to focus on the pathways and curriculum designs of different countries (“Educational Tools and Resources for Flexibility”); Section IV concerns the rules, tasks and future demands of VET professionals (“Professional Conditions”). Section I is introduced to the reader by an essay by the editors (“Shaping conditions for a flexible VET”).

The 16 essays of the sections II-IV present very different results and approaches of research in the field of VET. On the one hand, the structures and actual developments of VET in European countries [Scotland (Cathy HOWIESON / David RAFFE / Teresa TINKLIN), Italy (Luisa RIBOLZI), Ireland (David TUOHY), Hungaria (Laszlo ZACHAR), Finland (Anja HEIKKINEN)] are described in a quite general way.

On the other hand, the essays present research and considerations of special conditions or instances of “Flexibility” in VET, like “Design and effects of a flexible VET system: a case study in Dutch agricultural education” (Jos GEERLIGS and Wim J. NIJHOFF), “Challenges of supporting learning of newly qualified professionals in health care” (Allan BROWN), “The practise of a new VET profession” (Phil HODKINSON), “Valuing learning outcomes acquired in non-formal settings” (Gerald A. STRAKA), “Human Resource Development as a professional career? Perspectives from Finland, The Netherlands, and United Kingdom” (Tuija HYTÖNEN, / Rob POELL / Geoff CHIVERS), “Professionalism as a path for the reform of VET systems” (Lorenz LASSNIGG) and “Resources for flexibility: critical comments” (Fernando MARHUENDA).

The mentioned essays could probably have been arranged according to national examples on the one hand and general international problems on the other hand. However, the authors give a well informed insight of the main conditions but also of perspectives to the question of “Flexibility” in VET. Readers have the opportunity to understand the term of “Flexibility” in an European context, but they also have to realise the difference of concepts and realities.

To sum up, the need of getting more knowledge about national strategies is still huge, especially since “Flexibility” is considered as a crucial concept for designing lifelong learning systems. It is better to get this knowledge from “native researchers”. This volume is a result of these platforms, which are more necessary than ever.