

3.8 Limits, Opportunities and challenges

Austria

The success of the vocational training system in Austria has generated low youth unemployment rates and international recognition of Austrian skilled workers.

The Law on Vocation Training of 2011 sustains vocational orientation, counselling, assistance and training support actions for young people as well as for companies, even in those sectors in which the number of companies providing training are low.

The joint objective of all the institutions involved in apprenticeship training is the development and maintenance of the attractiveness of VET, which in the last fifteen years has led to:

- the updating or ex novo creation of over two thirds of all apprenticeship paths (including in occupations with the highest apprenticeship percentages);
- the creation of nine modular apprenticeship schemes (20,000 apprentices training throughout Austria in 2012 alone);
- the increase in IVET apprentices (from 1,114 in 2004 to 5,507 in 2011) and the enrolment of a large number of young people in supra-company training (10,400 in the 2010-2011 period alone);
- free access to the State exam *Berufsreifeprüfung* (*Berufsmatura*) is a milestone of educational policy for improving the attractiveness of apprenticeship and increasing the permeability of Austria's education system (9,484 qualified in 2011 alone).

The subsidies for apprenticeship placements translate into a substantial reduction in costs for the companies and are therefore a clear sign of appreciation given by the companies providing training.

The institution of a Central Office for the final apprenticeship exam has guaranteed quality and uniform standards throughout Austria.

To date, the most important challenges concern:

- the drop in population, leading to a decline in the number of newly employed persons together with an increase in retirees; this is causing a strong deficiency in qualified work force, already perceived in the labour market. To contrast this tendency it is necessary to increase the number of qualified workers with immigrant background within the apprenticeship training (in the 2010-2011 period, the proportion of young people of non-German native tongue in schools preceding professional school level was still 24.6 %, while their presence in part-time professional schools dropped to 9.4 %);
- improved vocational consulting and orientation in the seventh, eighth and ninth years and introduction of adequate measures in the first years; a step in the right direction has been taken with the introduction of the mandatory 'vocational orientation' subject in the new secondary school system in Autumn 2012;
- training and acquisition of qualifications for adults; the achievement of this objective should involve the adaptation of the apprenticeship system to this specific target;
- the creation of a national framework of qualifications (NQF);
- the definition in terms of competence of the outcomes of learning and of the regulations concerning training and curricula;
- the reinforcement of vocational training at tertiary level.

Germany

The dual system in Germany benefits all of the stakeholders involved.

The *trainees* acquire the skills required to find a job and an adequate retribution. Unlike in full-time professional schools, trainees are entitled to indemnity during training and train in workplaces corresponding to the actual technological progress as regards equipment, machinery and company processes.

It is important that apprentices learn to identify with the company, the corporate culture and their occupation, all aspects that it is almost impossible to acquire in the classroom.

Once training for the occupation is completed, the qualified candidates gain access to various employment and training opportunities.

The *employers*, on the other hand, acquire highly professional employees capable of meeting the company's requirements without extra introductory time, as would instead be necessary when hiring external personnel. This means employers save on hiring and requalification costs.

The subjects qualified with the dual system improve both the productivity and the quality of the services and products. In the long term, training of apprentices leads to very high returns on the capital invested.

The dual system allows entrepreneurs to participate in the development of corporate standards and to define the content of workplace training themselves.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the dual system falls under the corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The *Government*, by investing in a sector that has positive outcomes for the social system and for the economy:

- meets the domestic market's demand for skilled workers with the help of entrepreneurs;
- has a good quality dual system capable of being updated in function of technological progress;
- has a tool for reinforcing the formalisation of the economy via the regulation of workplace training;
- socially and economically integrates the younger section of the population.

The main challenges for vocational training in Germany are related to the changes in the economic system and in population figures.

The 2008 Group Report for Education stresses the fact that the transition system has expanded for years and now supports the weight of preparing students with low qualification levels – especially young people with an immigrant background – for the VET.

In 2006, the "Vocational training Innovation Association" (Innovationskreis Berufliche Bildung, IKBB) and the "Lifelong Education and Training Innovation Association" (Innovationskreis Weiterbildung, IKWB) identified the main challenges to innovation of VET in Germany and therefore set down the political priorities for the VET.

These concern:

- the modernisation and transition towards a more flexible organization of the VET;
- improvement in the so-called "transition management";
- improvement in the permeability of and integration among the various sectors and among the educational subsystems;

the growth in attractiveness of vocational training via permeability and interconnection with other educational areas, such as universities for example;

the growth in training opportunities via initiatives designed to improve the regional training structures and to increase the participation of enterprises of immigrants in training activities;

the optimisation and improvement of transition management by means of a further development of the actions aimed at promoting disadvantaged classes of people and at creating the tools for qualifying young adults who do not have diplomas or training certificates;

a better European dimension via the use of the Europass tools that support the development of a National Qualifications Framework.

Challenges

Besides the advantages of the dual system, there are also a few challenges to be met.

The number of applicants not enrolled in the dual system is growing. In 2012, there were 15,600 non-enrolled applicants, 21,000 in 2013. On the other hand, the number of companies participating in alternance training has dropped from 24% in 2009 to 21.3% in 2013.

Due to globalisation and to the speed of change connected to technological innovation, the demand for workplace training is increasing. This challenge also regards the knowledge of foreign languages, project management, computer science skills and so on.

The situation is such that entrepreneurs find it difficult to find trainees competent enough for the dual system. The requirements in terms of skills, knowledge and predisposition required for access alternance training are increasing. The new slogan is “trainability”, intended as a preliminary condition to the dual system.

In 2009 there were 17,300 training vacancies, a number that rose to 33,500 in 2013. The number of contracts recently closed had fallen in 2013 by 3.7% compared to the same parameter in 2012.

The following issues must be addressed:

- improve the passage from the mandatory general education system to the dual system and to upper secondary education;
- further develop orientation and shadowing;
- prevent dropping out from the dual system;
- reduce the scarcity of qualified personnel.

Friuli-Venezia Giulia

In Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the dual system is not yet codified and established like it is in other countries. The two training models connected to work, apprenticeship and internship, although quite similar to a dual model, are not adequately linked to the curricula of the Education System and are often relegated to the vocational system. This is expressed in the system’s ability to perform an adequate action of general orientation and employment of young people.

The FVG Region is working to shorten the distance between the two models, boosting orientation actions using specific tools (such as the GOandLEARN catalogue), and via the promotion of these tools among operators and in schools.

Despite this, the limitation consisting in not yet having developed a good dual system and good dialogue between the education sector and the professional sector still remains. Apprenticeships and internships are tools that can be used after school and when about to enter the world of employment, and not tools that can promote the alternance between school and work, with the exception of the VET curricular training internships that are only a small part of the Education System's offering, however.

Something is moving thanks to the new policies concerning international mobility that the region has started supporting via the target defined by the European Commission: students and teachers are involved in training and traineeships abroad via the key actions of the Erasmusplus Programme.

This does not change the fact that there still is no structural dual system for students.

Autonomous Province of Bolzano

The dual system has always been a strong point of the South Tyrolean education and training system.

In these last years the apprenticeship model is undergoing a crisis, due to causes of varied origin but that have all affected each other.

There has been a considerable drop in the number of students in these last 10 years, in both language groups (-27%). Today, the group with most students is the German group, with an unbalanced ratio of 1 : 9.

Apprentices in Italian schools usually have a higher average age than those in German schools, to the point that, even though this is an offer by which to finish the last year of mandatory school and complete the right/duty to education and training up to the age of 18, the percentage of minors among Italian apprentices amounts only to 13% (2013).

The fact that this type of training is more popular in the German-speaking group, despite the training offering being equal, is due to a set of historical, economic as well as socio-cultural factors.

As regards the former, it should be noted that the sectors most targeted by apprenticeship demand are crafts and tourism that, by tradition, are the sectors in which more German-speaking people work, but in addition to this there are also a whole set of socio-cultural reasons that offer interesting elements for thought.

Among Italian-speaking people, apprenticeship has a negative connotation. It is seen by families and by young people as a residual choice, often to be chosen as the last chance after attempting the path of the higher schools, the licei, in which still many families place their hopes for the social and economic success of their children, while apprenticeship is on a lower step. The families continue to abide by the old mind frame that holds that apprenticeship is a losing choice.

The impact of these choices on the training system (and on society) brings a set of problems to the system: an excessive attendance of the licei, without professional outcomes; a marked selection in the first years of upper secondary school (because most students begin by attempting a kind of school that is high up in the hierarchy) that generates public expenditure and struggling students; the presence in senior high schools of struggling or demotivated students, caused by their actually being better cut out for other more vocational paths, which makes it more difficult to organise teaching in the classes.

This is reinforced by the fact that for the moment direct continuation of the studies after the qualification or diploma exam is not permitted. To this regard, the legislator shall have to allow the construction of a path that, via the apprenticeship, leads to the state exam, in order to reinforce the idea of a training path that is as dignified as that performed entirely in school.

These issues are less common in the German area in which the company, the craftsman's workshop, the workplace in general are more readily perceived as places for learning. In this sense, it can be said that the German world continues, at least in part, to preserve and enhance the educational potential that has characterised the apprenticeship model for centuries, acknowledging the enterprise as a place for learning not only professional skills but also behavioural models and mental attitudes.

There are differences in South Tyrol even as regards employers. For some craftsmen, the hiring of an apprentice represents the taking on of training co-responsibilities, while for others it doesn't. Many South Tyrolean entrepreneurs are tied down by strong traditions and by the identity of their specific craft: the so-called "trade committees" (Berufsbeiräte), for example, are still very important; moreover, a training path has been created that goes beyond the professional qualifications and diplomas and leads the student to become a "master craftsman" or "professional master".

Within this specific vision of the single professions stands the dual training model, which envisages that the companies themselves (at least partly) take care of the training of the future operators in the trade.

In addition to these more cultural aspects there are others more closely linked to the architecture of the training system.

Full-time vocational training courses are training schemes that sometimes compete with the apprenticeship for the professional qualification/diploma; on the other hand, professionalising apprenticeships, by offering employers more favourable contract conditions, often overlap apprenticeships for qualification and diploma and cause a drop in hiring.

Additionally, there seem to be obstacles in creating a closer training pact among all the actors involved, and this translates into various aspects: the variable quality of training in the enterprises; the difficulty, for small companies, to guarantee the entire programme of the corporate training framework; the increase in complexity of several profiles traditionally open to apprenticeship, regarding which there should be a rise in quality and in the type of offering.

There is also a fluctuation caused by the demand for jobs, by the need of safe and constant loans, and by the fact that companies are more and more frequently asking for short-term workers (in contrast with the training structure of dual apprenticeship).

This does not prejudice the fact that this system's success factors are visible on many fronts:

- the chance to learn both in the classroom and at the workplace, an exchange between channels that generates updating and innovation, leading towards higher technical training;
- harmonisation and joint creation between local body, schools, trade associations, companies and trade unions, which allows to share the responsibility of the training but also the social responsibility of growth and improvement;
- the condition of apprentice, i.e. a young one that learns and receives compensation under a well-defined contract, with more certain hopes of employment;
- facilitations for the companies, i.e. paying wages lower than those granted to an employee;
- the distribution of training costs between public and private institutions;
- a wider range of choices for young people, with a more balanced distribution of students in the secondary cycle and a contrasting action against dropping out;
- promotion of work even in small-sized suburban companies.

These are the reasons that make the dual system essential in South Tyrol and that determine the need for its structural consolidation and updating.



Autonomous Province of Trento

Since a completely functional dual system apprenticeship scheme is not yet in place, there are few data regarding the added value of apprenticeship training and so it is necessary to take into consideration the data relating to the current VET vocational and educational training paths.

The experience of Trentino differs from the general Italian one in terms of development of vocational training and of the weight it is attributed, and the data that are derived from it seem to be guiding Trentino towards the choice of a dual system.

Indeed, Trentino students who have completed upper secondary school, and especially those that have completed the VET, find jobs rather quickly.

An analysis conducted on young people aged from 18 to 22 who have acquired a VET or upper secondary school qualification or diploma in 2010 and in 2011 shows that the students with a VET diploma, followed by those with VET qualifications, show the longest 'employed times' (permanence in an employment status) - ten and seven months, respectively – compared to those with an upper secondary school diploma who stay employed for little more than one third of the eighteen months following their school leaving exam.

The consistency of this advantage varies not only in function of the education level but, within it, in function of the specialisation. Thus, in the case of students with VET qualification, those who have majored in industrial subjects show longer 'employed times'. The same stands for VET students with a diploma, closely followed by those who have completed the fourth year in social services.

Similarly, of the students who have completed the five years of the upper secondary school, those who have attended a technical or professional education have longer 'employed times'.

This means that the students who have completed a VET path not only enter the world of employment sooner, at least in the initial phases of their employment career, but also have, on average, a competitive advantage on those who have completed upper secondary school, even in terms of number of months spent in the employed status.

As regards the quality of the employment obtained, the probability of carrying out a qualified task is higher for VET and technical diploma holders.

The probability of finding qualified jobs of a manual kind is very high among those coming from VET, (almost) independently from the duration of the course of studies attended, and rather low among those coming from the upper secondary school cycle. The probability of carrying out non-manual qualified jobs, as well as a very low risk of finding themselves in manual and low-pay jobs, is concentrated solely on the educational diploma holders. In this case, the effect of the type of studies followed seems almost negligible.

Finally, it is reasonable to state that, in Trentino, upper secondary school final qualifications seem to protect from the danger of ending up with a low profile job.

VET still provides a better chance of finding a job. Despite the current economic crisis that obviously has also reduced the hiring of young people exiting from this system, the employment ratio 18 months after the final exam for these subjects amounts to 73%, of which 70% are coherently employed. In the same period of time, the employment ratio of young people with a 4-year diploma amounts to 85%, of which 76% are coherently employed.

These data can lead us only to theorise on which could be the strong points and the weaknesses of an implementation of the dual system. Below is a tentative summary.



Based on the experience of other nations, the most common expectation is that the implementation of a dual system for apprenticeship training for the achievement of the 3-year qualification and of the 4-year diploma can:

- help young people holding formal qualifications to access the labour market;
- contribute in reducing the number of drop-outs after the mandatory school cycle, thus expanding the young people's range of choices.

In particular, in Trentino the advantages would be felt on three fronts: young population, enterprises and the government.

As regards the young, the dual system could be the right occasion for:

- familiarising with the entrepreneurial world via a real employment relationship;
- learn transversal technical and operational skills in a context that is different from school and put to the test their actual capabilities and inclinations;
- facilitate and reduce the time for access to the labour market;
- gain income already during training;
- obtain a formal qualification identical to that of full-time path attendees, while working.

The enterprises could:

- train the young people according to their own needs;
- cut down on hiring costs;
- acquire new and updated skills (e.g.: computer science, languages, etc.) that are taught in school and that can benefit the company.

As regards the government, this transition could lead to:

- a reduction in vocational training costs charged to the national budget compared to a full-time course;
- prompt adjustment of the training offer based on market demand;
- active involvement of employer associations and trade unions.

The greatest disadvantages, instead, could be those linked mainly to the difficulty in finding companies to hire all the young people potentially interested in apprenticeships; over the medium term, the risk of a lower chance of vertical mobility and of progression in a professional career only with higher formal qualifications (from qualification to diploma to higher training and universities).

For the introduction of the dual system into the VET of Trentino to be successful, it is necessary to work on diversified fronts.

First of all, a cultural change must occur so as to dampen the contrast, as well as the stereotypes, that place the culture of labour and the culture of knowledge on two opposite fronts, the latter clearly excelling over the former. This aspect slows down the development of the attractiveness of VET in general and obviously of apprenticeship in particular.

A change of this kind would imply the adoption of measures for reinforcing the partnerships between training, enterprises and territory along the following lines:

- cooperation between trade unions, industrial associations and provincial authorities to ensure the feasibility of compliance with the quality standards in training and final exams;

measures to encourage enterprises to take on the apprentice-student and take in charge their workplace training;

commitment by the enterprises to support training, even in small-sized companies;

verification of the other forms of facilitated hiring so as to avoid overlapping/placing out in apprenticeships for qualification;

alignment of starting times of workplace training and classroom training;

targeted promotion with companies and young people, and forms of orientation starting from the first year of VET;

partnership between potential hiring companies and training institutions, where the latter are fundamental players in matching students with companies;

definition of training contents, also for integration of workplace training with classroom training.

Poland

Poland is developing strategies and programmes for the modernisation not only of vocational training but of the entire education system. Difficulties, in fact, are found transversally in several sectors.

A first major issue concerns the relatively low percentage of students who have gained a diploma in all types of secondary school: considering the data for the year 2012, in the conclusive session of the study cycle, only 62.7% passed the post-secondary school exam, 67.6% the secondary technical school exam and 76.7% the basic professional school exam.

Another problem concerns the fact that the network of professional schools in Pomerania operates in a labour market that is strongly limited to local businesses. The resulting apprenticeship does not offer training opportunities for a market that is changing quickly, and the skills on which the companies are focusing are limited, without considering the need to be versatile, to seek new knowledge, to gain the characteristics of speed and efficiency in adapting that today are considered essential.

As regards the training paths, according to a survey conducted among employers, the changes in training regulations should include the addition of mandatory traineeships/internships, the increase in number of practical lessons compared to theoretical lessons, the adjustment of the superior study curricula to the needs of the local labour market, and finally, the modernisation of the training methods. As regards the skills, the employers express the need to develop the soft skills in degree holders and languages and entrepreneurial skills in young people.

Overall, the actions to be implemented regard:

- the boosting of cooperation between schools, higher education institutes, employment services and employers;
- the creation of a platform for the exchange of the results of any research and analyses conducted by research institutes, schools, labour market institutions and employers;
- the creation – together with employers – of spaces for the professional development of teachers involved in the supervision of professional education and apprenticeship as regards modern technologies and materials;
- the development and implementation of a model for cooperation between professional schools and employers;
- the appointment of programme committees for professional schools;
- the sensitization and social responsabilization of employers and companies concerning the quality of education;



the increase in the number of student traineeship vacancies;
the assignment of greater importance to specialised apprenticeship so as to increase the specialist skills of degree holders;
the offer of training to companies too, so as to increase their competitiveness in a changing and highly globalised market.