

Dual vocational education and training systems in Europe facing similar challenges

Approaches towards reform in Austria and Denmark

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The aim of the European Erasmus+ Project “Apprenticeship Toolbox” was to present dual training systems in Europe. Within the scope of the project, it became clear that these systems are facing similar challenges. This article presents the challenges and approaches towards reform developed in Austria and Denmark.

Background to the project

“A dual training system is characterised by a combination of company-based and school-based learning which is aligned to the needs of the labour market in a particular way and which leads to qualifications in nationally recognised training occupations” (KREKEL/WALDEN 2016, p. 55).

The comparative representation of dual training systems within the scope of the Erasmus+ Project “Apprenticeship Toolbox” (cf. Information Box) made it clear that all five systems are successful in terms of performance, which is frequently measured against the low unemployment rate of those completing qualifications. Nevertheless, the systems continue to face a series of specific challenges if they

are to remain competitive in future. The challenges and attendant modernisation strategies will be outlined below using Austria and Denmark as examples.

Challenges for VET in the two countries

Although the vocational education and training (VET) systems in Austria and Denmark are successful, they are confronted with a series of challenges that are very similar to those faced in Germany. The particular challenges being experienced by the Austrian system of vocational education and training are as follows:

- Decline in the number of companies providing training and in the number of trainees, resulting in a shortage of skilled workers,
- a youth unemployment rate that is continuously displaying a slight rise,
- integration of young people from a migrant background,
- a high drop-out rate in dual training.

The particular challenges in the Danish VET system include the following:

- Access to higher education (permeability),
- equivalence of vocational education and training and higher education (“parity of esteem”),
- shortage of company-based training places,
- improved linking of VET with the needs of the labour market,
- the topic of inclusion.

Approaches towards reform

Reforms in Austria are taking place within the context of falling demographics and an increase in drop-out rates. Competition between initial education and training and (higher vocational) schools to secure the services of higher ability young people is proving to be fierce. Another aspect is greater concentration of training activities at larger companies (cf. DORNMAYR/NOWAK 2016). Against this background, the measures instigated to increase the supply of apprenticeships encompass the development of integra-

Apprenticeship toolbox

The aim of the project is to present the core characteristics of dual training systems, primarily in Denmark, Austria, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany, and to make this information available online.

The project pursued an exploratory approach, and this resulted in the selection of seven categories to act as a grid for the description of the dual training systems. The objectives of policy learning and policy sharing were operationalised within the framework of European workshops. All national working groups from the ministries and institutes responsible subsequently prepared the information for presentation in the Toolbox.

The project was conducted between 2014 and 2016 with the involvement of BIBB and under the lead management of the Danish Ministry of Education. It was co-funded by the European Commission.

For further information, please visit:
www.apprenticeship-toolbox.eu

tive VET¹, financial incentives for companies to take part in training (funding for training contracts) and the funding of inter-company apprentice training programmes². In 2015 and 2016, the Austrian Government introduced three new elements into the educational and vocational education and training system. Attendance at school or participation in training was made mandatory up until the age of 18. Quality management and systematic support and guidance for young people in training were put on a firmer footing within the Berufsausbildungsgesetz (BAG) [Austrian Vocational Training Act]. A number of programmes were introduced with the aim of achieving better transition to vocational education and training. These include the programme “Coaching and guidance for apprentices and companies providing training”, measures to prepare young people for entry to VET (e.g. vocational orientation, second chance acquisition of the lower secondary school leaving certificate, management of the transition from school to work) and early stage support for young people at the interface between school and employment (information provision from the Austrian Labour Market Service, production schools, coaching for young people etc.) (cf. www.apprenticeship-toolbox.eu; BMWFW 2016).

In Denmark, reforms comprise improved vocational orientation and the development of hybrid training provision (so-called combination models of full-time school-based and company-based training) with the aim of increasing permeability within the educational system. The EUX Model combines vocational training with upper secondary education (general higher education entrance qualification). This was introduced in 2010 and has been in brisk demand, especially since the system reform in 2015. The Danish Government is seeking to counter the decline in company-based training places by launching new financing models. Companies providing training receive funding from the so-called Employer Reimbursement Fund for the period in which trainees are attending school. This fund is also used to finance activities to foster company willingness to provide training (cf. KUCZERA 2017). Minimum marks for admission to training have been introduced in order to avoid drop-outs. A further innovation took place in 2013 with the introduction of training centres (“praktikcentre”) with

a view to compensating for the lack of companies providing training. These are very similar to the inter-company training centres which exist in Germany. Reforms are evaluated in formative terms via an analysis of the satisfaction levels of trainees and companies providing training. The relevant survey also includes the relationship between companies providing training and vocational schools (cf. www.apprenticeship-toolbox.eu; HANF 2012; JØRGENSEN 2015).

Reform approaches in four main directions

The reform approaches merely outlined here allow four main directions to be identified:

1. Change in the relationship between the two learning venues (vocational school and company)
2. Measures to increase participation in training and improve the companies' ability to provide training
3. Change in the interlinking of dual training with general or academic education (permeability, lifelong learning)
4. Strengthening of quality assurance

Despite different emphases in the vocational education and training systems, the modernisation strategies exhibit similarities with German programmes such as JOBSTARTER, the inter-company training centres or vocational orientation measures. For this reason, ongoing networking on the effects and successes of the relevant reform measures appears useful in order to learn from and with one another on the basis of best practice examples. It would also be conceivable to expand this networking with regard to future challenges such as the integration of refugees or the new requirements arising in the wake of digitalisation. ◀

Literature

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¹ The term “Integrative vocational education and training” has been in use since 2003 and designates VET provision for disadvantaged young people. Within the framework of the BAG reform of 2015, such training continues pursuant to Section 8 b BAG (extension of apprenticeship period or partial training) (cf. DORNMAYR/NOWAK 2016).

² Inter-company apprentice training encompasses training measures at training institutions under a training contract (the contract is concluded for the whole of the period of the apprenticeship). It also includes training programmes that take place within the scope of a cooperation agreement between training institutions and companies providing practical training under a training contract, which is shorter than the whole of the apprenticeship period (cf. DORNMAYR/NOWAK 2016).