

Slovakia - balancing general and vocational components in Slovak secondary VET

Linking VET schools with the world of work to meet labour market needs is a long-term challenge for education and training in Slovakia.

The 2015 Act on VET introducing a Slovak form of dual VET allowed companies to recruit directly lower secondary graduates for initial VET programmes, meaning that the following streams are legislatively supported:

- a strictly school-based stream offering practical training in school workshops;
- a mixed school-based system, within which practical training can be delivered by companies specified by an institutional contract between a school and a company;
- dual stream, based on individual learning contracts between lower secondary graduates (their parents) and companies on provision of practical training under the responsibility of the company.

The third stream has allowed adjusting of volume and learning outcomes of practical training to company needs since 2015/16. Different from dual VET in some other countries, contracted individuals are not employees of a company but regular learners. Although no future employment contract is explicitly envisaged by law, agreement on employment in the company, or at least in the sector, is expected.

Dual VET has been created with direct participation of employer representatives. In cooperation with private schools, it can help make VET even more attractive. The private VET school (ssosh.sk) run by a steel making and processing company Železiarne Podbrezová is the first ‘company’ VET school in Slovakia.

In September 2016, over 80 learners will enrol in the dual VET programme in the private VET school of Volkswagen Slovakia and Matador Holding (sk.volkswagen.sk/sk/dualna-akademia.html) located next to the Volkswagen car-assembly plant. This school will serve as a centre of automotive VET (www.sosaba.sk). It will benefit from state incentives introduced by the new act (see cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/slovakia-new-vocational-education-and-training-vet-act-adopted) along with EUR 9 million investments in equipment and from the German dual VET curricula.

This creates challenges for further development of education and training systems in Slovakia. Volkswagen representatives have announced a 70% share of practical training in the company, a model very suitable for training of learners expected to be employed in the expanding Volkswagen Slovakia plant and the automotive sector as a whole. However, it is not really possible to offer general and theoretical education needed for a ‘maturita’ school leaving certificate, permitting progress into higher education, within the remaining 30% of available time for general and theoretical education in school.

Cooperation in further reform is needed rather than simple criticism of VET schools for offering ‘too many’ and ‘cheap’ maturita certificates:

- instruments for validation of non-formal and informal learning (and experiential learning) should be legislatively better supported and subsequently put in place;

- an upward career trajectory for ‘apprentices’ up to formal higher education, focused on specialised knowledge, skills and competences, should be established.

A new trajectory should be considered, complementary to the traditional upward ones that are based on a broad general education component within all upper secondary programmes. A ‘VET maturita’ school leaving certificate and a ‘licenced master (of crafts)’ are the first two steps of necessary change supported by amended legislation.

A licenced master should be institutionalised as a qualification equivalent to a level of tertiary bachelor studies and/or open the door to the validation at labour market oriented tertiary bachelor studies.

VET schools with a strong share of practical training could offer a VET maturita, certifying a balanced mixture of key competences and specialised VET knowledge, skills and competences corresponding to labour market needs, but also permitting entry to specialised higher education career.

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