

Slovakia - How to get more young people into VET

A decline in attractiveness of secondary IVET studies and dissatisfaction of employers with graduate supply has led to a radical, yet disputed intervention by the government. Stricter rules for secondary school admission were approved by the parliament by an amendment to the Act on VET. A grade point average in grade 8 and the first half of grade 9 of lower secondary school was introduced as a regulating indicator valid from the 2014/15 school year.

The average mark 2.0 or better is prescribed for entering grammar schools and 2.75 or better for ISCED 3A VET programmes. Lower secondary school graduates with an average mark higher than 2.75 can only apply for ISCED 3C programmes. A five-point scale with 1 as excellent and 5 as fail is used in Slovakia.

Further, to prevent provision of study programmes not required by the labour market, self-governing regions were given the right to regulate provision of new classes in all secondary schools regardless of ownership.

Below are some data explaining why some business representatives welcomed this measure:

The number of secondary VET graduates declined by 80%, while the number of general education graduates jumped 180% in 2011 compared to 1989. Moreover, a formerly very strong ISCED 3C stream shrank to 20.6% of all graduates in 2011/12 (only 9 856 of 47 897 students). In addition, 4 193 people graduated in the same year from two-year ISCED 3A follow-up studies designed for graduates from ISCED 3C programmes.

All this indicates an unfavourably low supply of ISCED 3C graduates for industry in general and in particular for its strong assembly-based component predominantly interested in ISCED 3C graduates.

The future will show whether expectations of employers will be met. The following can however be forecast:

First, ISCED 3A follow-up studies will become even more attractive as a consequence of this measure and must become regulated too in the spirit of the new regulation of access to ISCED 3A programmes.

Second, this kind of regulation can harm IVET's status and increase the status of general education.

Third, fighting for marks could emerge in lower secondary schools harming the learning environment.

For sure, current unsound conditions in delivery of ISCED 3A secondary programmes call for intervention. A more sustainable solution can be achieved from improved career guidance and counselling and from fiscal incentives for trainees and businesses engaged in IVET.

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