

Slovakia's first year of dual VET: Is the glass half empty or half full?

Adoption of the law on vocational education and training (VET) in March 2015 enabled the first generation of students to enter 'dual VET' in the school year 2015/16.

Initial data show that 422 individual contracts between students and companies were signed within 89 umbrella contracts made between companies and 31 VET schools.

Training is delivered in certified training centres. Analysis of training place demand and supply is shown in Table 1. In contrast to Austria or Germany, where young people have to find a place in a company, companies in Slovakia have to offer training places to young people who participate in VET programmes. Companies are free to find individuals and sign training contracts with them. However, these individual contracts must be complemented by a contract between the company and the relevant VET school which describes how they cooperate.

Table 1 Demand and supply of training places by field of study, for the school year 2015/16

Field of study	Number of places offered by companies	Number of individual contracts signed	%
Engineering and other metal processing	900*	280 ⁺	31.1
Electrical engineering	251**	89 ⁺⁺	35.5
Textile and clothing	24	0	0.0
Wood processing	69	23	33.3
Printing and media	30	0	0.0
Building, geodesy and cartography	58	9	15.5
Agriculture and forestry and rural development	7	0	0.0
Economics and organisation, retail and services	99	21	21.2
Total	1 438	422	29.3

Source: State Institute of Vocational Education; 4 September 2015

NB: * out of which 377 places for mechanics - machine setters and 295 places for car mechanics;

** out of which 90 places for computing systems and 126 places for mechanics - mechatronic technicians; + out of which 183 places for mechanics - machine setters and 46 places for car mechanics; ++ out of which 30 places for computing systems and 59 places for mechanics - mechatronic technicians.

Figures show that companies' interest significantly exceeds the number of individual contracts concluded. Out of 1438 training places on offer since September 2015, fewer than one third were contracted. Highest demand was in mechanical engineering, particularly for machine setters, car mechanics and mechatronic technicians; also, in electrical engineering with the highest interest for computing systems specialists. Shares of training contracts in these fields were 48.5%, 15.6%, 46.8%, and 33.3%, respectively.

Data analyses show that the programmes leading to a 'maturita' school leaving certificate, i.e. qualifications that grant higher education access, are more attractive than those leading to an apprenticeship certificate (Table 2).

Table 2 Demand and supply of training places by programmes/qualification level, for the school year 2015/16

ISCED level (qualifications)	Training places offered by companies		Individual contracts*		S/D matching
	Number	%	Number	%	%
353 (CoA)	596	41.4	102	24.2	17.1
354 (MSLC+ CoA)	752	52.3	290	68.7	38.6
354 (MSLC)	0	0	0	0	0
554 (AD)	90	6.3	30	7.1	33.3
Total	1 438	100	422	100	29.3

Source: State Institute of Vocational Education, table by authors.

NB: CoA – certificate of apprenticeship; MSLC – matura school leaving certificate; AD – absolutorium diploma.

* Contracts signed as of 4 September 2015; minor changes in numbers of contracts after 4 September 2015 are not excluded.

The figures prompted a vivid debate, with some arguing that match between demand and supply is too low. Others see these figures as positive, particularly considering the short preparatory time since the adoption of the VET act in March 2015 and the novelty of the concept.

It seems a waste to argue if the glass is half empty or half full. In order to support dual VET in the school year 2016/17, following actions will be taken:

- promotion of dual VET by companies, including meetings with lower secondary students and their parents;
- improving cooperation between VET schools and training companies.

The quality of practical training offered by companies, as well as provision of attractive working positions, will become crucial for the success of dual VET. The importance of a feedback loop within a well-balanced quality assurance model for company provision of practical training can never be stressed enough

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