



Mutual Learning Programme-Learning Exchange

'Dual apprenticeships: Qualifications and labour market needs'

5-6 September 2013, Berlin

Participating countries:

Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal

The Learning Exchange on '*Dual apprenticeships: Qualifications and labour market needs*' took place on 5-6 September 2013 in Berlin. The meeting was attended by representatives of Ministries of Employment, Social Affairs and Education, Public Employment Services and national representations in Germany from the host country, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal as well as guest speakers connected with key institutions in the delivery of the German dual system. The attending countries are all in the process of developing for the first time or enhancing dual training systems, so the Learning Exchange was therefore considered to be particularly timely. The aim of the meeting was to discuss systems to match qualifications to labour market needs; providing vocational orientation and guidance to pupils and students and the setting up a regular revision of curricula for vocational training.

The importance of mechanisms to forecast future labour and skills supply and demand was underlined. This can take place at the national, regional or local level and cover the whole economy, particular sectors and indeed occupations. Skills forecasting in the context of increased European and transnational mobility provides an additional challenge as well as an opportunity. The discussion demonstrated that various challenges are faced by national systems in obtaining reliable data to feed such mechanisms and more information was sought, particularly by countries with a governance structure characterised by significant regional autonomy on how such issues might be addressed. Vocational orientation has an important role to play in providing young people with information on all the potential training and career options available. This should begin in school and the offer of guidance via various channels (face to face, multi-media) should be considered to meet the needs of young people. PES play an important role not only in vocational guidance but also in the delivery of effective matching systems. Suitable systems to assess the skills, capacities and requirements of young people to the needs of employers need to be in place. Particular efforts are required to assist young people unable to find training placements (e.g. by reducing school drop out, helping them to tackle educational deficits or other challenges and encouraging employers to offer opportunities for these young people). The support mechanisms in place for disadvantaged young people in Germany were of particular interest to the countries participating in the Learning Exchange.

Training in a dual system or similar arrangement combining school based instruction with practical work experience has been demonstrated as an effective way to smooth transitions from school into the labour market. Countries with strong and highly valued dual systems have demonstrated significantly lower youth employment challenges during the crisis. The difficulties in introducing such a system were recognised and the following were seen to be particularly important:

- High valorisation of the vocational pathway by young people, their parents, employers and wider society;
- Strong engagement and buy in of core stakeholders into curricula setting, regular updating, delivery and control of the system;
- Development of national curricula recognised at national level (and beyond);
- Effective combination of theoretical training and 'real world' work experience;
- Strong process of quality control and accreditation of training and trainers.



Stakeholders such as Chambers of Commerce and Industry and other sectoral representatives can play a critical role in this process.

It was acknowledged that engagement of employers in dual training needs to be improved in all participating countries. This can be done by demonstrating the value to the business of training apprentices, both in terms of their productivity and opportunities to prevent future skill shortages and reduce recruitment and retention costs. Particular support may be required for SMEs who may find it more difficult to offer qualified trainers or offer all aspects of a required curriculum. Success in this has been achieved through the establishment of networks of companies, trainee exchanges and elements of supra-company training in specially designed workshops.

Finally issues around trainee mobility and the mutual recognition of qualifications were also discussed at the Learning Exchange and interest was expressed in further exchange on all the issues indicated above.