



# Implementation of dual vocational education and training in Slovakia: first assessments

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## Description

*In order to improve the labour market prospects of young graduates, a dual education system was introduced in 2015 in Slovakia, with the first 422 students entering the system in the school year 2015/2016. Dual education is based on collaboration between secondary vocational schools and companies, with the aim to provide practical learning.*

Improving the match between skills supply and labour force demand represents one of the key challenges for building inclusive labour markets. The situation of young people warrants special attention in this respect. In Slovakia, the unemployment rate of persons aged 15–24 years was 26.5% in 2015 as opposed to 20.4% for the EU average. The long-term unemployment rate for this age group reached 14.4% in 2015, compared to 6.5% for the EU-28. Persons below the age of 25 accounted for 15.5% of the total number of registered jobseekers at the end of 2015. Despite recent positive trends, characterised by decreasing unemployment rates, the vulnerable position of young people in the labour market persists.

In view of this context, a series of actions has been taken, most under the umbrella of the “Youth Guarantee” scheme. In addition, in order to improve the connection between vocational education and training (VET) and the changing content of jobs, and in order to support transition from school to work, a dual vocational education and training system was introduced in 2015.

Dual VET is based on cooperation between secondary vocational schools and companies. Companies can become involved in VET, taking full responsibility for organising practical, work-based learning. Cooperation between schools and companies has been in place for several years, using school-based VET

where practical training was carried out in companies. But it is the adoption of the new Act on Vocational Education and Training in March 2015 (in force since April 2015) that established an official nation-wide framework for dual education. Dual education should enhance pupils’ practical skills, increase their contact with the real world of work and help employers to prepare the future workforce in accordance with their current technologies and production facilities.

Within the dual education system, the role of employers has been reinforced. They are fully responsible for organising practical training, its content and quality. They are also involved in the creation of the school curricula, which are prepared in close collaboration with the associations of employers and their chambers. Apart from benefits related to the availability of a greater skilled workforce in the near future, employers may benefit from fiscal incentives which take the form of tax exemptions.

Companies offer practical training in certified training centres (certified by employers’ associations) based on a contract signed with secondary schools. The contract defines the form and place of training, its timetable, number of pupils involved, financial and material provision, etc. A further “apprenticeship” contract between the employer and the pupil (his/her legal representative) must also be signed.

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In addition to improving skills and competencies and obtaining practical experience at real workplaces, there are financial incentives for pupils to take part in the dual education system. First, pupils engaged in so-called "productive work" are entitled to a financial reward ranging from 50 to 100 % of the hourly minimum wage. Secondly, a motivation scholarship is offered to pupils who take part in fields with a shortage of workers (such as electro-mechanics, glass industry or chemical production). The amount of the motivation scholarship varies according to school results. Thirdly, pupils may benefit from a company scholarship, which is paid by the employer itself.

The first wave of students entered dual education in the school year 2015/2016. There were 89 contracts between companies and VET schools, involving 422 contracts with pupils. The number of places offered by companies (1 438) was much higher than the number of students who took part in the dual education (Vantúch & Jelínková, 2016). Training in electrical engineering, wood processing and engineering and other metal processing was most in demand. In contrast, other sectors (textile and clothing sector, printing and media, agriculture and rural development) did not attract the interest of pupils. The attractiveness of the places depends, inter alia, on the type of certificate which can be obtained. Programmes with higher-level certificates (i.e. certificates which allow access to higher education) are more attractive (Vantúch & Jelínková, 2016).

## Outlook & Commentary

The first year of performance shows rather less interest among pupils and their parents in the programmes offered by companies. Several factors are at play. First, more time is needed to raise awareness of existing opportunities. The Act came into force in April 2015 and the first students entered the system in September 2015. Secondly, the low expectations of pupils (and their parents) in relation to education itself may contribute to a lower use of the programmes. Here, more efforts have to be made to demonstrate the advantages and benefits of participation to pupils and their parents. This issue is well recognised by experts and the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2016). It holds true also for the companies, in order to increase their participation and extend the existing offer.

The quality of practical training should be monitored and evaluated carefully, in close cooperation between schools, companies and employers' associations. Opportunities for continual professional development for trainers and teachers should be systematically supported. To support the social inclusion dimension of the programmes, the sectors and types of work should be carefully selected in order to promote opportunities for pupils to enter the labour market.

## Further reading

Act no. 61/2015 on Vocational Education and Training and on amendments and supplements to other laws:

<https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/9244.pdf>

Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic: Introduction of Elements of Dual VET in the Slovak Republic. Review of Slovak Legislation and VET Pilot Schemes. Bratislava, 2016.

Vantúch, J. & Jelínková, D.: Slovakia's first year of dual VET: is the glass half empty or half full? CEDEFOP ReferNet, 2016:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/it/new-s-and-press/news/slovakias-first-year-dual-vet-glass-half-empty-or-half-full>

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