

Summary of Henri Prévost's (2004) "International Vocational Training", Institute Reports, Paris, Institut de l'entreprise.

Guiding Students Toward Vocational Training

In most countries, the percentage of students in vocational degree programmes has been on the decline. However, elsewhere, they are by no means hurt by the same image problems as in France, to the extent that such a subjective factor can be appraised.

In a number of countries, vocational education plays a very minor role. In the United States, Canada or Japan, nearly three-fourths of the young population choose general degree programmes. In Australia and Canada, nearly all of the young people head for general education during upper secondary school. In the United States, however, general degree students often study a few vocational subjects; 97% of secondary school graduates, for instance, had taken at least one vocational subject in 1992, even though only 24% of those could be referred to as having gone through vocational training (i.e., having earned at least three credits in a single vocational field).

In Germany, two-thirds of the students who choose to carry their secondary education beyond mandatory schooling requirements do so in vocational training, mainly under the *dual system* (apprenticeship). There, vocational training paves the way for further studies, in particular in *Fachschule*, which prepare students to work in middle management.

In Denmark, too, apprentices can continue their studies up into higher education, without any trouble. Moreover, it should be emphasised that the Danish apprentices can try out several fields of training before settling on one in particular, though few of them actually change their field.

The decrease in the number of fields of training reported in a number of countries is probably one of the factors making it easier to guide students, as it allows them to choose a profession gradually and in a well-informed manner.

The Place of Apprenticeship and Training Conditions

- The place of apprenticeship varies noticeably from country to country

60% of young people in Switzerland and around 40% in Austria and Denmark go through apprenticeship as part of their training. In Germany, as was emphasised earlier, the system also continues to reflect the dominant role of apprenticeship in initial vocational training. In Switzerland, the percentage of young people who have been through vocational training during upper secondary school is relatively stable, between 74% and 80%. Of those, 85% are in apprenticeship programmes.

In Norway, measures to revive the apprenticeship system have been ongoing since 1994, with a model involving two years of full-time education and two years in an enterprise, as well as a decrease in compensation, from 80% to 50% of the pay offered to qualified workers. Around one-fourth of the young people who enter upper secondary education choose apprenticeship programmes.

Sweden offers the interesting and unique feature of having done away with apprenticeships as a form of vocational training in 1970, replacing it with traditional school education. Since 1998, a "new modern apprenticeship system" has been set up. The apprentices are not paid and their progress continues to be tracked by the schooling institution, which ensures that they are exposed to the same curriculum as students in the school degree programme. The main difference lies in the fact that the students spend 15% of their time in the workplace, as compared to 50% for apprentices.

In Anglo-American countries, apprenticeship programmes have traditionally played a limited role; this is particularly true in Canada and the United States, despite attempts to revive it. In the United Kingdom, the number of apprentices in industry steadily declined, between the mid-1960s to the early 1990s. In 1995, the “modern apprenticeship” system was launched with the intention of bringing young people to Level 3 qualifications and above. In 1998, 117 000 young people were involved in this form of training in England and Wales. However, the system was not a total success, as many young people exited without having earned a diploma. One of the causes behind this was the lack of classroom instruction, the training being entirely reliant on the enterprise and the structure of the programmes having limited structure.

- **Markedly Difference Deployment Conditions**

The requirements for entering apprenticeship programmes, length of the contracts and balance between work times and training times vary markedly from one country to the next and are likely one of the reasons for the success garnered by this type of training.

In Austria and Switzerland, the length of the training programmes varies from two to four years, but, most of the time, extends over a three-year period. The apprentices generally spend 70% of their apprenticeship in the enterprise and receive one-and-a-half days of classroom instruction per week.

In Germany, the length of the programme varies from one to three years, with apprentices spending 60 to 80% of their time in the enterprise, and the remainder in a learning establishment, where they follow a heavy curriculum made up of general subjects such as languages or math (accounting for 1/5 to 2/5 of class time). In-work training is organised methodically and inter-company centres exist to expose the apprentices to hands-on situations that they may not encounter in their enterprise. The apprentices receive a salary equal to 25 to 45% of a starting worker’s pay, which is sometimes less than in France, depending on the profession (25 to 78% of minimum wage). The cost of the apprenticeship programme is shared by the enterprises and the public sector, according to a simple principle: the company bears the cost of all in-company training, while the classroom instruction is funded by the public sector.

In Denmark, most apprentices first go through initial training in a vocational secondary school before they begin the apprenticeship itself. After spending the first year in secondary school, they return only for a few two- to three-week periods. The local training committee, made up of employer and employee representatives is in charge of looking at the types and number of apprenticeship training spots available in the companies. It ensures that each company is capable of providing the appropriate training and may, if necessary, ask a company to find another one to fill out the training programme in a given area. The cost-sharing system is relatively similar to that used in Germany, except that there also exists an equalisation mechanism, to make companies without apprentices bear some of the costs.

Results in Terms of Integration and Qualification

- **The positive effects of the link with the corporate world in terms of integration**

Apprenticeship countries, such as Germany and Switzerland, or those with combined programmes, such as Austria, Denmark and Norway offer more indicators of positive impacts on the training-work transition than countries where general education or school-based vocational degree programmes dominate. In contrast, the OECD deems that unsatisfactory performance indicators exist more frequently in countries where general education or school-based vocational degree programmes dominate.

Results show that the advantage offered by alternating job-study programmes in terms of mainstreaming comes, first and foremost, from integration into the workplace. To witness, Swedish studies quoted by the OECD on “cooperative” education – in which an enterprise-based training period follows a period of classroom instruction – reportedly show that, *“it cannot be determined how spending time in a professional environment actually impacts young people’s integration. Across all of Sweden’s vocational degree programmes,*

there is only a 6% difference between the employment rate of students having completed an apprenticeship and those that have not". However, "the role of part-time employment or holiday employment has a much more positive impact on a student's chances of finding work upon graduation than an apprenticeship arranged by a schooling institution".¹.

After all, countries such as the United States and Japan post good results despite the absence of apprenticeship programmes². In the United States, as in a number of other OECD countries (Australia, Denmark, Finland, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Norway, in particular), part-time work bridges the gap with the working world. Its positive impact has been confirmed by research, provided that it does not exceed a certain limit (10 hours per week)³.

The example of Japan, which was in the fore of decision-makers' minds when the vocational baccalaureate was instituted, is a distinctive one. The country stands out for its very good results in integrating young people into the job market, but offers very few opportunities for combining training and on-the-job experience. Three-fourths of the students in upper secondary school are in general education degree programmes and the vocational programmes include a great deal of general education. That young people successfully integrate the job market is the result of the very close ties that exist between the schools and the enterprise, and not the work the young people do in the enterprises.

- Integration as a lever for improving qualification levels

All of Europe's countries report comparable difficulties in absorbing students who leave programmes without qualifications. In 1997, a study commissioned by the European Commission showed that, on average, 22.5% of Europe's young people stopped their education at the lower secondary school level. France, with 13%, came in far ahead of countries like Italy (30.2%), the United Kingdom (31.4%) or even Denmark (15.4%). It is relatively frequent that a young person exit the school system before earning a diploma: "overall, in OECD countries, approximately one out of every four young people aged 20 to 24 has not completed upper secondary school"⁴. Here too, France has posted relatively good results: 82.9% of young people aged 22 had completed at least their upper secondary education in 2002, as compared to 66.8% in Denmark, 77.4% in Germany and 72.9% in Italy.

Based on this metric, apprenticeship is not a guarantee that qualification levels will improve. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the mainstreaming it fosters contributes a great deal to improvements through life-long education.

This is because a number of countries have set up mechanisms allowing those young people to subsequently earn qualifications. In the United States, for example, 44% of secondary school drop-outs earn their degree two years after the normal age, and over 60% of them end up earning it at some point in time, often through an equivalency certificate such as the *Test of General Education Development* (GED). Another mechanism that comes into play is the credit system, under which students may earn part of a diploma, even if they leave the training programme early.

In addition, it should be emphasised that the quality of coordination between the training programme and the mainstreaming policy has a significant impact on the system's effectiveness.

In Denmark, for instance, the town authorities are responsible for young people under 20 who leave school without qualifications, with the schools required to report all such individuals to the local government. The young people – whether unemployed or in a paying job – are called in and must set out an action plan intended to reintegrate them into a normal training programme. Should they refuse to participate, the town government, which also has responsibility for public subsidies, can call their benefits into question.

¹ « De la formation initiale à la vie active », [From Initial Training to the Working World], OECD; 2000.

² At least during times of growth; during economic slowdowns, employment amongst young people follows the prevailing trend, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States.

³ « De la formation initiale à la vie active », [From Initial Training to the Working World], OECD; 2000.

⁴ « De la formation initiale à la vie active », [From Initial Training to the Working World], OECD; 2000.

The towns are required to have municipal schools for young people aged 14 to 18, open in the afternoons and evenings. They offer both review courses and recreational activities. So-called production schools are open to those who began secondary education but stopped without a degree; they offer individually-designed programmes to help individuals return to secondary education.

Very similar procedures can be seen in Norway and Sweden, the system's effectiveness being ascribable to the close ties between educational policy, employment policy and labour policy. In Denmark and Sweden alike, the percentage of unemployed people ages 15 to 24 looking for their first job is the lowest in Europe's leading countries. The same countries also have the lowest long-term unemployment (over 12 months) amongst young people aged 15 to 24.

The comparative data presented above were the basis for the proposals set out to improve initial vocational training in the Observatory on Public Expenditure's recent publications.