

Vocational Education and Training in Switzerland

Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

Switzerland's highly developed VET/PET system has many strengths. In particular:

- The system is strongly employer and market driven.
- The partnership between Confederation, cantons and professional organisations works well.
- School and work-based learning are well integrated; workplace training (which Switzerland refers to as in-company training) is not too company-specific.
- Switzerland's VET/PET system is well-resourced and able to include up-to-date equipment.
- Switzerland's apprenticeship-based VET programmes pay for themselves, in the sense that benefits to most employers outweigh the costs.
- Tertiary VET is strong; there is a broad spectrum of tertiary VET offerings.
- Flexible pathways have been introduced to allow for mobility and avoid the risk of dead-ends.
- Vocational teachers and trainers, examiners and directors are well prepared.
- Quality control is ensured and national assessment procedures are in place.
- Career guidance and counselling is systematic and professional.
- Evidence is well developed and routinely used to support policy arguments.

CHALLENGES

- The global recession might have negative effects on VET, in particular the provision of apprenticeship places.
- Demographic changes with shrinking cohort numbers may sharpen competition between academic and vocational education; VET faces competition from academic tertiary education.
- Entry of international companies without a training tradition threatens the Swiss dual-track learning arrangements.
- Several equity concerns are confronting the VET system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Switzerland should accompany its justified pride in a high quality VET system with practical measures to maintain its strengths. This requires, among other matters, high quality data and analysis. Review whether the current mix of VET and academic education for young people matches labour market needs.
2. Aim to reinforce equity throughout the VET system: ensure that dropout is minimised and that those who do dropout are supported adequately; ensure common funding principles to underpin the level of subsidy granted to VET and university forms of education; and use VET to build the skills and labour force participation of women. Monitor the system closely in support of these objectives.
3. Develop a contingency plan to cope with any sharp reduction in employer willingness to provide in-company training as a result of the economic crisis.

FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET) has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

[Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Policies, Switzerland](#) (OECD, 2009) was released in April 2009 and assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of three policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs