

Executive
summary

INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF DUAL VET IN SPAIN

April 2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This deliverable is within the framework of the European Commission DG REFORM **Technical support to improve the quality of dual VET in the Spanish education system**. It analyses apprenticeship quality implementation in four European countries, namely Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland. The aim is to highlight good practices in these countries for possible transferability to Spain, rather than analysing these European apprenticeship systems in depth.

The focus is on the quality criteria included in the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (Council Recommendation 2018/C 153/01). Data are collected for all these criteria in each country analysed, gathered from reviews of apprenticeship programmes in grey and academic literature. In addition, in order to complement, confirm and expand the information collected from the literature review – where necessary – meetings and interviews with national and European stakeholders have been carried out. A total of 11 in-depth interviews have been conducted with relevant informants from public administrations and national institutions, as well as with independent experts. A template for data collection has been developed based on the 14 quality criteria of the European Framework. It has been used to structure data collection both for the desk research and for the in-depth interview phases, performed from September 2019 to May 2020.

Contextual information on the apprenticeship systems in the four countries analysed is briefly included in the report to contextualise the quality-criteria analysis performed. Information on the main characteristics and data of each system is provided.

Out of the 14 quality criteria, 10 have been selected for in-depth analysis as they might be more inspiring to the current Spanish model and more likely to be included in a future legislative reform. The selected quality criteria are analysed across the four countries in question. The following is a summary of national implementations for each one:

Apprentice's link with the company

Three of the four countries analysed have apprenticeship contracts (Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland), which set working and learning conditions. In the Netherlands, there is a contract between the school, the apprentice and the employer. The school is responsible for the contract and registers it, thus emphasising its educational dimension. In Denmark, the school approves and registers the contract, but is not a signatory. Contrarily, Portugal has a training agreement between the learner and the VET school.

Learning outcomes

Follow-up mechanisms are in place to monitor the development of the teaching and learning process, as well as the fit between apprentices' learning objectives and the work placement's learning opportunities. In Switzerland, in-company trainers monitor learner progress at regular intervals (at least every 6 months). In the Netherlands, in-company training follow-up depends on the school and the companies, and this is included in the learning agreement. In Portugal, there is an activity-roadmap form completed by the company with an evaluation of the activities developed by the apprentice. In Denmark, apprentice follow-up is done by the school through coordination and communication instruments such as teachers' regular visits to companies, a student plan, an apprentice's personal educational portfolio, and company reports on the tasks undertaken by apprentices.

Pedagogical support

In-company tutors and trainers¹ should have the necessary professional and pedagogical skills. Three of the four countries analysed have an **accreditation procedure for in-company tutors or trainers** related mainly to their qualifications, as well as labour and training skills. Denmark does not have such formal accreditation, but there are specific requirements related to qualifications and professional experience.

The four countries analysed have training courses for in-company tutors/trainers organised by different institutions, from public authorities to social partners. In Switzerland and Portugal, there is a tutor/trainer apprentice ratio establishing the maximum number of apprentices that an in-company tutor or trainer can have. In the Netherlands, this is left to the companies, though a maximum of two students per tutor is recommended.

¹ Due to the scope and goal of this report, we will not delve into existing differences between tutors and trainers in the different countries, and will use these concepts equally.

Workplace component

In Switzerland, regulations for each occupation establish in which learning venues – VET school, company or branch-course facilities – specific **learning outcomes** must be achieved. In the three other countries, the definition of learning outcomes is established in an agreement between VET schools, companies and (to an extent) apprentices.

Portugal and Switzerland hold an exam to evaluate learning outcomes achieved in in-company training. Moreover, in Switzerland labour inspectors from VET cantonal offices track the training carried out by companies. In the Netherlands, the SBB² determines whether a company is considered a stable training company.

In the Netherlands and Switzerland, at least 60% of time is spent in-company. In Denmark, time spent in-company is usually 70-80%, while in Portugal it is around 40%.

Elements of alternation are included in Danish, Portuguese and Swiss regulation.

Switzerland regulates the alternate model in each VET ordinance, by profession. Danish VET law defines VET as an alternate training, and sectoral partners at the national level determine the details of the alternate model for each programme. Portuguese regulation stipulates a few characteristics of the alternate model.

In the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland the in-company period can start in the first year of training, while in Denmark an initial school-based period must come first.

The Netherlands and Switzerland alternate on a weekly basis. Portugal allows total flexibility: Alternation can take place at the end of each school year, can be divided into small blocks throughout each training period or can be established with a weekly or monthly periodicity. Danish apprentices alternate by long-term blocks (up to one year in the companies and up to three months in school). Finally, the four countries analysed have high levels of flexibility in the alternate model (sectoral in Switzerland, by projects' specific needs in the Netherlands, taking social partners into account in Denmark).

In the four countries analysed, different kinds of **training plans** ensure that in-company learning covers a comprehensive set of practical skills and competencies required for qualification. In Switzerland, companies design internal apprenticeship training plans, and the in-company tutors/trainers design individual training plans for each apprentice. Denmark and the Netherlands involve students in the follow-up of training plans. In

2 The SBB is the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and Labour Market (the Netherlands)

addition, Denmark requires companies to submit a final, formal statement after each training block on the achievement of learning goals and tasks performed in-company.

Pay and/or compensation

Three of the four countries analysed (Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland) have established mandatory and standardised wages for apprentices. The minimum apprentice salary is established according to professional organisations (Switzerland), the minimum wage (the Netherlands) or collective bargaining (Denmark). In Denmark and Switzerland, it is progressive, increasing during the training period according to the apprentice's productivity curve.

Involvement of social partners

Beyond advisory roles, social partners play specific roles and are **co-responsible** for the apprenticeship system in three of the countries (Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland). In Switzerland, the Confederation, the cantons and professional organisations together contribute to the governance and implementation of the apprenticeship system. In the Netherlands, the SBB has the mission of coordinating this cooperation at the national level (as established by law). The SBB is organised in eight sector chambers, groups of relevant stakeholders within a specific sector working collaboratively. These are equally constituted by education and labour-market representatives. Denmark ensures dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders at the national, sectoral and local level. Sectoral employers' organisations and unions, within the national trade committees, determine the main characteristics of apprenticeship programmes. Moreover, social partners are part of the local training committees.

Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland have an advisory body established at the national level. Portugal establishes formal dialogue through sectoral councils, which are made up of business associations, unions, ministries, VET providers and experts.

Support for companies

Financial support is provided in two of the four countries analysed: Denmark and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands the most important funding arrangements for VET are nongovernmental, although there is also government funding. Many sectoral collective bargaining agreements include a levy system to finance a training and development fund, governed by the sectors' social partners. In Denmark, all public and private companies contribute a fixed annual amount to the Employers' Reimbursement System (AUB), whether they have apprentices or not.

Non-financial support is provided in the four countries analysed. In Switzerland (through cantonal offices) and the Netherlands (through the SBB), this support is holistic and helps companies promote and implement apprenticeship projects. In Denmark, companies can get support on almost everything (provided either by the VET school, the local training committee or employers' associations). In Portugal, advice for companies on apprenticeships is provided by the public employment service or by external entities.

A **recognition scheme for companies** and entities providing high-quality work placement has been identified in Switzerland (labels for companies committed to VET), the Netherlands (award for the best training company and the best practical trainer) and Portugal ('Certification as a Partner of Excellence for Aprendizagem').

Career guidance

In Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland, career guidance to students and their families is provided systematically during and after compulsory education. In Switzerland, it is provided through vocational, educational and career guidance counsellors, who have received federally recognised training. Cantonal vocational guidance offices offer individual coaching and mentoring. In the Netherlands, guidance is provided by the Service Centres on Education and Work – regional alliances between schools, VET institutions, business owners and government agencies. In Denmark, there is a fully established career guidance system that is given high priority. Different types of guidance centres (e.g. municipal youth guidance units, regional guidance centres, and online platforms) work independently from sectoral and institutional interests. In Portugal, career guidance is provided in a non-systematic way, through information, career guidance and counselling services.

Transparency

The four countries analysed have an **accreditation process for companies** willing to provide apprenticeships. Requirements are related to company infrastructure, workplace environment and available trainers. In the Netherlands, accreditation is granted by the SBB. Moreover, as with Denmark, a periodic quality check or periodic accreditation renewal is required. In Denmark, either full or partial certification may be granted.

In the four countries analysed, apprenticeship **offers are published** in a publicly available format, each format with its differences.

In all four countries analysed, there is some kind of **apprentice selection process**.

It might vary by country, but in general terms it is similar to an ordinary employee-selection process, in some cases with the participation of the training entity.

Quality assurance and graduate tracking

The four countries analysed produce **public statistics** on the transition rate from apprenticeship to employment. Moreover, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland systematically collect and publish data on several indicators of apprenticeship performance. Apprenticeship programmes are **evaluated** in these three countries. In Switzerland, an evaluation is made at least every five years. It is made by occupation and is carried out by the professional organisation responsible for the respective apprenticeship occupation. In the Netherlands, an assessment procedure can be executed when, for instance, difficulties are detected in finding an employment appropriate to apprentices' qualification. In Denmark, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) carries out systematic evaluations of apprenticeship programmes.

TOP-PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the top-priority recommendations drawn from the country and transferability analysis. To foster dual-VET quality, it would be advisable to include most of them into national regulations and/or further structural reforms. They are the following:

1. **Apprentice and company should be linked by a labour contract.** It should be **specific to dual VET**, should set working and learning conditions, and should establish apprentices' specific status. As an alternative, Spain could also reform aspects of the current training and learning contract regarding age limitations, duration, the possibility of apprentice rotation, the complexity of training-programme validation through the public employment service, and the labour implications of apprentices being deemed workers. Involving VET schools or VET education departments in the validation of training plans would facilitate the use of contracts.
2. **Compulsory training for in-company tutors or trainers** should be established by national regulation, and there should be some elements of subsequent retraining. Efforts should be made to provide this training effectively in all regions of Spain. Companies joining dual-VET programmes should have a period (two or three years, for instance) to accomplish this criterion.

3. **An accreditation procedure for in-company tutors/trainers** should be included in regulation to ensure their profiles match students' needs. It would be recommendable **few requirements, but enforcement of compliance**. These could include (some) years of significant work experience, a minimum period present in the company, as well as training in dual-VET schemes and pedagogical competences. It would also be advisable to establish a minimum of one accredited tutor/trainer per company.
4. **A tutor/trainer apprentice ratio** could be established by regulation. This would ensure sufficient time and resources for tutoring or instructing apprentices and would establish the maximum number of apprentices per trained tutors (rather than per total number of workers) at a given company. This recommendation would be linked to the previous two recommendations: Once Spain has developed mandatory training for tutors/trainers as well as the accreditation process, the ratio requirement could be introduced.
5. **There should be a standard and formal assessment of the skills apprentices acquire incompany**. This would not necessarily need to be through a single formal exam, but could consist of an apprentices' mandatory presentation of activities carried out in-company.
6. **The minimum standards of the alternate model should be regulated at the national level** (including maximum time for in-company periods). Regular contact between apprentice and VET school should be ensured during alternate periods, preferably face to face. There should be a high level of flexibility regarding the beginning of the incompany periods (mainly depending on the sector, but also according to each occupation's learning curve). If the alternate model allows long and exclusive incompany periods, follow-up mechanisms should be reinforced.
7. Simple but mandatory in-company **internal training plans**³ could be established and introduced in regulation at the national level. This could start with medium and large companies in the first implementation period and include SMEs at a second stage. Mechanisms to support SMEs should be set up, for instance, through dual-VET advisers or coaches.
8. **Mandatory and standardised retribution for apprentices should be established at the national level**. Minimum remuneration should be set, and

3 'Internal training plan' should be understood in Spain as a training plan that goes beyond the agreement between company and training centre.

flexibility could be given to sectors and companies to offer better retribution. This remuneration could be progressive based on the apprentice's in-company learning curve and proficiency.

9. **Social partners** and chambers of commerce **should be involved in apprenticeships** strengthening their roles at the decision-making level (especially from a sectoral perspective). **Social partners should play specific roles established in dual-VET policy** and should be co-responsible for them. Some examples may include tutor training, project follow-up, managing sectoral projects, managing company accreditation, skillstesting apprentices, dissemination, etc. Sectoral social partners should be consulted when defining the main characteristics of dual-VET programmes. This could include, for instance, complementary training recommendation at the sectoral level.
10. **Stakeholders beyond social partners should participate in dual-VET policy discussions.** Moreover, VET schools' organisations, as well as municipalities or regions, could advise regional or national authorities. The viewpoints of VET students should be included.
11. **A public, non-financial incentive scheme for companies should be developed** that includes in-company tutor training, specific units to support dualisation or business advisers. Specific support should also be provided to micro-companies, for instance through a professionalised body with the exclusive mission of performing these tasks. Both the training of in-company tutors and extra training offered by companies could be funded by the general Spanish training fund.
12. **Subsidies for apprentices' retributions could be provided to stimulate companies for limited periods and/or to achieve specific and strategic goals** (i.e. during an economic crisis, to stimulate an emerging sector or occupation not traditionally in dual VET, or to support micro-companies in their first or second year participating in dual VET).
13. An **accreditation process for training companies** should be regulated nationally at least defining the basic **formal requirements**. Again, few requirements should be established, but compliance should be ensured. Some kind of periodic quality check or process of accreditation renewal should be carried out. Requirements should be mainly related to the training environment and company resources. The accreditation process would be ideally integrated into a coaching process in which companies would receive advice and support at the start of the apprenticeship.

14. **A recognition of companies based on quality standards (a quality label) could be promoted.** It would be useful for companies to promote their good work in relation to apprenticeships. Moreover, it would incentivise companies to improve the quality of their training programmes since they would be aware of the requirements for such distinction.
15. **Career guidance should be introduced in regulation as a strategic element for dualVET success.** Efforts should be made to disseminate information on VET and dual-VET programmes to educational professionals, counsellors and teachers. Encouraging the involvement of guidance systems outside the education sector (employment, youth services) seems a relevant strategy too.
16. **The participation of companies in the selection process should be established in national regulation.** Selection of apprentices should be a process shared between educational centres and companies.
17. **Data on the transition rate** from apprenticeship to employment and other relevant performance indicators on apprenticeships (such as participation rates, graduation rates, dropout rates and reasons, satisfaction, and continuity of training companies) **gathered at the national level should be made public and updated on a regular basis.**
18. **A national monitoring system for dual VET which should include key indicators that are comparable at the national level,** would be a strength. It would be advisable starting with few indicators, such as participation rates, graduation rates, dropout rates and reasons, satisfaction, and continuity of training companies.
19. **An evaluation of dual-VET policy could be envisaged every few years.** This would allow to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. At the least, an evaluation should be performed for those VET programmes where mismatches are detected. This would allow for results and impact to be evaluated, and would help identify any needed and possible adjustments to dual-VET projects.

