

Modernisation of dual vocational education and training with a view to the increasing digitisation of the economy

Dual vocational education and training (dual VET, apprenticeship, apprenticeship training) plays a major role in Austria. In order to maintain the attractiveness of this educational pathway both for companies and for young people, the training contents need to keep pace with the requirements of the economy. This can only be successful if the training ordinances and curricula of part-time vocational schools are revised at regular intervals. Since 2010 more than 50 apprenticeship occupations (this is one quarter of all dual VET programmes) have either been adapted in terms of content or newly introduced.

The 2017 “apprenticeship occupation package” (*Lehrberufspaket*), which was issued in July, comprises eight modernised apprenticeships. Here the changes are the result of the increasing digitisation of the economy: the occupation “retail trade services”, for example, was extended with the specialisation “digital sales”. The trend towards Industry 4.0 is also reflected in the newly regulated apprenticeships “tyre and vulcanisation technology” and “prefabricated housing construction”, for example due to the increased use of diagnostic computers or digitally controlled production facilities for construction elements. Also the apprenticeship occupation “solar insulation technician” has been modernised because automation systems are increasingly used in this field in practice. In addition, digital skills have also been integrated into the apprenticeships “bookbinder”, “paver” and “heating, refrigeration, noise and fire protection technology”. It is planned that by 2020 another 50 apprenticeship occupations – from “glass process engineering” to “sports equipment technology” – will be adapted or newly introduced to make the apprentices and consequently the skilled workforce of tomorrow fit for digitisation.

Apprenticeship training constitutes a major part of the Austrian VET sector. But it also faces huge challenges: societal and economic framework conditions are undergoing increasingly faster changes. In a parallel development, demographic change is leading to a decline in the number of youths. Moreover, competition between the companies and upper secondary schools for the best young people is getting fiercer. Therefore it is important to maintain or increase the young people’s interest in apprenticeship training by taking various measures, such as modernising the training contents.

This can also be successful by improving the framework conditions. One relevant example is the further intensification of the youth coaching scheme, which was piloted in two Austrian provinces in 2012 and rolled out across the country in 2013. Coaches help young people as well as training companies in facing all the challenges they have to tackle in day-to-day training, with the aim of further reducing the dropout figures in particular. More efforts should also be made in apprenticeship placement. The “b.mobile – using the skilled workers’ potential” project, which was piloted in 2016, will be launched as a longer-term scheme in 2018. It is about increasing the young people’s willingness to be mobile by providing financial and personal support in order to enhance the search for apprenticeship posts and related recruitment.

More information:

Apprenticeship occupation package:

<https://www.bmfwf.gv.at/Berufsausbildung/LehrberufeInOesterreich/Seiten/Lehrberufspaket-2017.aspx> (retrieved on 28.08.2017)

Press memo on the 2017 apprenticeship occupation package:

https://www.bmfwf.gv.at/Presse/Documents/Digitalisierung_Lehre.pdf

Youth coaching: <http://www.neba.at/neba-leistungen-mob/jugendcoaching/warum-jugendcoaching> (retrieved on 28.08.2017)

“b.mobile” project: https://www.wko.at/site/fachkraeftepotenzial/b_mobile.html (retrieved on 28.08.2017)