

A decorative background graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that suggests a map of Europe.

From School to Work – How are Vocational Education, Training and Employment Related?

NIKOS GEORGIADIS
December 2014

- In July 2013 a new law (Law 4186) with an innovative approach to apprenticeship training was adopted in Greece. Apprenticeship training schemes and other forms of work-based learning are essential in order to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training and to reinforce its connection with the labour market. Quality assurance issues and a learning outcomes approach are crucial for the successful integration of EU Vocational education and training (VET) policies in the Greek education system.
- In 2012, a Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of VET was signed between the respective ministries in Germany and Greece. The tangible results of this cooperation are presented in this report and its future planning discussed.
- The impact of EU VET policies and initiatives in Greece and their relationship with other EU initiatives aimed at tackling youth unemployment have to be evaluated so that Greece can develop a coherent national policy framework, which, on one hand, addresses its particular needs and, on the other, remains compatible with the European policy framework.

Vocational Education and Training: the Policy Context in Greece

Vocational education and training (VET) in Greece is a lesser option for those who have completed compulsory education. The predominant trend remains general education as the safe pathway to tertiary education. Also, VET has a poor reputation in Greece. The provision of training is mainly school-based – with the exception of OAED and its established apprenticeship system – and its connection with the labour market disputed.

The recent reform (Law 4186/2013) introduces apprenticeship as an option and a means to tackle youth unemployment. However, the social partners remain extremely sceptical about its prospects of success in the teeth of the ongoing deregulation of the labour market. Enterprises do not seem eager to take on apprenticeships. Furthermore, a representative of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE, a workers' organisation) pointed out that VET should not be regarded as the sole means of tackling youth unemployment and has raised concerns about current apprenticeship schemes which – in his opinion – promote exploitation. The representative of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) asserted that previous VET policies were not effective and that a new approach is needed, based on a clear institutional framework based on sound principles. A representative of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE) pointed out the problematic character of evidence-based policy-making in Greece and questioned the possibility of building a minimum consensus on labour market and VET issues.

Regardless of their differing standpoints the social partners did agree on the shortcomings of the VET system and highlighted the following in particular:

Skills forecasting is needed. Skills forecasting is indispensable if Greece wants to improve skills matching between education, lifelong learning and companies' needs. Although the development of a skills need forecasting system was provided for legally in the early 2000s and organisations were established to carry out this task, an efficient skills need forecasting

system/mechanism was never developed. For the first projection, a joint-team of Greek scholars and experts with experience from abroad should be considered, to rapidly transfer skills to Greek researchers. CEDEFOP, the specialised EU agency (based in Greece) could support this project and speed it up.¹

Occupational standards/profiles: Competence-based standards are a prerequisite for outcome-based curricula and certification schemes. 203 occupational profiles have been developed and certified since 2006. However as the representative of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises admitted, they have not lived up to expectations.

Certification / accreditation: The certification of knowledge/skills/competences is essential for the transparency and reliability of qualifications. Although opinions vary between relevant stakeholders on how and by whom this responsibility should be assumed, they all argued in favour of certification.

Quality of VET providers and VET system: High quality VET provision is essential in order to raise the attractiveness of the VET system and of qualifications on offer. It is therefore essential to enhance the quality of VET provision.

Lifelong learning guidance: All prospective or current learners need guidance and counselling. Especially where apprenticeship schemes are implemented guidance is needed even more to address learning and organisational issues among both learners and enterprises. All stakeholders agreed that efforts should concentrate on guidance quality and quantity.

Lack of social dialogue: Currently, national social dialogue is confined mainly to mandatory meetings. This favours political posturing, but rarely constructive »dialogue«. Bilateral contacts between government officials and social partners are useful but not sufficient. Beyond official postures there is a strong willingness among all stakeholders to work together. Reviving social dialogue and social collaboration is of the utmost importance as no country can move forward without a minimum social and political consensus.

* This report presents conclusions drawn from a conference organised by FES under the title »School to work transition – The relationship between vocational education with training and employment«. The conference was held at CEDEFOP's premises in Thessaloniki on 13 October 2014.

1. CEDEFOP has confirmed the expression of interest by the Greek ministries of labour and education for cooperation in this field.

EU Initiatives to Promote VET and Combat Youth Unemployment

The main European initiative being discussed in Greece is the European Youth Guarantee, as this concerns one of the country's most pressing problems. However, the responsible ministries (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare) tend to avoid public statements concerning the Youth Guarantee, so there is still a lack of transparency concerning the government policies. Therefore most of the debate on the Youth Guarantee is based on the thorough analysis of Greek options using this instrument by Ioannis Cholezas (2013).²

The Youth Guarantee Initiative (which is reflected in the relevant EU Recommendation) will ensure that all young people up to 25 years of age who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) will receive a good-quality offer of employment, further education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

The peculiarities of the Greek case determine the necessary preconditions for a successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee. These peculiarities are:

- the proportion of those eligible for unemployment benefit is extremely low;
- the number of NEETs is extremely high compared with the European average;
- there is limited demand for labour;
- long transition periods from education to the labour market;
- low prestige of vocational education and of technical professions;
- rules that limit access to tertiary education;
- heterogeneity of the youth population, including native Greeks, immigrants' descendants and various

other minority groups, such as Roma, Muslims residing in Thrace and so on. These groups have different needs and aspirations which will be difficult, but not impossible, to accommodate.

- a long-standing and extensive informal labour market in Greece operating next to the official one.

It can therefore be concluded that these peculiarities require special policy and operational priority in order to implement the Youth Guarantee successfully. A strong consultation network of the relevant stakeholders needs to be set up and the operational defects of the past overcome. The funding issues should be taken into serious consideration and a funding loss prevention plan should be put in place. To quote Cholezas: »the Youth Guarantee is an excellent opportunity for Greece to rectify some long-standing problems ranging from education to labour market institutions, while dealing with youth unemployment at the same time. In order to accomplish that, though, careful preparation, planning, implementation and evaluation are needed, along with a continuous communication campaign to inform all social partners and eligible youths of the effort. Last but not least, in order for the initiative to have its full impact the expansion of the age span of those eligible should be negotiated with our European partners so as to include those under 30.«³ Another contribution to the discussion was the potential for complementarity with other funding tools, such as Erasmus. The new Erasmus facilitates the creation and function of partnerships, especially in the field of VET and work-based learning. Finally, the need to tackle uneven gender participation issues and the social bias against VET in Greece was emphasised and relevant data were presented.

OAED and the Greek apprenticeship (dual) system

A particular problem with Greek VET is the poor integration of work-based learning. In Greece, VET upper secondary schools (EPAL and EPAS) have to date offered only school-based training (practical training was offered

2. Cholezas Ioannis, Youth Guarantee in Times of Austerity: the Greek case, International Policy Analysis, November 2013, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, download: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/10316-20131118.pdf>

3. Cholezas Ioannis, Youth Guarantee in Times of Austerity: the Greek case, International Policy Analysis, November 2013, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p. 15.



on school premises),⁴ although dual training has a long tradition in Greece, implemented since the early 1950s by OAED (Manpower Employment Organization).

OAED's system is based on the German dual training system with some variations; the system is known as »Mathitia« (Μαθητεία) and is at the upper secondary level. Apprenticeship is defined as alternating training in a school and a workplace (four days a week, in the mornings, students do practical work in an enterprise, whereas in the afternoons, they attend classes at apprenticeship vocational schools). The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives a wage. At the end of their studies, trainees acquire a Specialisation Certificate. Eligible are people aged 16–23 years who have completed secondary school. Around 10,000 learners (approximately 10 per cent of the overall number of upper secondary IVET participants, 2008 data) attend Mathitia and is estimated that two-thirds⁵ find a job in the enterprises that trained them.

The transformation of EPAS into Vocational Training Schools (SEK) has forced OAED to redefine its operational planning. It is worth noting that the institution of SEK is considered a negative development by GSEVEE.

The German-Greek VET Cooperation: Developments and Future Prospects

In 2012 the German Ministry of Education and Research and the Greek Ministry of Education signed a memorandum of cooperation in the field of VET. The aim was to maximise efforts to develop an apprenticeship system in Greece. This cooperation is supported further by the Greek-German Assembly (DGV), which in a joint declaration expresses its commitment to tackling the problem of youth unemployment and favours the development of an apprenticeship system to this end. The tangible effects of this cooperation were five

4. The recent law (4186/2013) institutes the development of apprenticeships in the formal and non-formal VET system. EPAS schools, which previously were part of the formal education system, are now considered to provide non-formal learning and have been renamed SEK (Vocational Training Schools). According to the Law they will offer three-year periods of study. A transition period which ends in 2016 is foreseen for EPAS Mathitias (belonging to OAED). The past tense in the paper is used in order to describe the situation as it was. Although the law established apprenticeships in 2013, it has not been implemented so far.

5. It must be pointed out that OAED provides only estimates. There is no systematic collection of data or publicly accessible reports that confirm these estimations.

feasibility studies, coordinated by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), on various sectors in which dual training and bilateral cooperation could be enhanced in the future. At the conference one of the feasibility studies and two pilot projects were presented and are analysed in the following sections.

Feasibility Study on the Renewable Energy Sector and Energy Efficiency for Buildings

Greece has national resources that could provide the framework for economic development of renewable sources of energy and energy efficiency for the construction sector. At present only 5 per cent of the domestic energy supply is covered by renewable sources sun and wind. Development of renewable sources and improvement of energy efficiency in buildings have been identified as key areas that could boost employment.

This feasibility study was undertaken in partnership with the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EBEA) and the Frankfurt am Main Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK), which provided the overall support.

The following working packages were identified:

- determination of relevant enterprise needs in apprenticeships and their willingness to provide training;
- keeping a record of training facilities and specialised trainers;
- keeping a record of and evaluating relevant Greek legislation;
- the role of Greek Chambers;
- determination of the training needs of teachers, workplace trainers and Chambers executives;
- creation of a cooperative training implementation plan.

As a result of the project 23 apprenticeships were placed and demand for apprenticeship schemes recorded in electric installation, thermohydraulics and construction.

Moreover, the crucial role of Greek Chambers in the future development of apprenticeship training was identified. The Greek Chambers could imitate the German example and play a vital role in all aspects of apprenticeship training. Moreover, as a result of the project, a network with great potential was created. However, this project has only laid the foundations for enhanced future cooperation. Its continuation is subject to the resolution of funding issues.

Pilot Projects

As a result of the bilateral Memorandum of Cooperation in VET, two pilot projects aiming to transfer German dual training know-how to the Greek VET were started. The first, known as Mendi (Mentoring Dual Training) focuses on Tourism, is funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research and is an initiative of the Greek-German Chamber. For its implementation, OAED, the Greek Ministry of Tourism, the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, Dekra Akademie, TUI and Osnabrück University (scientific project supervisor) work closely together. One of the main features of the project is that apprenticeship fees are paid exclusively by the employers (and are not partly subsidised by the Greek state, as has been the case so far). The second one, known as VETnet, is in its initial phase, so no concrete results could be presented. However, the Greek-German Chamber will again play a decisive role in the future implementation of the project.

Although these initiatives can be seen as a positive development in Greek-German cooperation in VET, during the discussion several reservations and suspicions were expressed. Some questioned the good intentions of the German involvement and attributed it to the German labour market's need for skilled workers. Others doubted the potential for successful integration of dual training in the Greek environment. Some of these reservations are based on real concerns, related mainly to the absence of an official, standardised training content for on-the-job-learning and the limited quality control of the training provided. Another issue is the poor dissemination of the positive results of potential and already existing apprenticeship training schemes. Funding issues need to be taken seriously and all sides expressed their deepest concerns about this, as the future funding of the VET cooperation schemes remains uncertain.

Evaluation of the Recent Legal Framework

The debate on the recently adopted legal framework (law 4186/2013) »Restructuring of secondary education and other provisions«, focuses, at least within the teaching community, on infrastructure problems and not on the law as such. This of course raises overall concerns about social dialogue and the building up of a consensus before legislation and gives the impression (expressed by all participants) that, on one hand, the law was a product of limited (if any) consultation between the relevant stakeholders and the Ministry of Education and, on the other hand, that no scientific or real evidence was taken into account in the making of the law. As a result, almost all participants questioned the existence of a solid implementation plan and expressed their reservations about its realisation. However, it is important to say that the introduction of apprenticeships in the formal VET system was generally considered a positive development (one participant called it »the last chance for the Greek VET system«). The reservations expressed were not concentrated on apprenticeships as such, but mostly on the capacity of the system and its ability to offer sufficient apprenticeships. In this respect other forms of work-based learning should also be considered as complementary to the apprenticeship schemes. The teachers' representatives also claimed that in order to reach the enterprises they would need assistance from OAED, as the establishment of relationships with the labour market is terra incognita for them. It should also be stated that members of the teaching community became self-critical and admitted that they haven't focused as much as they should on an argumentative approach towards the law and focused on other issues, such as the subject exam database and the employment status of their colleagues. Interestingly, the harshest criticism was expressed by experts. Their main points were that the law provided no reference for apprenticeship qualifications to the NQF and consequently the EQF; that no solid implementation of ECVET had been institutionalised (it is only mentioned vaguely); that nothing is said about quality assurance; and that horizontal and vertical learning mobility is forbidden (therefore the law is not compatible with the EU policy framework). Undoubtedly the law can be easily amended but the operational planning, evidence-based policy-making and constructive social dialogue problems seem to be deeply rooted in the Greek state and society and should be »reconstructed«.



Conclusions

The Greek education system faces multiple challenges in the current economic crisis. Its overall efficiency and quality need special attention. With regard to VET, more needs to be done in terms of increasing its attractiveness and integrating work-based learning (apprenticeship training is one aspect of work-based learning).⁶ Links with the labour market should be reinforced and the social partners, enterprises and Chambers should play an active role in the determination and the quality assurance aspects of the training provided. They should participate in VET funding in order to ensure the sustainability of the system. The active participation of the relevant stakeholders is crucial as it will provide pragmatic evidence that they actually see VET as an investment in the human capital of the country. Despite the suffering, the economic crisis provides a unique opportunity for radical reforms in the right direction. Let us hope that this opportunity will not be wasted.

6. Ioannidou, A./Stavrou, S., Reformperspektiven der Berufsbildung in Griechenland. Internationale Politikanalyse. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung,. download <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/10251.pdf>



About the author

Nikos Georgiadis holds a PhD in Philosophy and Media Aesthetics. He has worked as an advisor for the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs on VET and Lifelong Learning. At present he is an advisor of the Ministry of Administrative Reform and E- Government on training and certification of public servants.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Western Europe/North America
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Anne Seyfferth, Head, Western Europe/North America

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7736 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9249
<http://www.fes.de/international/wil>
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Orders/Contact:
FES-WENA@fes.de

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