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## **Optimising Cooperation between Part-time Vocational Schools and Company-based Training**

### **Surveys and Analyses of Pedagogical Aspects to Improve the Quality of Initial Vocational Education and Training**

**W**ithin the framework of apprenticeship training (the dual IVET system), part-time vocational school fulfils both supplementary and independent tasks in the interest of the young people's general education and vocational training. In this work, part-time vocational school with the training enterprises forms part of a legal, institutional and regional network: Key prerequisites for success are information and contacts. Part-time vocational schools form an integral part of the economic life of their respective site. Direct contact with the training enterprises in the region is a key prerequisite to ensure they optimally fulfil their educational task. This normative provision may be considered the starting point of the present empirical study of the relationship between part-time vocational schools and training enterprises in six large apprenticeship occupations.

In November 2005, the ibw (Institute for Research on Qualification and Training of the Austrian Economy) conducted a written survey among training enterprises and part-time vocational schools for apprentices regarding their contacts, mutual information and cooperation in the interest of quality assurance in dual training (the apprenticeship training system).

Six large apprenticeship occupations and all nine Austrian provinces were covered. Approximately 760 questionnaires were returned by the training enterprises (return rate: >40 percent) and about 640 questionnaires by the part-time vocational schools (return rate: >60 percent).

***90 percent of training enterprises are satisfied with the occupation-related theoretical subjects, nearly as many with the occupation-related practice taught at part-time vocational school***

Satisfaction of training enterprises with part-time vocational school is clearly most pronounced with regard to

occupation-related theory and practice. These services provided by the schools are also considered "very important" by far most frequently.

Also classes with relevance for the apprenticeship-leave examination are rated as "very important" by more than 50 percent of responding entrepreneurs, satisfaction with these subjects is expressed even considerably more often.

The difference between their assessment of importance and satisfaction strikes as most positive with regard to the expansion of general education (improvement of knowledge and skills from compulsory school). Here, the companies' satisfaction is significantly more pronounced than their appraisal of the importance of these services.

Their satisfaction is by far least pronounced with regard to special support provided to apprentices with learning difficulties, where also their assessment of the importance of these measures is relatively weak.

TABLE 1:

**Viewpoint of training enterprises: Importance and satisfaction regarding services provided by part-time vocational school, in %**

Part-time vocational school services	Percentage: Very important	Percentage: Satisfied*	Difference
Provision of occupation-related theory	73	91	18
Provision of occupation-related practical contents needed in the company	73	85	12
Preparation for the apprenticeship-leave exam	55	79	24
Specific offers for particularly gifted apprentices	49	60	11
Support classes for apprentices with learning difficulties	45	47	2
Expansion of general education, improvement of knowledge and skills from compulsory school	32	65	33

\* "Very satisfied" and "Satisfied"

Source: *ibw* training enterprise survey, November 2005

**Confirmation of underlying hypothesis: Information and contacts between part-time vocational school and training enterprises guarantee training quality**

The underlying hypothesis, which was that information and contacts between the two places of learning (training enterprise and part-time vocational school) are important elements for quality development and quality assurance in dual training, was confirmed by empirical evidence.

➤ Among enterprises that feel very well informed by part-time vocational schools, 53 percent are “very

satisfied” with occupation-related theory imparted to their apprentices, whereas among enterprises that feel poorly informed this share is at merely 2 percent.

➤ Among enterprises that feel very well informed by part-time vocational schools, 48 percent are “very satisfied” with occupation-related practice taught to their apprentices, whereas among enterprises that feel poorly informed this share is at merely 5 percent.

TABLE 2:

**Satisfaction with occupation-related theory taught at part-time vocational school, broken down by degree of satisfaction with information provided by part-time vocational school (n=650), in %**

Satisfaction with occupation-related theory taught at part-time vocational school	With the “information provided to the training enterprise by part-time vocational school” ...				Total
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Rather dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	
<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	18
Satisfied	47	75	78	73	74
Rather dissatisfied	0	4	12	25	8
Very dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Absolute	n= 55	n=319	n=266	n=63	n=758

Source: *ibw* training enterprise survey, November 2005

The satisfaction with the organisation of learning times at part-time vocational school does not come close to the enterprises’ high rate of satisfaction with occupation-related subjects. One quarter of the training enterprises expressed their dissatisfaction with the timetables (among companies with fewer than five employees, this share was 44 percent).

**Reasons and functions of information exchanges: Company size as a determinant of communication**

In functional respect, two types of information exchanges between part-time vocational school and training enterprise may basically be distinguished between:

- Firstly, talks about the performance or behaviour of the young people,
- secondly, subject-related exchanges between part-time vocational school teachers and experts in the sector of industry concerned.

Regarding both activities, company size is the major variable of distinction between training enterprises. In

micro-enterprises, the transfer of information is occasioned most frequently at the initiative of part-time vocational school, whereas in enterprises with 100 or more employees, the initiative to communicate about the apprentices frequently comes from sides. Experts at larger training enterprises are an additional major factor influencing subject-related knowledge transfer between the world of business and part-time vocational school.

More than half of the training enterprises feel well informed by part-time vocational school, slightly less than half “rather not”. As could be expected, the share of those who wish to be provided with still more information by part-time vocational school is relatively low among the well-informed, with 20 percent. By contrast, clearly more than half of those companies which have so far had little contact or feel not so well informed express the wish for more information from the part of part-time vocational school. Among those which are currently “very poorly informed” this share is 90 percent in both cases.

TABLE 3:

**Informational activities of training enterprises and part-time vocational school  
Survey among training enterprises, in %**  
*Tabulated values: “very often” and “sometimes”*

<i>Number of employees at company</i>	Vocational school teachers get in touch with enterprises in case of problems with an apprentice	Training enterprise asks vocational school for information about the apprentices' performance	Training enterprise asks vocational school for information about the apprentices' performance
Below 5 (n=47)	41	38	16
5 to 20 (n=232)	37	41	17
21 to 99 (n=262)	47	42	19
100 and more (n=216)	64	68	41
Total (n=758)	49	49	24

Source: *ibw* training enterprise survey, November 2005

***Personal contacts between trainers/teachers and company-oriented CVET for part-time vocational school teachers are key variables that guarantee quality***

The majority of part-time vocational school teachers express their interest in subject-related feedback on learning at school level. Information provided by the companies, more company-oriented CVET, as well as frequent suggestions by training enterprises. 52 percent fully agree with the statement “Information provided by training enterprises is important to my work because it makes classroom instruction more topical”, another 39 percent rather agree with this statement. The sentence “I wish I had more contacts and excursions to companies” finds agreement with 84 percent.

These findings reveal starting points for quality-assuring measures which basically aim to meet two objectives at the same time:

- To establish and maintain personal contacts of key stakeholders in the dual training system and
- to update subject-oriented teacher qualifications and skills via company-oriented CVET measures.

The survey shows that there are already good examples from practice for these activities (work placements, invitations to events and training programmes at companies, etc.).

TABLE 4:

**Interest in information provided by companies among part-time vocational school teachers, in %**

Statements	<i>Fully agree</i>	<i>Rather agree</i>	<i>Rather disagree</i>	<i>Fully disagree</i>
Information provided by training enterprises is important to my work because it makes classroom instruction more topical	52	39	8	1
I wish I had more contacts and excursions to companies in the sector	40	44	14	2

Source: *ibw* part-time vocational school survey, November 2005

***Apprenticeship occupation-specific differences in experience of part-time vocational school teachers with training enterprises***

Nearly 30 percent of the representatives of part-time vocational schools work at schools which “cooperate

closely with training enterprises”, 44 percent of them at schools where this statement applies to a certain degree; contacts are perceived as less close and positive according to the experience of the remaining 27 percent of interviewees from part-time vocational school. There are marked differences between apprenticeship occupations, they manifest themselves also in other indicators.

## **Head teachers of part-time vocational school as points of contact to training enterprises and regional offices of the economic chambers**

Within the part-time vocational schools, a division of work between subject teachers and head teachers regarding contacts with the training enterprises and the representative bodies of the economic chambers in the provinces (Apprenticeship Offices and specialised organisations) can be observed. Even though part-time vocational school teachers frequently state to have contacts, this proportion is markedly higher among head teachers.

### **Conclusions**

The survey among training enterprises has proved empirically the following: The more information is exchanged and the more contacts exist between training enterprises and part-time vocational schools, the higher is the satisfaction among “accepting institutions” in the dual training system with subject-related / occupation-specific teaching. This trend is enhanced by the fact that 90 percent of those that feel they have so far not received sufficient information express the wish for more information.

An amazing 85 to 90 percent of the training enterprises are satisfied with occupation-related theory provided at part-time vocational school. But there is also the wish for more information (expressed by part of training enterprises), the wish for more interest by training enterprises in part-time vocational school, and more subject-related information provided by companies (part-time vocational school).

In principle it must be assumed that the training enterprises and part-time vocational schools belong to different “learning cultures”. Therefore, the survey results must take into account both perspectives in order to meet with acceptance.

How can sufficient information and contacts between the two “partners” in the dual training system be guaranteed?

1. Continuous “cultivation of relationships” at the institutional level of part-time vocational school (school inspectorate, head teachers) and the Federal Economic Chamber (Apprenticeship Offices and specialised organisations).

2. Establishment of personal contacts and relations at the level of authorised apprenticeship trainers and part-time vocational school teachers as the basis of communication. For this, e.g. interesting (also informal) evening events or other activities (award ceremonies on the occasion of apprenticeship competitions, Open Door Days at school, regular meetings of master craftsmen, etc.).
3. The micro-enterprises need mediators for cooperation with part-time vocational school. Many part-time vocational schools talk about e.g. good contacts with the sectoral subunits of the employers’ organisations.
4. Instruments to ensure a timely exchange of information in case young people have problems: student booklets (with information about their school performance, behaviour, training contents, etc.), regular phone calls, half-yearly information may be useful tools if the “relationship between the two training partners” is well established.
5. Deepening of contacts and subject-specific CVET measures by means of a long-term cooperation (both partners are able to introduce something); also here we find some good examples, such as working groups, the joint organisation of apprenticeship competitions, and participation in European VET and CVET programmes.
6. The part-time vocational school teachers need to regularly update their subject-specific skills and qualifications. The survey has shown some relevant good examples (such as invitations to a *three-day work placement* for a professional caterer [system gastronomy expert]).

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*The study was compiled on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture by the Institute for Research on Qualification and Training of the Austrian Economy*

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