

# GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF DUAL SCHOOL APPLICATION IN ROMANIA

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## Abstract

*In recent decades, in the member countries of the E.U. stakeholders started to understand and recognize more and more the importance of education and professional training. In this regard they have assumed common targets and commitments that emphasize the importance of the initial and continuous education mission. Investing in the training and qualification of employees generates high returns that exceed the costs and provide a long-term effect, as the European Council emphasized in 2006. Even if the system of professional education and training in Romania faces many challenges, examples of good practice are beginning to emerge signalling a shift in the national strategy.*

**Keywords:** *Dual school, education, strategy, mission, vocational education and training.*

## 1. Introduction

The increase of globalized economy has also increased the competition, therefore companies have started to acknowledge the importance of the vocational education and training in general. Whether we are talking about the initial or continuous form of qualified vocational training, combined with work-based learning, both have the potential to promote the solving/improvement of the employability factor and to support policies and strategies for resilience, innovation, competitiveness and growth of companies and countries. The vocational education training is provided by a multitude of stakeholders and is inseparably linked to the structure of the labour market. It operates in various national, regional, local and sectoral contexts depending on the structure, size and economic culture.

There are many examples of good practices, but still there is a lack of systematic comprehensive knowledge in the field, although a complete and consistent overview is fundamental for the development of policies in this area of professional training<sup>1</sup>, matter to which this article intends to answer. There is no quality professional training without the contribution of employers who represent the key to good functioning in a diverse and heterogeneous environment. Work based qualified vocational training is important because it increases the relevance and flexibility of training. It is considered useful both for the induction of newly hired staff as well as for further development of existing personnel.

The challenges presented above are valid on the European level as well. For example, based on the analysis of good practice examples, dual school involves different forms of training, regulations and learning sequences. The form, the design and the practices of the qualified vocational training are somewhat flexible, because they are inevitably conditioned by the type and the particularities of the environment.

The increase in the productivity of the economy is realized through the adequate training of the labour force, and in order to achieve this goal, a national effort must be made - a collaboration plan between the Government, employers, providers of education and qualified professional training and other stakeholders (social partners).

## 2. Context. Dual education in the EU

A series of crystallized criteria imposed the classification of countries according to the openness of their educational strategies and policies regarding the dual school, whose main component is work-based training. "Depending on the degree of openness, national policies can be classified as 'conducive', 'just-allowing' or 'unconcerned'. *Conducive* policies meet all the criteria, *just-allowing* policies meet only some of the criteria and *unconcerned* policies only verify one or none of the criteria. These operational criteria are:

to acknowledge work-based learning as a regularly accepted training method;

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop, *Vocational education and training in France: short description*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, available at [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4205\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4205_en.pdf), last time consulted on 16.03.2023;

to develop work-based learning programmes at all levels (national, regional or sectoral);  
 to finance work-based learning specific programmes;  
 to recognise work acquired learning outcomes (non-formal and informal);  
 the stakeholders to promote, encourage and focus on work -based learning<sup>2</sup>.

**England** has been identified as an example of a country with *conducive* policies. Even though the proportion of students enrolled in the initial vocational education and training is below the European Union average, the number of students that are following work-based training is above the EU average. The attractiveness factor of the vocational education and training is a challenge present everywhere due to the lack of systematic comprehensive knowledge in the field, so the British introduced tech level in their attempt to solve part of the problem. This step had the purpose of preparing the students for specific job roles, but also to be relevant in admission to higher education. In order to improve the situation, the stakeholders tracked the relevance of several factors that influence the vocational education and training like:

- the availability of funds;
- the orientation structures;
- the work-based training experience provision;
- the complexity of professional development paths in the VET sector.

The report *English Apprenticeship: Our 2020 Vision* planned to increase the quality and the quantity of apprenticeships. "This publication sets out what is expected of all key stakeholders, employers, education and training providers and government working together"<sup>3</sup>.

The contract between the parties consisted in the fact that the employers had to pay the apprentice's minimum wage and the British Government covered the cost of training the apprentices. The Department of Education is responsible for the organisation of education, services and skills. Employers are developing new qualification standards to better meet the skills needs of their sectors. These standards describe the knowledge, skills and expected behaviours that will be demonstrated on the basis of a test. Also, to improve quality, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education public body led by employers, to be in charge of maintaining the quality of standards. After all, employers best understand the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for the future, which is why they have the freedom to choose between training their own staff or choosing the best vocational education and training provider.

The Enterprise Act was the law which, among other effects, sought to "protect and strengthen the apprenticeship brand, to introduce targets for apprenticeships in public sector bodies in England and to establish the Institute for Apprenticeships – an independent, employer-led body which will ensure that the apprenticeship meets the needs of the business"<sup>4</sup>.

Currently, students and employers are in an unstable and confusing situation in which the multitude of qualifications have an insignificant relevance for both students and employers. Within the framework of the reforms, the development of an easy-to-navigate system is pursued. The multitude of qualifications used affected the overall transparency of qualifications.

"Department for Education (DfE) has published a series of action plans ahead of the introduction of new technical study programmes called T levels"<sup>5</sup>. The T levels and the apprenticeship ensure both a qualified professional training path for employment, as well as for entry into higher education and technical training. The educational programs in Level T have a duration of two years and represent a combination of teaching, workshops and a simulated work environment. Both educational programs are based on the same qualification standards designed by employers. Likewise, T Levels differ from apprenticeships in that most of the learning time is spent in the classroom (80%).

As a result of the reforms proposed in England, the disciples demonstrate their capacity through an assessment specified by employer groups. The creativity and applicability of knowledge, skills acquired in work environments are evaluated. Apprenticeships promotes the adaptability of apprentices to a variety of roles, employers and their capacity for personal development. Apprenticeship standards should also facilitate the

<sup>2</sup> Cedefop, *Work-based learning in continuing vocational education and training: policies and practices in Europe*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, available at [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5549\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5549_en.pdf), last time consulted on 16.03.2023.

<sup>3</sup> HM Government, *English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision, 2022*, available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf), last time consulted on 18.03.2023.

<sup>4</sup> Press release, *Enterprise Act becomes law*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/enterprise-act-becomes-law>, 2016, last time consulted on 18.03.2023.

<sup>5</sup> Cedefop. *Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-19: England. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies, 2020*, available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/countryreports/developments-vocational-education-and-training-policy-2015-19-uk-england>, last time consulted on 18.03.2023.

acquisition of transferable skills – such as creativity, innovation, problem solving, self-management, communication skills, interpersonal skills.

Good productivity is the foundation of economic growth; however, England's productivity is about 20% lower than its international competition, part of the G7 group. England, like the rest of the European countries, has a critical need for professional workers qualified for replacement and also for workers qualified in new technologies. Hence the country's openness to new approaches and the multitude of education and professional training programs. The one of the Government's way to pursue the competitiveness of the economy and to maintain its current economic strength.

England has taken steps to continuously reform and transform its technical education and bring providers and employers closer together. Their educational strategy is guided by systems of information and feedback which enforced the guidance infrastructure, improved attractiveness of VET through national debate, where all stakeholders had their chance to influence the outcome.

**France** qualifies in *just-allowing* category. Following a national consultation on the state of the education system in France, a new pedagogy was outlined that promotes multidisciplinary and the personalized support given to students. The resulting concrete measures aimed at the re-evaluation of professional education through:

- new human resources management practices;
- personalized support of routes and careers;
- better financial remuneration;
- promoting skills and mobility.

Within the expected investments, students and teachers occupy a central place. The skills agenda, the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce in the context of the globalization of the economy, the green and the digital transition represent objectives in which intervention is necessary so that France is in accordance with the E.U guidelines on education and professional training recommended for the period 2021-2030. Those who follow the professional path benefit from personalized support, the diversification of the learning offer, guidance towards an easy transition to further studies or the labour market. Also, the investments in the skills agenda aimed at aligning education and professional training to the needs of companies and to emerging needs such as digitization and distance learning.

Apprenticeship has seen a strong dynamic due to the law adopted by the Ministry of Labor that regulates the individuals' professional future. Apprentice training centers were created where the role and responsibility of mentors were increased, as well as introducing the obligation of quality certification for teachers and trainers from the providing units. The obligation revised the criteria related to qualification and professionalism. Another strong point of the reform was the skills investment plan, that also supported the acceleration of the digital transformation of professional training. Secondary education offers three study paths: general, technological and vocational, its graduation ensuring access to further education and/or to the labour market. Vocational education and training qualifications are provided in initial education, apprenticeships and continuous vocational training through various forms of training.

Is in the apprenticeships where students are alternating between an apprentices training center (CFA) and a company. The Apprentice training centers (CFA) offer complementary general theoretical training for apprentices in order to ensure their social progress and technological and practical training. Also, they ensure cooperation between trainers and teachers. The market for the provision of education and professional training was liberalized, so that even private companies could create CFA to train their apprentices. The laws that reformed the vocational training system created the legislative framework and regulated the obligations and quality standards, as well as the financing of apprenticeship contracts. At the state level, ministries develop standards for VET qualifications in consultation with business representatives, define the regulations for examining and awarding VET qualifications. They deliver VET programmes; recruit, train and pay teachers; and monitor the quality of training, outcomes and resources used. Regions are responsible for the planning and coherence of vocational training activity in their territory. They define their policies according to local economic and social priorities, in consultation with the state and social partners.

Certificates of professional qualification (CQP) are sector or industry specific qualifications, created and recognized by professional branches, which attest to the knowledge of skills. Until 2018, CQPs were classified by activity sector, then starting in 2019, CQPs can be associated with a qualification level and included in the RNCP (Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles) register.

In France, the promotion of vocational education was ensured by establishing partnerships between schools and companies, partnerships supported through specialized local offices in school inspectorates, school-business committees and specialized school counsellors. At national level there are particular departments in the Ministry of National Education that set up training programs and schemes like 'Engineers for schools' (IPE), which offers the possibility of "detaching engineers and other specialists in the academies, for a fixed period so that

the vocational training system will take advantage of their expertise”<sup>6</sup>. The transformation of the vocational pathway was another factor that ensured the strengthening of the link between the world of education and the world of business. Vocational education and training will play an important role in securing employment, especially for the young generation due to vast budgets allocated to it in economic recovery plans (15 billion EUR are allocated to training actions for skills development).

**Bulgaria** belongs to the latter category, the *unconcerned*. In 2015, Bulgaria introduced a dual VET system that combines school and workplace, learning to provide students with real opportunities to gain relevant experience that will develop the skills needed for successful integration into the labour market. The Bulgarian vocational education and training system is characterized by the following features:

- qualifications and curricula are coordinated by the state;
- dual vocational education and training still represents a major challenge;
- VET learners represent more than 50% of the total secondary education population;
- there is a high level of skill mismatch regarding the labour market needs.

Cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders are defined according to the purpose of the provided regulations. The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) is the agency that coordinates the national vocational education system. The Ministry of Education and Science, through the Directorate of Vocational Education and Training is responsible for the management of the guidance centres in career. The Ministry of Labour is responsible for medium- and long-term skills forecasts and the Employment Agency – for short term skills forecasts<sup>7</sup>.

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning aims to improve access to guidance and skills development for both students and adults, to promote effective cooperation and internal exchange of information between all agencies in the country with the aim of bridging the gaps between graduates and labour market needs<sup>8</sup>.

Current national policies in education and employment seek to equip students with relevant skills, in the context of national and European trends in the labour market and emphasize the importance of transversal skills, or lifelong skills. Also, the legislation empowered local and regional authorities to act for the benefit their labour market particular needs, as Bulgarian industrial enterprises complained that the labour shortages are limiting their activity. The reform increased local and regional authorities’ responsibility in VET planification, funding (which is mostly State-financed), equipping schools and organising vocational training for the unemployed.

Bulgaria set up the first career guidance portal, which contain detailed information on the economy of each region of the country, whose main beneficiaries are students with a professional qualification seeking a sustainable placement on the labour market, as well as other stakeholders.

Their vocational education and training strategy launched in 2015 set up to address other issues as low adult learning participation, poor career guidance services, low flexibility in VET provision and to promote modularization. Curricula is coordinated by the state, only school-specific curricula is designed by VET providers (public or private) in order to better synchronize qualifications with the local labour market specific needs<sup>9</sup>.

The Bulgarian vocational education and training system’s education population share is on the rise because there are incentives for learners. After graduation students receive both a diploma for secondary education, which assures them access to higher education and a certificate for vocational qualification, which increases their employability factor.

### 3. Good practice examples of dual school application in Romania

We are confident that the vocational training expressed through the dual school represents an excellent investment for the main beneficiaries - the Government and employers. The article aims to further emphasize the benefits by presenting good practice models that have incorporated characteristics of other dual school

<sup>6</sup> Joseph, V., *Teachers and trainers in a changing world – France: Building up competences for inclusive, green and digitalised vocational education and training (VET)*. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, 2022, available at [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2022/teachers\\_and\\_trainers\\_in\\_a\\_changing\\_world\\_France\\_Cedefop\\_ReferNet.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2022/teachers_and_trainers_in_a_changing_world_France_Cedefop_ReferNet.pdf), last time consulted on 20.03.2023.

<sup>7</sup> Cedefop; National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. *Vocational education and training in Europe - Bulgaria: system description* [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database], 2022, available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/bulgaria-u2>, last time consulted on 20.03.2023.

<sup>8</sup> Cedefop. *Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Bulgaria*. CareersNet national records, 2020, available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-bulgaria>, last time consulted on 20.03.2023.

<sup>9</sup> Hristova, A.; Petrova, S., *Teachers and trainers in a changing world – Bulgaria: Building up competences for inclusive, green and digitalised vocational education and training (VET)*. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, 2022, available at [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2022/teachers\\_and\\_trainers\\_in\\_a\\_changing\\_world\\_Bulgaria\\_Cedefop\\_ReferNet.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2022/teachers_and_trainers_in_a_changing_world_Bulgaria_Cedefop_ReferNet.pdf), last time consulted on 27.03.2023.

systems from abroad in Romania, creating an alternative that can be integrated in the future reform, which aims at the vocational education and training. These features include greater freedom granted to the employer in setting performance standards of qualification, a better access of external providers to training programs, good orientation structure and high-quality, well-equipped training providers.

Romanian authorities need addressing some pressing challenges:

- increase investments in the educational field;
- anticipate labour market skills needs;
- modularization of training programmes;
- low adult learning participation.

Romania has adopted several strategies as action plans in various fields to emphasize the importance of the quality of education and professional training in the context of new challenges and high expectations in society<sup>10</sup>.

Starting with the year 2017-2018, Romania proposes a form of dual school that is provided at the request of companies, which themselves participate in the provision of vocational education and training. The share of learners in dual schools is 4.4% of the total VET population at upper secondary level. The main characteristic of these programs is that they open access to the labour market. Work based learning for initial VET is also offered in schools, its share varying between 15% and 25%, depending on the EQF level. For continuous VET the work-based learning's share can exceed 70%<sup>11</sup>.

The creation of training standards for qualifications is coordinated by the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, approved by the Ministry of Education and Research and validated by sectoral committees, where stakeholders participate and sustain their implementation. Sectoral committees, representatives of different sectors of the economy, are the guarantee of the involvement of stakeholders in the design and evaluation of professional qualifications. Also, stakeholders participate in partnerships at regional (regional consortia) and local level.

An effect of the reforms can be seen through the development and endowment of integrated professional consortia for dual education that contribute to the development of professional education. This aims to increase the number of areas of qualification and graduates who can acquire level 3 - 8 qualifications, according to the National Qualifications Framework. "The consortium represents a centre of expertise for the implementation of national reforms in the field of education and vocational training through dual education, including piloting and further development of tools and methodologies specific to the dual education route"<sup>12</sup>. The mandatory constituents of the consortium are at least one of the following institutions:

- one higher education institution accredited in engineering sciences;
- one professional and technical education unit;
- one administrative-territorial unit;
- one economic operator.

The partnership agreement is concluded for a period of at least 15 years and other entities may be added depending on the evolution of the regional or local development context. This concept is a landmark measure aimed to develop the dual education with a focus on the needs of all stakeholders. The 10 initially planned consortia will be funded through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). This measure is expected to be a success story, as the vocational education and training in Romania had a great prestige before 1989. Back then VET enjoyed success when it was not merely seen as a secondary option; most students opted for a qualification in the technological education, which resembled to dual schools we are trying to set up today. There are multiple successful recipes when it comes to dual school implementation, but it was found that the way, the specificity of the dual model of putting skills into practice from an early age helps to increase the performance of a company.

Dual system education is the new trend in training in Romania. The advantages are many - students learn about the latest technologies; their qualifications are recognised at the European level and have quick access to employment opportunities within the company at an advantageous salary.

<sup>10</sup> E.-B. Cerkez, *Teachers and trainers in a changing world – Romania: Building up competences for inclusive, green and digitalised vocational education and training (VET)*. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, 2022, available at [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2022/teachers\\_and\\_trainers\\_in\\_a\\_changing\\_world\\_Romania\\_Cedefop\\_ReferNet.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2022/teachers_and_trainers_in_a_changing_world_Romania_Cedefop_ReferNet.pdf), last time consulted on 27.03.2023.

<sup>11</sup> Cedefop, National Centre for TVET Development, *Vocational education and training in Europe - Romania: system description* [From Cedefop, ReferNet, Vocational education and training in Europe database], 2022, available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/romania-u2>, last time consulted on 29.03.2023.

<sup>12</sup> Ministerul Educației, *Consortii pentru învățământ dual*, available at [https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/\\_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2022/PNRR/Consortii\\_dual/](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2022/PNRR/Consortii_dual/), last time consulted on 18.03.2023.

The economic sector demanded for the dual school to be further extended in the new education law. So, the entrepreneurs and students need to meet on the ground of their common interest more. There are some places in Romania where these conditions have been met. One of them is Kronstadt German Vocational School, which is actually pioneering dual school in Romania. It was founded in 2010 and is backed up by an association of 19 economic agents who wanted targeted work force. They adapted the German model to the needs they had in Romania. Currently they have 7 qualifications with solid plans to enlarge their offer to 10 qualifications. What they have done was to create the conditions for changing the collective mindset regarding the technological education. The marketing budget is large precisely to maintain the attractiveness of their training programs.

Another successful story in Romania is the Bosch Group, which is a partner of schools in the dual system since 2013, developing successful partnerships with several high schools in Cluj and Blaj to ensure a reliable source of technicians adapted to the requirements of a modern production unit and equipment. Moreover, the factory inaugurated in Cluj and in Blaj training centres, which are equipped with specific equipment for the professional training of secondary school students<sup>13</sup>.

The Acarom dual school in Mioveni is an education and vocational training project that follows trends and skill needs in the automotive field. At the same time, it is provided as a viable alternative to cover the need for skilled labour for the region's biggest factory - Dacia-Renault. In fact, this is the most advanced project which represented the blueprint for the integrated professional consortia for dual education already mentioned in this article.

Continental Romania is another important stakeholder in the dual school implementation in Romania, with multiple partnerships in different cities. They have locations in Timișoara, Brașov, Sibiu and Carei. It is one of the companies that initiated, in 2012 the reintroduction of the dual vocational education system in Romania. Since then, hundreds of students have been employed in Continental's factories or engineering centers in Romania.

These are only a few examples of successful implementations, but dual vocational education and training is becoming attractive again both for students and for all stakeholders. Other economic agents are benefiting from the share of these pioneer's know-how. Their success stories are a powerful factor that influence the reshaping of the collective perspective regarding dual vocational education and training which should be considered a solid educational alternative with the same potential academic and development outcomes. Positive examples are the driving force that shape societies with a great rapidity and enthusiasm. We must search for and promote such models.

#### 4. Conclusions

Good practice example of dual school in Romania exists and although its implementation history is quite recent, the conclusion is that we cannot talk about high quality technological education and training without the contribution of companies that are willing to invest in the human resources. Entire departments must fully engage in order to promote and sustain attractiveness of their proposed qualifications. Benefits must be explained to the students that choose the paths of dual vocational education and training. There are no limitations to this path, the student and his inclination toward the practical side of the learning process is a natural alternative, the process of fixation of the acquired skills is faster.

One of the research results is to expose the multitude of dual school implementation models in Europe and their complexity. Another result is the presentation of the successful implementation models of the dual school in our country. The expected impact of the research is to improve comprehensive systematic knowledge in the field at the European level and to help create an efficient unitary solution. An overview of the field is fundamental to the development of this unitary European solution. Also, the research aims to improve the Romanian society's perspective on this educational route by presenting and promoting examples of good practice already implemented in our country. That is why, for further research, we intend to launch a questionnaire to collect and analyse the perception of stakeholders regarding vocational education and training in Romania.

The Declaration of the joint Vocational Education and Training providers on the contribution of Vocational Education and Training to the EU 2020 strategy starts with this quotation: "Without the opportunity to learn through the hands, the world remains abstract, and distant, and the passions for learning will not be engaged"<sup>14</sup>, emphasizing the E.U.'s commitment to provide the foundation for a healthy and diverse educational environment suitable for all. Moreover, this E.U. commitment stems from the emphasis placed on the importance of skills as a pathway to employment and prosperity, enabling people to access good-quality jobs and fulfil their potential. In the context of a global economy in continuous change, skills will determine competitiveness and innovation

<sup>13</sup> Bosch, *Scoala duală Blaj – specializări tehnice adaptate nevoilor elevilor și ale pieței*, <https://www.bosch.ro/stiri-si-noutati/scoala-duala-blaj.html>, last time consulted on 29.03.2023.

<sup>14</sup> D. Stowe, *The Wisdom of Our Hands: Crafting, A Life*, Linden Publishing House, 2022.

at European level. Competences are an important factor of development and economic growth. They are the key to social cohesion<sup>15</sup>.

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