

FoBBIZ Annual meeting, 29.10.2020 (online via Zoom)

How is VET changing as a result of the pandemic?

Experiences and lessons learned from the Covid 19 crisis in Switzerland and internationally

Theses for the introduction

A pleasing quantity of 59 out of 72 registered participants attended the event, which was moderated by board members Bettina Jenny, Helvetas, and Franz Kehl, KEK-CDC. The event started with two speed dating rounds. On the occasion of these exchanges, the participants discussed the [Theses](#) on the changes in vocational education and training due to the pandemic, published in advance by FoBBIZ.

Thesis 1: “The poverty crisis” The Corona crisis is a social crisis. It primarily affects those with fewer resources. Poverty will increase significantly and the successes of development cooperation and anti-poverty policy in Switzerland will be deprived of their fruits.
Thesis 2: “The generation crisis” The Corona crisis is a generational crisis. It will primarily affect the younger generation and be carried by it.
Thesis 3: “The work integration crisis” The state will have to offer or finance additional programs for young people to better support the young generation in the transition to the world of work. These programs will remain after the Corona crisis.
Thesis 4: “The crisis in dual vocational training” Dual vocational education and training is massively challenged by the Corona crisis.
Thesis 5: The innovation engine The Corona crisis promotes innovative practices in vocational education and training.

Vocational education and training in Switzerland during the pandemic

Sandra Müller from the **SERI** and member of the **Task Force Perspectives for Vocational Education and Training 2020** explained the challenges which Swiss VET/PET is facing in the wake of the Covid crisis, what measures have been taken and whether certain measures will be retained in the future. (Presentation see www.fobbiz.ch/veranstaltungen/jahresveranstaltung2020)

The lockdown in spring 2020 triggered a wave of uncertainty about how trial apprenticeships can be completed and apprenticeship certificates awarded, but also about how vocational students with performance problems and worried parents can be supported. The most important task for the involved cantonal authorities and schools proved to be to convey confidence, motivating students to persevere and encouraging them to try out new forms.

Crisis management was able to take place within the framework of the established cooperation vessels among the network partners (Confederation, cantons, labour organisations, professional associations, social partners). The existing information channels were used efficiently and the necessary measures were broadly supported. Contrary to expectations, the number of apprenticeship contracts concluded by the autumn was about the same as in the previous year. This should, at least in the short term, make people somewhat more confident about Thesis 4 on dual VET.

The biggest problem was to find, in a relatively short time, a form of Qualification Procedure for around 240 different professions with their own sponsors and their own problems, which was uniform, feasible and consistent for all throughout Switzerland, so that these special qualifications from summer 2020 would continue to be recognised as fully valid in the future. The goal for 2021 is therefore to be able to conduct the QPs as "normally" as possible.

What further conclusions can be drawn from the corona crisis period is not yet clear at this stage. For reasons of uncertainty, many companies are currently not yet able to decide whether and how many training places they will offer next summer.

In the discussion Sandra Müller made the following points:

- **What remains in memory from this special time?** Above all, the dismay of the apprentices and their parents and the urgency of finding workable solutions.
- **What can be personally taken away as experience?** It is worthwhile to work in network partnerships (with everyone, including the social partners). They are sometimes cumbersome, but they bring broad-based solutions. It was now possible to build on established information channels and manners, which had been developed in recent years.
- **What was particularly difficult to solve?** To modulate the Qualification Procedures in a reasonably acceptable way under this time pressure.
- **What can be taken along to the "normal" QP?** That is not yet clear at the moment, it is still too early.
- **Do the Qualification Procedures possibly have to be made simpler again?** The procedures are indeed complex: regulation is national, implementation is cantonal and the lead is with the individual Organisation of work. Only if this distribution of responsibilities is changed can the procedure be streamlined and simplified.
- **Has there been an impact on the number of apprenticeship contracts concluded?** No, the curve was not dramatic. It happens every year that not all apprenticeship places can be filled (lack of matching). In future, however, more school-leavers will need an apprenticeship place (demographic reasons). As a result of the crisis, many companies currently cannot yet determine whether and how many apprenticeship places they can offer in the coming years.
- **Has VET entered a crisis because of Corona?** The crisis is felt everywhere, but it is not a crisis of dual VET.

A view to Central America: What are the challenges IC actors are facing in Honduras? The example of the ProJoven project

Angie-Cristine Murillo, National Program Officer SDC in Honduras, and Ivan Rodriguez, Swisscontact Country Director Honduras, used the example of the ProJoven project in Honduras to illustrate the challenges facing vocational training programs in development cooperation. (Presentation see www.fobbiz.ch/veranstaltungen/jahresveranstaltung2020)

As a result of the pandemic, Honduras has been in lockdown for seven months. Only agricultural production and a few other vital services remain operating. 65% of the approximately 4.2 million inhabitants were already affected by poverty before, 42% even to a high degree. In the lockdown, an additional 14% of the working population (about 600,000 people) lost their jobs. As a result, crime and domestic violence increased, especially in urban areas.

Those who are suffering most from the consequences of the lockdown are young people who are at the beginning or about to start their apprenticeship. In addition, around one million young people were already underemployed or unemployed before the crisis. In the lockdown, vocational schools and shops had to close overnight. Personal contacts with apprentices were thus interrupted. The young people had to hold out under poor conditions. Their will to continue their apprenticeship is waning. The considerable ICT gap has widened,

as IT application skills, Internet access and simply the necessary equipment is lacking to follow virtual lessons. Although the transition to online teaching has been relatively rapid, the number of apprenticeship drop-outs has increased as many of their businesses have had to close. Angie-Cristine Murillo said that the situation is currently worse than when the "ProJoven" project started in 2014.

More than one hundred instructors have therefore been trained nationwide to support training centres and similar institutions in the field of learning and communicating via digital channels. This should enable maintaining virtual contact with apprentices and young people. Instructions for online learning were also produced. However, the Internet is not accessible everywhere and is also expensive. It was recognised that, in addition to digital learning, face-2-face training with the necessary safety distances remains enormously important to make learning possible for all.

In the tourism sector, support measures are also being set up, curricula are being adapted and the development of soft skills are being promoted. As there is a lack not only of training but also of enough material, the possibility of producing the necessary training material with the help of 3D printers is also being examined.

With the help of the university's psychological service, apprentices, trainers and their families have received psychological support, which is very important in this crisis.

The imminent reopening of economic and commercial life in Honduras will be difficult. The sudden lockdown created chaos and many unresolved economic and social problems.

Conclusion

Afterwards the participants discussed in small groups the questions "What changes in VET after the pandemic - and what should remain?", "What roles are changing - and how?" and "How can we contribute to this?"

At the end of the event, two participants explained what they took from the discussion as the most important contents. **Elizabeth Kiewisch of Plan International** considers the crisis to be a generation and gender crisis. She wants to help in her work to develop the necessary solutions for the next generation in developing countries. **Katharina Walker of Helvetas** emphasises how important it is now to promote the competencies of teachers in the field of online learning in a targeted and rapid manner so that they can prepare learning content in a didactically and pedagogically meaningful way and pass it on virtually. From her point of view, it should be maintained that the theoretical part of a teaching content is partly taught online. It remains an open question in what form and to what extent practical training could be sensibly implemented online.

Feedback on the FoBBIZ virtual annual event

The majority of the participants' feedback was enthusiastic. Both the insight into the work of the SERI Task Force Group and the report on the situation in Honduras were met with great interest. Most participants appreciated the mix of presentation and group discussions. The formation of small groups was well received, as it enabled professional exchange and networking. Although the short time available for discussion was regretted, it ensured that the main thread remained throughout the entire event.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)

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