

Thursday, 22 November 2018

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Swiss Session of the 8<sup>th</sup> CII Global Summit for Skill Development. Your interest in Swiss Vocational Education and Training is an honour for us and my aim today is to provide you with some elements on why VET is important to Switzerland. I will say a few general words about Switzerland, its education system, the features of the Swiss VET system, the partners that support and design the Swiss Vocational and Professional Education and Training system. I will also hint at the outcomes, say a few words about the challenges as well as about our internationalisation activities.

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Let us look at the country, the basic requirements and general conditions in Switzerland. They ultimately led to the VET system in its present form and continue to shape it today. With 8.5 million inhabitants, Switzerland is a small country with four different national languages and therefore four different cultures. This setting has an impact on policies and society. Our fundamental policy principles are federalism and direct democracy. These principles are deeply ingrained in the Swiss political mind-set. The Confederation works with 26 cantons and indirectly with 2200 municipalities in the steering of policies and their implementation at various levels. Most processes follow the bottom-up principle – decisions are based on cooperation between the various stakeholders. The bottom-up principle is also a key pillar of the Swiss VET system, which relies on both the public and private sectors.

After compulsory school, which lasts until the age of 15 or 16, young people have two main options: vocational education and training OR general education. Vocational and professional education and training complements the general education part of the system on equal terms – both at the upper-secondary level and the tertiary level. We draw a distinction between vocational education and training - at the upper-secondary level - and professional education – at the tertiary level.

Around two-thirds of all young people coming out of compulsory school opt for vocational education and training. They have around 230 different occupations to choose from, both in the white and blue-collar sectors. Young people choose to train as mechanical engineers, cooks, healthcare professionals, commercial employees - in banking, insurance, business etc. -, retail salespeople, metal plumbers, mechatronics engineers for cars, beauticians, IT professionals and many more professions. You will hear from some of them later in this session. Why does such a high percentage of young people opt for the VET sector? In Switzerland, the VET system enjoys considerable prestige and has a solid reputation.

You may wonder whether all these young people will find a job. And yes, they do. Most of the VET programmes are taken in the form of apprenticeships, which last between 2 and 4 years. They end with a journeyman's exam and a federally recognised diploma or qualification, which allows them to enter the labour market immediately.

The VET sector is crucial for the Swiss economy because it ensures an adequate supply of skilled workers.

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The labour market orientation of the Swiss VET system ensures that apprentices will find a job very easily. How is this achieved? Most education and training within the Swiss VET and professional education sector is based on the dual-track model, combining theory and practice.

The basic structure of VET programmes in Switzerland is as follows. Most of the training takes place at host companies for 3 to 4 days per week. At the same time, learners spend 1 to 2 days per week attending classes at a vocational school. Classroom instruction covers vocational instruction as well as general subjects. Depending on the occupation, learners will also attend 3 to 8 industry courses, which serve to compensate for any differences in knowledge and skills arising during apprenticeship training in their respective workplaces.

Classroom instruction and apprenticeship training generally run in parallel. Learners gain exposure to current production processes within the host company and therefore generate productive output for the company. At the same time, they are able to apply what they learn in the classroom to their work in the host company. In this manner, the learning dynamics continuously move in both directions.

The learning process is guided by experienced apprenticeship trainers at the host company and experienced teachers at the vocational school. Generally, both apprenticeship trainers and vocational school teachers continue to work in the occupations for which they provide training. At the same time, they undergo training in pedagogy and didactics.

The dual-track approach is key to ensuring that VET programmes are correlated with the actual needs of the labour market.

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In Switzerland, about 20% of a cohort are holders of a university degree. But looking at all tertiary level diplomas or degrees, 60% of the population have one. And two thirds of those have at least one, but normally four or more years, of exposure to the labour market.

An important aspect of the Swiss education system is the almost complete permeability between different education pathways. Whatever you choose to do after compulsory school as a young person, all further education and career options will still be available later on. This permeability greatly contributes to the attractiveness of VET in Switzerland – also for strong students. There are no dead-end qualifications anywhere in the system.

While most young people choose to enter the labour market after their apprenticeship, they still have the option for further education and training afterwards. The usual route is to acquire a further practice-oriented qualification at tertiary level through professional education. These qualifications follow the same philosophy of duality and are acquired part-time. They prepare young professionals for specialized and/or managerial tasks. They are an essential source of highly valuable workforce for Swiss companies.

Another possible pathway is to acquire a vocational baccalaureate after an apprenticeship. Holders of this qualification are entitled to enrol in a Bachelor's degree programme at a Swiss university of applied sciences. Universities of applied sciences place more emphasis on practical training and applied research than classical universities.

Holders of a vocational baccalaureate, who pass the University Aptitude Test, may even enrol in a classical university, whose focus is primarily academic. The other way around is also possible: holders of an academic baccalaureate may undergo a one-year internship to acquire the practical competences needed to enrol in a degree programme at a Swiss university of applied sciences.

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Another important element is the governance of the Swiss Vocational and Professional Education System. It is collectively managed and implemented as a public-private partnership. There are three main partners, that each contribute in their own ways to the system. Their specific roles complement each other. This division of roles arises from different traditions - the autonomy of the private sector, sharing of power and the principle of cooperation – some of which date back to late medieval times. The modern practice that has emerged over time has been codified into law and forms the institutional foundation of the system.

We are privileged to have members of the three partners with us today. They will tell us more about their functions within the system.

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Let's have a look at the systemic factors that drive the success, strength and good reputation of the Swiss VET system.

- A full integration into the Swiss education system and equality with general education.
- A diversity of pathways and career prospects, that are nationally recognised and some of them so demanding that they represent an interesting option for the very talented.
- A governance system that ensures the quality and attractiveness of the VET system by means of a public-private partnership. This cooperation between the public and private sectors is one of the key features of the system. Each partner bears the responsibility of ensuring quality at its respective level.
- A permeability, which allows learners to pursue their career in the VET system. VET is a viable option for academically minded young people. For two thirds of all young people coming out of lower-secondary school at age 15, VET is the basis for lifelong learning and a major contributing factor for their integration into society. The principle of "no dead-end qualifications" enables holders of VET qualifications to pursue training at the tertiary level. This permeability leaves considerable room for individual flexibility in career paths.
- A strong labour market orientation and work-based learning approach. Labour market-orientation is certainly one of the big strengths of Swiss dual-track VET programmes. The competences acquired by learners are based on the actual needs of the host companies that provide them with apprenticeship training. Professional competences correspond to the actual tasks that holders of VET qualifications will be called upon to perform as qualified professionals.
- And, finally, cost-efficiency. For companies and professional organisations, to play an active role in the VET sector is not just a long-term investment in the future labour force. By assigning learners to productive tasks, most host companies directly recover the costs of their involvement in apprenticeship training and make a profit by the end of

the corresponding VET programme. This makes apprenticeship training economically appealing for host companies. It is a win-win situation for all partners.

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Let me end with this slogan, at the heart of an ongoing public campaign focusing on permeability: "Train as a mechanical engineer, become a dental technician. Professionals go far". We have amongst us today an actual example of such permeability. You will hear from him later in this session. Mr Pascal Gerber learned the profession of a metal roofer in a small enterprise for three years. He obtained a Gold Medal at the Euroskills competition a few weeks ago. He however decided for a change and, earlier this year, started medical studies at the University of Berne. From metal roofer to a future Doctor in Medicine, this shows the possibilities of the Swiss VET system.

Thank you.