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Slovakia

No longer waiting for Godot

The rapidly growing automotive industry is tuning up vocational education and training

Slovakia's economic performance heavily depends on its automotive industry. And the sector is expanding, with production rates expected to triple by 2010. In June 2003 the cornerstone of a new plant was laid 50 kilometres northeast of Bratislava. By 2006 it will provide direct employment for 3 500 people and indirectly over 6000 jobs with suppliers. Another giant investor from the automotive industry is expected to enter Slovakia soon.

No use to keep complaining about insufficient education and training. Július Hron, the Head of the Motor Vehicle Dealers and Services Guild (MVDSG) invited all the key players to establish a steering committee and a special task force to redesign VET curricula from scratch.

The first step was to draw up job and school leaver profiles, based on international experience. The guild provided funding for study visits to relevant countries, e.g. Germany, France, the Czech Republic and Hungary. According to a survey conducted by the guild, the Slovak automotive industry will by 2010 need at least 15 000 people (28 000, if potential new investors implement their plans), who have attained at least ISCED level 3.

Curricula redesign started in October 2002 in co-operation with the State Institute of VET (SIOV). The guild set the standards and more than 40 teachers were invited to review the old curricula. In January 2003 a group of experts (teachers, representatives of the guild etc.) started to develop curricula. In March 2003, the group completed its work. "We did it in a 'conclave manner', said Stanislav Pravda, responsible for educational issues within the MVDSG, "the group remained locked up for three days until a result had been reached". Subsequently, the Ministry of Education approved the new curricula for ISCED level 3 in three occupational areas - (auto/car electrician, vehicle body (re) finisher/vehicle painter and passenger car mechanic). The guild using a list of over 100 criteria, has selected 12, out of 124, vocational schools, spread all over the country. These will create a special network aimed at meeting the labour requirements of the guild members. The guild and the regional self-governing authorities will co-finance the equipment of the schools, but also hope for additional funding through European projects, which the guild has started to prepare. In one of these schools a training centre for educators will be set up. New textbooks are being prepared and will be funded by either the Ministry of Education or the guild.

These developments represent an important new departure in terms of co-operation between the education system and employers in Slovakia. The input by both sides into the development of curricula was substantial. In effect, a growing economic sector was faced with a gap between skill demand and supply and joint action has been taken to remove the mismatch.

In other VET sectors, the traditional debate continues. The schools are unaware of the labour market needs within a changing economy and do not understand the employers' complaints. The employers think that schools are simply reluctant to change. And they are still waiting for Godot, although it is quite easy to embark on an alternative strategy.

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