

EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

MANAGEMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE OUTLINE OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND MAJOR ISSUES

After a brief presentation of the economic and educational context in the countries concerned, this presentation focuses on four major themes which were particularly analyzed in the research contributions and discussed during the workshop: * changing the architecture of the VET system; the sharing of responsibilities and the decentralization process; the role of enterprises and the relationship with the economy; the instruments required for monitoring and regulation.

The context

A comparative analysis of the national reports suggests strong similarities between them, particularly with regard to their respective economic situations. However, greater differences are apparent in the way their vocational education and training systems are trying to adapt to the new context.

Following the collapse of the centrally-planned economic system, Central and Eastern European countries entered into a period of deep recession, with substantial decreases in the GDP (up to 24 per cent between 1990 and 1993), unknown to Western industrialized countries. Large manufacturing enterprises, which used to export to the former Soviet Union have been particularly affected by this change, suddenly being faced with competition from more efficient Western industries.

The four countries have become engaged in their own particular manner in a process of privatization and are beginning to show some signs of recovery, at least in terms of macroeconomics indicators. At the same time, and as a major and probably long-term result of the recession, a sharp reduction in employment levels were recorded together with the emergence of unemployment, as indicated by the country reports, its exact impact is however hard to measure: a number of unemployed people do not register, moonlighting is expanding and the statistics are not always adequate. This makes inter-country comparisons difficult and limits

* Held in Paris (19–21, December, 1994), initiated by a training program of International Institute for Educational Planning and carried out with the contribution of Epicures Project of the Network Educational Science Amsterdam (NESAS) the workshop was aimed to finalize a report on new trends in vocational education of E-C Europe countries with the participation of researchers from Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland exposing reports on vocational education and training (VET) of their countries.

The original version of this study was published in: Caillods & Bertrand & Atchoarena (eds) *Managing Vocational Education and Training in Central and Eastern European Countries. A Report*. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, 1995.

the possibilities of analyzing what should be an important aspect of the research: the unemployment of graduates.

In all these countries, the level of education was comparatively high in terms of enrolment ratios at the secondary level and of the quality of teaching in general education (for instance, in science). Access, to the higher level however had been limited compared to Western Europe.

Concerning the VET systems, it should be borne in mind that Central and Eastern European countries had long-standing traditions of their own before the Second World War, but then went through a process of unification along the lines of the Soviet model. The Baltic States were fully integrated into this model. It entailed a somewhat larger proportion of pupils following general studies upon completion of elementary school, implying a more important role for enterprises in training at a later stage. A characteristic which is more typical of the other countries, such as Hungary and Poland, was the very high proportion of students going to skilled workers vocational schools (usually, of a three-year duration).

In all the countries covered by this research programme, technical and to an even larger extent vocational schools (especially in industrial areas) are those which have been most affected by the new economic context. First of all, the quality of general education and of training in skilled workers vocational schools leaves much to be desired. Second, and exceedingly high degree of specialization has been required up to now, leading to specific occupations. Finally, a number of enterprises have closed their schools or have withdrawn their support, so that opportunities for practical training have become limited. These circumstances may explain why the employment of graduates from these schools is becoming particularly difficult.

Overcoming these problems has been a priority in the reforms and experiments which are analyzed in detail in the country reports and summarized below.

Changing the architecture of the VET system

Attempts of reforming the VET systems in Central and Eastern European countries date back to the 1970s. They were aimed at remediating some of the shortcomings of these systems, already identified at the time. They were initiated mostly by people inside the system (teachers and administrators). Nevertheless, for various reasons (political, a lack of resources, or administrative inertia), they were not implemented.

a) Various steps towards modernization

In the new context, following the socialist system's collapse and the plunge into a deep economic recession, the need for change has become imperative. Yet, as expressed by one participant in the workshop, most countries have not yet any clear, overall idea of what their future educational system should look like and they are simply trying to cope with the most urgent issues. As a result, what has taken place up to now looks more like a modernisation of the former structure rather than a fundamental reform of the system.

Concerning the countries represented in the research, examples of modernisation include:

- New legislation, which has been established for instance in Hungary, where three separate Acts have been passed since 1990, respectively for general, vocational and adult education and training;
- Changes in the school structure, for instance, in Lithuania, where basic school attendance is extended from nine to ten years, or in Hungary, where the new legislation extended the

duration of schooling in general schools from eight to ten years, without excluding the continuation of the former type;

- A shift in the flow of students upon completion of elementary school, away from the short and specialised vocational stream towards more general education (academic secondary or secondary vocational schools). During the two-year period 1990–92, the proportion of students receiving the former type of education decreased from 42 to 36,6 per cent in Hungary, from 48 to 37 per cent in Poland. In Estonia, it decreased from 32 per cent to 28 in Estonian-speaking schools, and from 25,8 to 25,3 per cent in Russian-speaking schools over a period of only one year. It is interesting to observe, on the basis of figures concerning students' applications to various schools in Lithuania, that the shift from vocational schools to general education seems to be as much the result of a change of attitudes on the part of students as of a clearly stated Government policy;
- Experimentation with new types of schools. In Hungary, a project assisted by the World Bank concerns the development of secondary technical schools with a two-year period of orientation, followed by two years of broad training in a limited number of occupations, in addition to the preparation of the baccalaureate. Specialisation starts only afterwards. In the same country, craft trades are being developed under the leadership of the National Association of Craftsmen.
- In Poland, experimental vocational schools are being developed, providing both general and vocational education, with a focus on general vocational knowledge and skills, while practical training takes place only during the third year. A new type of technical lyceum will provide a high level of general education enabling vocational flexibility and mobility and will give access to university as well as to other forms of specific training.
- Changes in the teaching contents: reduction of the number of specialised streams (especially in industrial areas), emergence of new specialities (especially in management, commerce and computer science) and modernisation of the contents of existing curricula;
- Development of the private sector: the reports concerning Hungary and Poland describe the rapid expansion of private vocational schools and of training enterprises in specific areas for which there is now a demand;
- There are also several instances of new programmes intended for the retraining of adult workers in accordance with the new requirements of the labour market. These programmes have not been analysed in detail in the framework of the research work presented here which focused on initial training.

b) The need for more fundamental changes

These various forms of modernisation may be seen as rather traditional and approached essentially from inside the educational system. The discussion during the workshop suggested that the type of structural reform which would be required should not be limited to the sheer architecture of the system. A systemic approach would imply changing the whole logic of the system, the mechanisms relating the training system to the enterprises and, last but not least, the attitudes of the various people concerned. Educational change however is to be seen as a collective learning process including all the actors concerned, who should learn to work together. Hence its implementation will take time. Ideally, it would incorporate some innovative and alternative approaches which are beginning to emerge in a number of advanced industrialised countries: the learning enterprise or organization and the concept of integrated learning.

A *more forward-looking* approach would take into account the relationship between the school and the labour market, issues of labour allocation between sectors of activity and within them, the changes which are taking place in occupational structure and work organization and the relationship between these changes and the training contents and organization. It should also consider the opportunities for mobility within the training system and at a later stage.

On the other hand, a realistic appraisal of the situation must recognize that the prerequisites for a bolder approach are hardly fulfilled in Central and Eastern European countries. The main actors with the ability to stimulate innovation cannot easily be found, either in Government or among enterprises – a point which will be further discussed below. Changing attitudes is not something that you can be told to do as a result of an administrative decision in a top-down process.

As a possible answer to some of these objections, it has been suggested that more attention might be paid to attempting to shape new actors. From this point of view, the reform of the training system could be considered as an opportunity to develop procedures which would involve more partners. This would imply that it is probably easier to overcome the difficulties by co-operation and dialogue at the local level, where people have to cope with concrete problems, rather than at the central level.

The analysis of the developments which have taken place in the countries under review also suggests that even the steps towards modernisation are not necessarily related to formal changes in the legislation. There are instances where (as in Hungary, for instance) the various legislative Acts do not define a clear policy orientation. There are others (as in Lithuania, for example) where rather substantial changes have taken place at the school level without any formal legislative decision, but as a result of local initiative. For the participants at the meeting, the legislative aspects of change were not necessarily the most important ones.

It should also be kept in mind that a formal legislation requires a clear consensus on the direction change is to take. However, in some at least of the countries concerned, such a consensus does not seem to exist.

Either the policy-makers themselves do not have a clear idea of what should be done or the views of the various actors diverge, for instance, on the respective role of schools of general education, technical and vocational schools and enterprise-based training.

The latter situation is particularly described in the report concerning Hungary, suggesting divergences between ministries and between political parties concerning the desirable structure of the system and the role of the various types of schools. Extensive discussions are also taking place on this subject in Lithuania.

Countries offering their assistance are also often inclined to press for the adoption of their own model, whether it be Anglo-Saxon or German. Considering the uncertainty over the future of the economy and of the educational system, the participants at the workshop were rather in favour of a third approach, according to which it is too early to adopt a final decision concerning the structure of the VET system. At this stage, the emphasis should be put more on the process of change rather than on issues of structure.

In the meantime, two orientations seem to be appropriate: priority should be given to the improvement of the quality of education and training; experimentation has to be encouraged, which implies decentralization and local initiative (see below).

Responsibility for the management and regulation of vocational education

A major theme of the research undertaken in the four countries concerned the new pattern of distribution of responsibilities for training between the various actors. Recent years have seen a process of decentralization and progress in school autonomy. These developments require close monitoring. The system's regulation constitutes a challenge to the Government and other agencies operating at the central level.

a) The decentralization process

A process of decentralization to the regional or to the school level has been going on for a number of years in many OECD countries. It is intended to contribute to the responsiveness of the VET system, particularly to its adjustment to local needs, to give increased responsibility to local actors and to facilitate their co-operation.

In a different context, decentralization holds an even more important place on the agenda of Central and Eastern European countries. Having inherited an extremely centralized and rigid system of vocational education and training, the need to make it more flexible and responsive is even greater. The debates during the workshop suggest however that decentralization was not necessarily the result of a deliberate and well thought out policy. It may also have been the natural reaction of Governments faced with intractable financial and technical problems: it then became a necessity to decentralize those responsibilities that they could no longer bear to other actors or other levels of responsibility.

In such a context, some observers have been speaking of "forced decentralization". They consider that this process tends to be limited to a power devolution, transferring the problems to the lower administrative levels, whereas what would be needed is a positive policy aiming at a new pattern of distribution of powers between the various actors. Some progress in this direction has been made, however, with the gradual building up of groups of actors who know what they want (as to a certain extent in Hungary). It would be desirable to go further than simple consultation and consider that co-operation with social partners works only when they participate more actively in the decision-making process. In Western countries also the decentralization process gives rise to problems. Whether decentralization is always the result of free choice, rather than the outcome of a conflict, may be questioned.

This being said, developments have widely differed between the countries. The move towards decentralization has been particularly bold in Hungary, where elected local authorities have been given a considerable amount of authority on opening, closing, financing and administering schools, changing the school structure, appointing the teachers and even on the contents of training. Nevertheless, in a period of transition, there is still some uncertainty about the distribution of power between the various actors. There are problems of co-ordination between the central and the local levels and the attempts to set up consultative bodies and institutions working in a democratic way may contribute to a certain slowness in the decision-making process.

In Poland, greater responsibility has been given to superintendents at the regional level, in order to control the overall national policy. The difference with Hungary is that they are essentially local representatives of the State administration. In Estonia and Lithuania, with the former system most decisions were taken in Moscow where all the planning was carried out. Now the power has been transferred to the Ministry and there is no intermediate level

between the Ministry and the schools. No formal decentralization policy has as yet been considered.

There is no general rule on what should be the role of the State. Different models exist: the State may be the provider of training, may set the rules or may leave it entirely to the market. There is no rule either on how to allocate funds to the schools. What is needed is transparency and a reference to clear indicators. The legal framework should define the extent of autonomy of the various actors at different levels (national, regional and local) and its different aspects. It should also define the kind of reporting required by schools and/or local authorities to the Centre, or the type of control to be carried out by the Central authorities.

A problem may arise if the level at which educational and training decisions are taken does not coincide with the level where this type of decision is meaningful from the point of view of the economy and for the labour market. The labour markets usually operate at a regional level but such a level Government representatives may only have a limited amount of power (as in Hungary, where local governments exist at lower levels), or may not be concerned with educational matters.

It should also be clear that it is not sufficient to discuss concepts in the abstract; it is not adequate in particular to attempt to transfer innovations implemented in Western countries to Central and Eastern Europe, without taking due account of their specific historical, political and financial context. There, the problem of decentralization of authority on training issues has to be seen in the more global context of the process of developing democracy. Many things which go without saying in Western Europe are not yet entirely clear in Central and Eastern Europe, including the possible limits of power sharing.

Furthermore, it should be underlined that cultural traditions vary between these countries and an appraisal of the decentralization process has to take into account the specific cultural context. Where there is more a tradition of assuming local responsibilities (which seems to be the case in Hungary), decentralization may be a powerful element in changing the system. In other contexts, it is likely that the people in charge will feel overburdened and helpless.

b) School autonomy

The progress in school autonomy can also be observed in a number of OECD Member States. Concerning Central and Eastern European countries, school autonomy was introduced mainly because it was the only possible way to cope with the limitations of the State's capacity and to ensure some degree of responsiveness to the new context. The scope of this autonomy is not always clear: it could concern the choice of courses, the training contents, the recruitment of teachers or the collection of additional resources.

Illustrations of these situations may be found in the country reports, especially the one concerning Hungary, where schools seem to enjoy a very large degree of autonomy. In Poland, the official policy is in favour of more school autonomy, but there remains apparently greater control on the part of the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, the report refers to a number of experiments largely based on school initiative. In Lithuania, it appears that without any legal change in favour of autonomy, vocational schools have been able to work "de facto" in a very autonomous way. For a number of them, autonomy was a means of survival in an extremely difficult context.

One of the issues raised by research was the identification of the factors which determine the efficiency of individual schools, at least in terms of their capacity to survive and adjust to the new context. The investigations suggest that the most important factor is the attitude of the headmaster and particularly his/her ability to interpret the information available on the

labour market and to make the necessary decisions regarding change in the school orientation and in setting up new courses responding to the new demands.

Conversely, those headmasters who were simply waiting for instructions did not succeed: in some cases, the schools had to be closed or the number of students substantially reduced. In other words, managerial ability seems to be essential. Sometimes, the managerial role is taken up by the headmasters themselves; in others, by another staff member. This is partly a question of personality, but it can also be improved through training – hence the need to develop training courses.

Very often, greater school autonomy implies that school boards be established, involving more people (teachers, but also parents or representatives of local communities) in a process of taking over some of the managerial responsibilities.

As much as possible, accountability should go hand in hand with autonomy. However, considering the earlier discussion on the present situation of actors, the question was raised: accountability to whom: the central administration, the regional authorities, industry? In some regions, there are very few local enterprises and accounting to them would be a source of bias.

Nobody questioned the validity of the move towards decentralization, but if more autonomy was to be left to the schools, it would also be important to give them the means to do things. Too often, they do not have sufficient resources to produce teaching materials and equipment, nor are they equipped to evaluate employment trends and skill requirements. They cannot work if no agency is there to give them the necessary means or to impulse a policy. Nowhere is school autonomy complete. In the present context of Central and Eastern Europe, schools need a lot of assistance in such matters as curricula, textbooks production, teaching techniques, and so on. Otherwise, quality will suffer.

The State should define the overall policy, start pilot projects, encourage local initiatives, set skill and qualifications standards. Then the implementation of the restructuring policy could be left to the regional authorities or to large towns.

c) The need for regulation: a new challenge for the actors at the central level.

The experience of some of the Western countries indicates that decentralization may lead to two opposite results: local actors may look for the national average and compete in order to attain the level of the national system; or they may try to build up their own specificity's, leading to increased disparities. In such a case, there is need for central control and regulation.

Generally speaking, the trend towards the greater responsiveness and flexibility of VET systems should go along with the search for consistency and the identification of regulating mechanisms. A consensus on the necessity to regulate exists, but the notion of regulation has to be clarified and it should be determined who should regulate what and which level of authority should have the power over which element of management.

This analysis applies probably even more so to Central and Eastern European countries, which are still going through a period of transition and do not have the same experience and traditions of autonomy and of sharing responsibilities. Regulation is particularly needed there, in order to control the quality of training and to make sure that the providers are not only trying to make it cheap. Where a private sector emerges, it is also necessary to ensure that everyone may have access to training and that there is no risk of excluding those who cannot afford it.

A clear policy has to be defined which outlines the responsibilities of the different partners in the financing process. Appropriate indicators have to be developed to govern the allocation

of funds. Finally, regulation of the whole system is needed to introduce a more global and more long-term view of the socio-economic needs.

Meeting these regulation needs is a challenge for the new institutional set-up of Central and Eastern European countries.

At the local level, it is difficult to say yet whether the opportunities for co-ordination between actors offered by decentralization are actually used.

At the central level, important changes have taken place in the distribution of power between the various actors. In the former socialist system, much of the responsibility for training belonged to the technical ministries in charge of industrial sectors of activity. With the end of the centrally-planned economy, their responsibilities have been re-allocated in very different ways.

The actors at the central level

The new division of responsibilities at the central level is particularly complex in Hungary. The Ministry of Labour, which draws up and published the list of qualifications and training courses, has a central managing and controlling role. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the general education part of the curriculum and for the allocation of resources from the State budget, but most schools are maintained by self-governments. Other Ministries also have a responsibility for schools in specific areas. In addition, new consultative bodies have been established, such as the National VET Council, a tripartite forum including representatives from employer's organizations and trade unions. It provides advice on vocational education and training issues and makes decisions on the utilization of the Vocational Education Fund. The country report analyzes the positions of the various actors concerning this new context.

This situation contrasts with that of Poland, of Estonia and of Lithuania, where the main responsibility has been assigned to the Ministry of Education, which is not necessarily prepared to deal with the vocational aspects and their relationship with the economy. In Poland, for instance, the Ministry of Education retains a major responsibility regarding the conditions of pupils' enrolment, curriculum, textbooks, evaluation of pupils' achievements and examinations. It regulates the teaching process and the running of experimental schools. It distributes the budgetary funds to superintendents who allocate them to the schools. Other ministries also run some specialized schools.

In the Czech Republic apprenticeship now depends on the Ministry of Economic Affairs, vocational schools on the Ministry of Education and retraining on the Ministry of Labour, but it is not clear whether this will last and what should be the distribution of power. It is an example of the uncertainty which still prevails in many countries and which also concerns the sharing of responsibilities between geographic levels.

Some countries report that when several ministries are involved there are problems of co-ordination between them and the educational perspective promoted by the Ministry of Education and the economic perspective promoted by the Ministries of Labour or of Economic Affairs may lead to completely different programmes.

It is difficult to draw conclusions and to say which trends will predominate.

The relationship with the economy and the role of enterprises

Concerning the relations between the VET system and the economy, three interrelated aspects have to be considered: the shortage of financial resources, the relationship with the labour market for the determination of training needs and the participation of enterprises in the provision of training.

a) The shortage of financial resources

As mentioned above, the dramatic economic recession has implied a tightening of national budgets, while many large firms have withdrawn their support of training activities. On the other hand, decentralization at the regional level does not mean that regional or local authorities receive an adequate share of public revenue. As a result, the shortage of financial resources is often considered as the major challenge for these countries. It means that teachers' salaries are kept at a low level (with an adverse effect on their morale and motivations), but also that little or no additional resources are left for modernization of equipment and teaching aids, and also for innovation and experimentation.

Far from providing financial support, some enterprises ask to be paid in order to provide practical training to trainees. The taxation system does not always provide the appropriate incentives in this respect (for instance in Poland). Generally speaking, the idea of training as an investment is not yet widely accepted.

For the time being, most problems are more or less solved on an ad hoc and local basis. School autonomy makes it possible to develop various initiatives for collecting additional resources. The development of a private sector, implying contributions from students and their families, is another approach. These initiatives raise the problem of regulation mentioned earlier.

More contributions may be expected from users and from enterprises, under specific conditions: there are already some promising experiences of partnerships and of co-operation. As for public funding, it should take the form of incentives.

b) The relationship with the labour market

It is generally assumed that the main challenge facing the VET systems in Central and Eastern European countries is its adjustment to the changing needs of a market economy. This should particularly apply to the assessment of skill and training requirements. Yet, looking at the rather disappointing experience of advanced industrialized countries in this respect, one may wonder what can be done in countries facing a high degree of uncertainty with regard to the future shape of their economy. Furthermore, evaluation and anticipation are not only a matter of techniques, but they also require a machinery for research and co-operation with employers.

A major problem in Central and Eastern European countries is that no new frame of communication between education on the one hand and to economy and the labour market on the other has yet emerged. In most countries, the actors who could play this role are missing or do not have the ability to undertake the type of analysis that would be required. Even when discussions take place with employers or workers' representatives, there are few incentives to change the individual behaviour of the actors, including enterprises.

The emergence, from this point of view, of a new situation resulting from the creation of consultative bodies may be observed in Hungary. In Poland, schools and enterprises have been encouraged to work together, in order to better meet the needs of the labour market, but

the information and the mechanisms which would make it possible do not yet seem to exist. In the Czech Republic, a good relationship with the labour market has been established with the labour market programmes for unemployed and the strong tradition of co-operation between secondary schools and enterprises is being renovated.

In other countries, such as Lithuania, it is reported that there is no connection as yet between the VET system and the labour market. Furthermore, the very notion of a labour market is questioned in the present context. Schools are struggling on an individual basis to adapt their courses, not so much to the demands of enterprises, which are not clearly stated, but rather to the wishes of the students and their families, in order to find sufficient applicants and to maintain their activity.

Such a situation raises several questions: is the survival of the schools (or of an individual school) an objective as such, or should it depend on sufficient evidence that it meets national needs? To what extent do the wishes of the students and their families truly reflect the demands of the labour market? Satisfying short-term demands is one thing, but they may be different from the long-term socio-economic needs. These questions arising in connection with a growing autonomy of public schools also concern the growing private training sector.

Other questions may be raised with regard to the occupational objectives which can be assigned to adult training programmes when the problem is no more one of non-adjustment of the skill structure, but one of imbalance between the overall supply and demand of labour. In such a case, should not the priority be given to the recruitment of young people arriving on the labour market, rather than to the retraining of adults?

In any case, the experience of various countries (including in the West) shows that it is not possible to rely entirely on enterprises to anticipate future employment trends and training requirements. Governments should at least contribute to the collection of information and have a capacity to interpret the labour market's signals, as we shall discuss below.

In most Central and Eastern European countries, there is already a lot of information available on employment trends, but it is not systematically analysed nor is it presented in a way that is easily understood by central, or local administrators of vocational education and training. In any case, one should not expect specific and reliable forecasts, and the major challenge for training everywhere is to cope with uncertainty.

The discussion during the workshop concluded that there was a need to move from one kind of relationship with the labour market to another one. Training policies should try out new modes of regulation in order to rebuild new kinds of institutions.

c) Participation of enterprises in the provision of training

Close co-operation with enterprises was a basic feature of the former VET system. However, in recent years, there has been little attempt to integrate teaching and production in the enterprises: either students simply participate in the regular production, or they are practising in workshops separate from the production context.

Following the withdrawal of large enterprises, a number of workshops have been taken over by schools. Others have started operating in an autonomous fashion, becoming a kind of private training centre. This happens in Hungary, where, paradoxically, the official policy is to involve the enterprises to a greater extent in training and to follow the German dual model.

In all the countries covered by the research, there is a policy of maintaining or even strengthening the links with industry. Nevertheless, implementing this policy is difficult, in view of the present state of industry. The situation greatly differs however according to the type of enterprise and a distinction can be made in the present context between four kinds of firms:

- The large companies which used to be the core of the public manufacturing sector in the traditional industries. As mentioned above, most of them are in a deep recession and have withdrawn their participation in or their support of training activities. This situation has had three serious consequences: a more acute shortage of resources at the disposal of schools; a lack of training facilities, particularly for practical training, and a disruption of the traditional employment opportunities for graduates.
- Most of the new private enterprises belong to the service or to the high tech sectors. They are usually still very small and their structure is often quite informal. According to the country reports, for the moment many of them show little interest in training: when they recruit, they would be satisfied with young people having some kind of broad-based training. In any case, their training capacity is limited. However, this is probably an area for future development, using a more innovative approach.
- The situation is different with the craft industries which need employees with a practical know-how. Many of these enterprises are interested in recruiting young people through traditional apprenticeship. Developments in this direction are reported, for example, in Hungary and in Poland. In this case, though some problems remain: small enterprises usually do not have proper workshops and can offer only a limited range of training opportunities; how can it be ensured that apprenticeship is really a form of training, that trainees receive a proper salary or stipend and that enterprises are not simply interested in employing cheap labour? In this period of transition, there are great differences between individual situations. Setting up the institutional framework and distinguishing the actors who will contribute to the regulation of the system takes time.
- Finally, there are the large foreign enterprises which came to these countries during privatization. They usually need well-trained labour in the most up-to-date technologies and types of organization. They often tend to organize their own training programmes, but they may also offer opportunities for co-operation with the school system, giving it a change to increase its resources and to modernize (examples are given in the report on Poland).

Another solution to the provision of practical training which is also under consideration is the creation of inter-enterprise training centres, which could also be open to adults.

Monitoring the changes

Reference has been made earlier to the need for accountability and evaluation of the VET system, particularly in a context of experimentation and decentralization. This means that technical instruments are available. Three aspects have particularly received attention during the research and the discussion of its findings: the improvement of an information system and the evaluation of the output of the system, which requires mechanisms for assessment and certification, and data on the employment of graduates.

a) Information

As mentioned earlier, information is an essential aspect of the improvement of the VET systems in these countries. In many cases, it is already available (although not yet on specific aspects of unemployment, such as the unemployment of graduates). But improvement is needed in two areas:

- Relevance: there is enough information on stocks (of students, teachers, etc.), but not on flows (graduates and students leaving the training system); it is often too limited to quantitative data and more qualitative studies are required to understand what they mean; there is hardly any connection between the information collected on the school system and the

more limited one concerning the labour market; there is not enough emphasis on users' needs. In the context of a transformation process, there is a need to develop a system which would follow the different aspects of this change and would not simply reflect the present situation. As far as possible, the process of change should be analyzed in relation to the situation of other countries.

- Circulation and access. It requires proper mechanisms and a trained staff, as well as attitudes which facilitate co-operation. There is a need to develop a new culture of information, to see who are the users, what are the channels and what has been done in terms of capacity building. A capacity has to be developed for analyzing and interpreting the information and making it accessible to those who need it, especially the decision-makers and various actors at the regional and local levels.

The report concerning Estonia is focused on the improvement of databases. It identifies some of the problems faced by statisticians, concerning for instance the adaptation of international classifications to the national context. It underlines that they now answer the questions "how many?" and "how much?", but that there is now a need to determine how well the system is doing.

b) Evaluation, assessment and certification

The lack of any systematic evaluation of the efficiency of VET systems can still be observed in most countries. As mentioned earlier, it becomes a serious problem when it is associated with a period of experimentation and with a move towards decentralization.

One suggestion is that there should be a shift from the traditional way of controlling only the inputs (especially the financial resources) to the control of the output of the VET system.

With this concern in mind, many Central and Eastern European countries are considering the development of a national system of standards and certification. This could undoubtedly be an important step towards the harmonization of school standards within given country and some kind of quality control. However, some clarification may be needed on two points:

- to expect that the development of a single classification system could ensure some kind of simple correspondence between occupations and training courses would be unrealistic;
- if it is desirable to bring together the concepts and standards to be established in Central and Eastern Europe and those that are already in use in Western European countries, it should be clear that common European skill and qualification standards do not exist.

To ensure the consistency of the VET system and to avoid differences between geographic areas and between schools, the system of control and assessment should preferably be carried out at the central level.

c) Assessing the external efficiency of training through tracer studies

A very important aspect of the evaluation of the efficiency of the VET system concerns the situation of those who have completed their training. Whether they have found a proper job should be a major indicator of efficiency. In the present context of transition and of mounting unemployment it should be of particular interest in Central and Eastern European countries, but it is also particularly difficult: funds are lacking and conditions are changing so fast that the information collected may soon become obsolete.

There is no systematic collection of data of this sort in the four countries under study. However, in the framework of this programme, an experimental survey was conducted in Lithuania among the graduates from a sample of vocational and technical schools (detailed

results may be found in the country report). This experience raises interesting questions concerning the feasibility of this type of study and the interpretation of its results.

This type of study obviously requires not only financial resources, but also a competent staff and a certain amount of co-ordination between different agencies. They can be found only if there is sufficient interest on the part of the authorities concerned.

Such studies need to have a fairly wide scope. The tracer study conducted in Lithuania, for example, indicated relatively high rates of unemployment for vocational schools graduates; negative conclusions should not be drawn too hastily on the future of vocational schools, however, as long as similar rates concerning grammar schools are not available. Indeed, the statistical analysis contained in the report on Hungary shows that unemployment is even higher among those who have left grammar schools.

Similarly, the discrepancy between the type of course followed and the type of occupation is not necessarily to be interpreted as a bad sign in a context of rapid transformation of the economy: it may indicate an ability to adjust to rapidly changing circumstances.

A word of caution was, however, introduced on the cost-efficiency of this type of study: what is the quantity of really new information that it provides? How are the results to be interpreted when the response rates are low? There are probably no universal answers to such questions, but in any case there is a need to develop an awareness of and a concern for these issues among school teachers and administrators.

More generally speaking, a cost-efficiency approach to the monitoring of the VET system is desirable. The development of indicators and guidelines should take place with a clear policy in mind. What is to be done with the results of an evaluation system has to be clarified also: for instance, in a context of school autonomy, should the assessment of the efficiency of various schools lead to providing further assistance to the most successful ones or, on the contrary to those which are lagging behind? This is an important policy issue.

Concluding remarks

This review of the main issues faced by Central and Eastern European countries leads to a few general remarks which may conclude this report.

An important aspect which has not been covered in this research programme concerns the training and retraining of adult workers. The question of the relative role of initial and continuous training nevertheless has to be raised. In the present context of mounting unemployment and of apparent mismatch between the training provided and the new demands, two very different approaches may be put forward: the conservative approach would tend to help schools to survive, without any consideration for their economic efficiency, simply because they are there with their teachers and facilities. A more radical approach would be to suggest the closure of these schools altogether – or to let them die – and give priority to programmes for adults.

None of these approaches is entirely satisfactory: the first one is economically costly, it is inefficient and is not a good means of preparation for the future. The second one however is not socially realistic and does not include preparations on a long-term basis either. Sooner or later, the economy will recover and will need a skilled workforce with a broad training. What the shape of this vocational education and training system will be still remains to be determined.

There does not seem to be much discussion of this issue. Yet, establishing a closer link between vocational schools and training or retraining programmes for adults, which are usually provided in a different institutional context and in other facilities, is desirable.

The fact that no drastic and comprehensive reform of the VET system has yet taken place does not mean that nothing has happened. Indeed, many things are happening, but the most important ones are not necessarily the most conspicuous: they are often taking place at the local level, on the basis of individual initiatives. From this point of view, decentralization and school autonomy seem to have had positive effects. However, broad policy orientations and guidelines remain to be defined, together with the accountability mechanisms which will allow for the right balance between central monitoring and decentralized management.

The most important changes required concern the attitudes and have cultural connotations. Most probably, a long period of transition will be required. The cultural heritage, as well as the uncertainty concerning the future shape of the economy, militate in favour or giving time to these countries to develop their own system. The simple transfer of a foreign model is neither desirable, nor possible. What is important is the coherence of the future system, in relation to the overall institutional and cultural context of each country. Nevertheless, a careful and comparative analysis of foreign experiences may be useful for the progressive building of the future system. The research presented here constitutes an initial step in this direction.

Olivier Bertrand & Françoise Caillods

