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WORK-STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The present study focuses on the prospect of a more educational than structural approach to work-study programmes in the education sector. Work-study programmes are considered to be an educational tool for helping to promote successful training and encourage professional integration accordingly by means of both schooling and academic study and apprenticeships.

THE OBSERVATION:

The lack of importance placed on work experience as part of the knowledge acquisition process means that work-study programmes are unable to facilitate learning processes or help improve vocational guidance choices.

In October 2013, the government outlined its objective of reaching a total of 500,000 apprentices by 2017 - that is 65,000 more than at the end of 2012. With this in mind, the Ministry of National Education has expressed a desire to increase the number of EPLE (local public education institution) apprentices from 40,000 to 60,000 within the next four years.

Every year some 150,000 young people leave the education system without any qualifications, 52% of whom were unemployed in 2010. The overwhelming majority of children leaving the system without qualifications are the children of blue-collar workers (5 children of blue-collar workers for every child of a white-collar worker).

In the case of the 2007 generation, 24,000 pupils completed their fourth year of

secondary education. The highest qualification obtained by young people taking the vocational route was the CAP (vocational training certificate) or the BEP (school leaving certificate) in 39% of cases, the vocational baccalauréat in 26%, the DUT technical diploma in 6% and the bachelor's degree in 2% of cases.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the vocational route caters for those children experiencing the greatest difficulty (80% had dropped behind in their first year of secondary education).

The apprenticeship figures (436,334 apprentices in 2012) show that over 40% of apprentices are preparing to take a CAP qualification and that 30% are preparing to take the baccalauréat. Ultimately, the aforementioned underdevelopment has resulted in an increase in the average age of an apprentice from 17.5 years in 1986 to 19.2 years in 2012, with girls accounting for a very small proportion of the apprenticeships available.

An international approach has shown that basing the training pathway on apprenticeships does not necessarily go hand in hand



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with a low youth unemployment rate. Even though work-study programmes, and apprenticeship contracts in particular, perform better with regards to access to employment (although this does decrease as the level of qualification increases), it is important to avoid establishing apprenticeships as a training approach that is likely to guarantee conditions that will facilitate professional integration and therefore to effectively fight unemployment.

AVENUES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Work-study programmes, which are based on rigorous foundations and implemented as part of the acquisition of a knowledge, skills and culture base and developed as this base is extended, are believed to offer the dual advantage of both encouraging acquisition and highlighting the benefits of apprenticeship as a natural training pathway at all levels of qualification.

It is essential that work-study programmes be based on organic exchange between professionals in the world of work and professionals in the teaching sector. It is important to accurately define the conditions under which work-study programmes are implemented for the purposes of avoiding incorrect classification, particularly in the case of initial contact with the company and indeed with the professional sphere in general.

Work-study-based vocational training requires both academic supervision and 'vocational supervision'. The former is important for the purposes of positioning the knowledge involved in the professional tasks undertaken in relation to the body of knowledge already acquired or yet to acquire, the second for qualifying said knowledge, establishing the framework within which it is hosted and suggesting a relevant scenario for its usage and development that reflects the individual's professional objectives, thus giving it an element of social significance through the very expression of its utility. This, of course, requires the appropriate mechanisms for close consultation between the academic and economic spheres to be put in place.

Supported by a degree of basic training and adhering to the same educational principles, work-study programmes, by virtue of their practical relationship with the professional environment, should be capable of altering or even correcting certain trajectories that prevent many young people from acquiring sound knowledge or a qualification and, ultimately, from achieving professional integration.

All apprenticeship schemes require an educational framework.

Lifelong training provides a likely opportunity to create new and productive cross-generation cooperation initiatives.

APL in the framework of a work-study-based educational approach must endeavour to make national pathways comparable or compatible and eventually facilitate European mobility.

The link between knowledge and the methods of acquisition and practical application thereof remains one of the major aspects of the issue of training, regardless of the type of training in question.

The present study advocates work-study programmes as an educational approach that is capable not of resolving all of the issues raised but rather of enriching the context in which knowledge is acquired.

Indeed, by offering a greater variety of options for giving meaning to the apprenticeships undertaken by both young and older students alike, work-study programmes in the education sector offer the greatest chances of success in terms of both the diversity of skills and talent and the most uncertain of educational pathways.