

PRESS RELEASE

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Reports to the Flemish Parliament

Workplace learning in full-time vocational and technical secondary education

With workplace learning, Flemish government wants to better connect secondary education to the labor market and to reduce the unqualified outflow and youth unemployment. The Court of Audit investigated whether schools of full-time vocational secondary (VSE) and technical secondary education (TSE) offer work-based learning, and in particular the internship form, sufficiently and qualitatively and whether they achieve the predetermined objectives. It found that the schools certainly largely comply with the internship obligation, but that they sometimes struggle to find suitable workplaces and to offer quality traineeships. Dual learning has had limited success to date. In the absence of suitable internship data, it is unclear to what extent work-based learning achieves its objectives, although there are strong indications that this is not the case in the special secondary education study area of trade.

Workplace learning in full-time VSE and TSE

Flemish Government obliges students to organize a traineeship of at least eighteen half days per school year in the sixth and seventh year of all VSE courses and in the sixth year of a number of TSE courses. This obligation didn't change a lot, as the study programs concerned already had a long tradition of organizing internships. Internships are therefore well established in the third stage of VSE: an internship has been registered for 80 to 90% of the students. Internships are also frequent in TSE (up to 35%). Interviews and internship registrations show that schools largely comply with the internship obligation.

Find internship places

Interviewed schools indicated that they sometimes find it difficult to find suitable traineeship places for some fields of study and in practice have to move to traineeship places that are less in line with curriculum objectives. Administrative internships in the VSE field of office work in particular are often problematic due to the gap between the job requirements and what students learned at school. The study field of logistics, on the other hand, has to deal with hard-to-reach logistics companies for students, who are only mobile to a limited extent. Mobility problems also complicate internships in home care, as well as the private sphere of those internships. Mechanics-electricity internships also struggle with less accessible companies in the school environment, together with the specificity of some

courses and negative experiences of employers in the past. Programming also sometimes takes insufficient account of the availability of internships.

Internship quality

Schools try to offer quality internships in line with curriculum objectives. However, the balance between internship sizes and what students are expected to achieve on the internship is not always clear, nor school boards allocate hours for internship supervision. Internship evaluations sometimes focus on work attitudes curriculums do not mention.

Dual learning

In 2018, legislation introduced dual learning, in which a student learns on the work floor, in contrast to an internship, in which the student applies in the workplace what he has learned at school. However, the number of students in dual training has so far remained limited (1,810 students in the 2020-2021 school year, an average of 3.11 students per grade and per field of study in a school). Possible causes include: little interest on the part of schools and companies, unfamiliarity on the part of companies and some schools that do not support the fact that learning is shifting from the school to the work floor.

Achieving objectives

Measuring the achievement of objectives is difficult as reliable and complete internship data lack. Schools only provide limited data to the National Social Security Office. Apart from the three general policy objectives, government has not set any specific or quantified objectives for workplace learning. Nor has it itself evaluated all of its policy results. As a result, it cannot check whether the internship obligation pays off. Within these limitations, the Court of Audit found that VSE and TSE students usually quickly found a first employment, regardless of any internship obligation, but that students in the VSE study field of trade were less likely to find work.

Proper coordination of education with the labour market is hampered by regulations currently basing vocationally-oriented training in curricula too little on the related professional activities. Modernization of secondary education should remedy this by working with professional qualifications based on competence profiles. In general, the place of employment in the cases studied corresponded with the field of study followed, which indicates a good match. But for the office administration and data management students, that coordination was less good. About one in ten students also found their first employer in the internship provider. This was less the case for VSE students from the trade study field.

Response of the minister

The Flemish Minister of Education replied on 9 March 2023 that he mainly relies on the schools for internship quality. He leaves the initiative for scrapping and updating labour market oriented courses to the sectors. Furthermore, he wants to limit registration of internships to the electronic employment registration system DIMONA and is committed to combating the obstacles to the success of dual learning together with the Minister of Employment.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the

audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The audit report of the Court of Audit on the *Workplace learning in full-time vocational and technical secondary education* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full versions and this press release can be found on the Court's website: www.courtofaudit.be.