



FITT! Forma Il Tuo FuTuro!

INCREASING

THE QUALITY

OF APPRENTICESHIP

FOR VOCATIONAL

QUALIFICATIONS

IN ITALY



English



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THE CONTEXT

In Europe and Italy, policy makers and stakeholders are looking for new ways to overcome the high youth unemployment rate and to tackle the mismatch between education and labor markets. A structured coordination between actors of the educational system with private-sector representatives in the set-up and implementation of work-based learning systems - and in particular apprenticeship - is one way to achieve such objectives.

In recent years, the Italian government has introduced reforms that are intended to strengthen the role of companies in the education and training landscape (the last one in 2015). For example, in the dual model and, as part of a cooperation between companies and schools or training providers to provide work-based learning pathways, it is now possible for the “apprendistato” to lead to a recognized vocational qualification within the vocational and education training system.

The Italian VET system had little experience with such vocational education and training pathways. The FITT! project started timely with the aim to substantially contribute to the successful qualitative implementation of these reforms.

THE FITT! PROJECT

The Veneto Region, Human Capital and Culture Area, on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Labor together with Veneto Lavoro – its technical agency for labour, the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung - BIBB) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit - GIZ) joined forces in the European FITT! project (2015-2017).

Funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus + programme (Key action 3 – Support to policies), the objectives of the FITT! project encompass the development and experimentation of procedures leading to a reference model for the development of high-quality company-based VET models at regional and national level in Italy.

The project gives due consideration to the Italian VET regulatory framework as regards the distribution of legal competences between regional and State levels. It focuses on the 3-year and 4-year qualifications on the food and hospitality sector.

THE FITT! QUALITY DIMENSIONS

The title of the project sums up different dimensions in the concept of “quality” to revitalize the apprenticeship path as a VET learning option that meets the needs of the labour market and - at the same time – ensures the personal and professional growth of new generations.

The project works on four interrelated dimensions of the concept of quality:

- 1** Dialogue and cooperation between businesses, organizations that represent them, and schools / training institutions to converge on some common goals and standards, despite the diversity of the role and purpose that the different actors necessarily have;
 - 2** Quality of the apprenticeship pathways and the skills of the in-company trainers and VET trainers to ensure that apprenticeship becomes an effective learning path, enabling learning of both technical and relational skills;
 - 3** Coherence between dual VET pathways and professional careers;
 - 4** Benefits that apprenticeship can have for young people and for the companies, as well as for those involved in education and institutions in general.
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START!

FITT! started with a feasibility study of the framework conditions as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the latest reforms on apprenticeship in comparison with the German dual system. The stakeholder analysis, their attitude toward and experience with apprenticeship was of primary importance to build a VET model that is socially, culturally and institutionally acceptable in the local socio-economic context.

The analysis included experiences, roles and opinions of representatives of all stakeholder groups. The qualitative and quantitative data informed on trends, convergence and common perceptions about apprenticeship as a training and work placement tool:

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- 1 Framing the issues: in-depth interviews with 6 key stakeholders
 - 2 The definition of possible scenarios: 2 focus groups with schools and companies
 - 3 The analysis of the supply: questionnaires for students (over 500 respondents)
 - 4 The analysis of the demand: questionnaire to about 40 companies
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FIVE MAJOR RESULTS

1 A DIFFICULT TARGET

VET is a 'last resort' learning path. In most cases, entering vocational training and apprenticeship is not considered positively, as a potential way to acquire specific skills and integrate quickly into employment. The experiences of the youths show, however, that work-based learning is often the first entry point into the labour market.

2 IMAGE AND PERCEPTION PROBLEMS

Young persons and their families know little about apprenticeship. Issues of image (reputation) related to the selection and attendance of vocational and professional schools are quite pervasive in the contemporary socio-cultural collective perception, and they do not only refer to the youth, but also to families and teachers.

3 RELATIONS BETWEEN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Despite the existence of good practice, streamlining and standards to articulate the activities of VET schools and companies are still lacking. As a result, companies sometimes complain that the educational paths are not fully aligned to the needs of the territory or require further training, while schools highlight an instrumental use (cheap labour) of apprenticeship by local entrepreneurs.

4 DEFINITION OF THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILES AND CURRICULA

Despite a gradual integration of work-based learning in the secondary school curriculum, adequate tools for the definition, recognition and evaluation of skills learned during the work activity are still lacking.

5 REGULATORY ISSUES

Apprenticeship remains a blurry form of contract with a low salary that has little or nothing to do with the training of young people.



DESIGN OF THE FITT! MODEL

Based on the results of the analysis, the partners designed a general framework – the FITT! Model – in accordance with the current Italian legislative framework. The FITT! model mainly focuses on the “soft” features (not the prescriptive regulations) of the Italian and regional dual systems that are now being launched.

The model aims to develop the capacities of the involved actors, at the individual, organizational, network and systemic levels, improving and integrating tools and law provisions and acting on the different dimensions of quality.

The project partnership has analysed the approach, processes and products of the German apprenticeship system and selected those worthy at being adapted, while legislative references and / or institutional roles were not considered. The model also integrates the guidelines on the quality of apprenticeship and work-based learning issued at European level.

The model, while focusing on apprenticeship pathways leading to a recognized vocational qualification, refers to a wider policy framework of both education/training and labour policies, which - through the latest Italian school reforms (“Buona Scuola” and the strengthening of “*Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro*”) - constitute the roadmap of the Italian dual training. .

The FITT! model uses and improves tools and methodologies that are already available and that can be used first for the test phase, and then for its mainstreaming:

- Forms and tools developed to put into practice the latest reforms (in particular inter-ministerial decree implementing Article 46 of the Legislative Decree no. 81/2015 of October 12, 2015).
- Use of social dialogue and networks, formal and informal, that already exist at regional and local level.
- European cooperation (in this case Germany) to review, enforce and improve the system management tools at various stages of implementation.
- Using existing information systems for monitoring and evaluation, and for its promotion.
- Consistency with initiatives and active labour market policies and educational guidance programs.

The FITT! model means:

- Bring together, whenever possible, all relevant actors of dual training schemes: VET providers, companies, social partners and public institutions.
- Ensure a common understanding of dual training and its conditions and benefits through joint activities and learning opportunities like study visits.
- Develop a common action plan. Involve all stakeholders in the design, monitoring and evaluation of dual pathways, especially in the development of common training standards (*piano formativo quadro*).
- Train tutors for dual training both in the companies (*tutor aziendale*) and in the training centers / schools (*tutor formativo*) on how to transform common training standards into an individual in-company training plan (*piano formativo individuale*) and on how to use the latter to support apprentices to acquire professional and personal competences through work-based learning (pedagogy of work-based learning).
- Inform companies and intermediaries through events and publications.
- Elaborate guidelines and other helpful material on quality apprenticeship and the dual system.

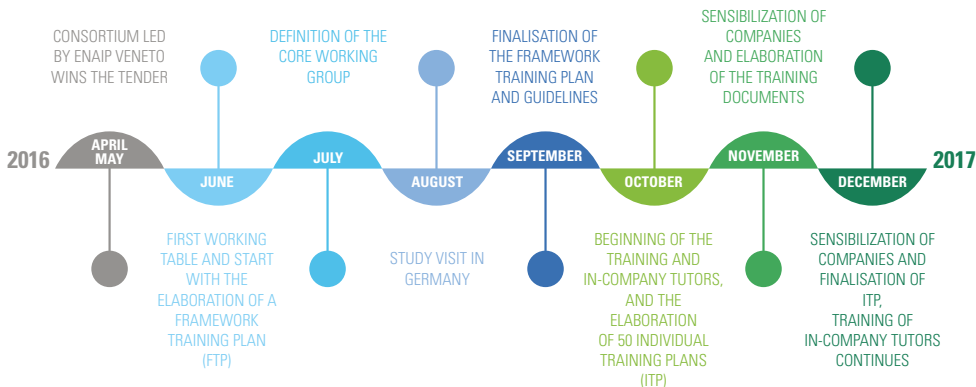
A pivotal component of the model is its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, which has been developed and deployed by GIZ. It allows, as for any innovative policy program, the identification of indicators and information that help measure impact and support the assessment of processes and results. The system evaluates, amongst other things, the role of key stakeholders (companies and schools) in the design and implementation of the “dual” apprenticeship model, the performance and employability of FITT participants as well as the employment rate of FITT! graduates, also in comparison with the employment rate in conventional schemes. Tools and indicators for the monitoring and impact evaluation are embedded in the model.



THE EXPERIMENTATION OF FITT!

A consortium including 5 VET providers (Enaip Veneto, Pia Società San Gaetano, Associazione Lepido Rocco, Centro polifunzionale Don Calabria, Engim Veneto), a social partner (Ente Bilaterale del Veneto e Friuli Venezia Giulia), F.I.C.I.A.P. VENETO (*Federazione Italiana Centri di Istruzione Addestramento Professionale*) and several companies carried out the experimentation of the FITT! model with the scientific support of the FITT! Italian-German project partnership.

FITT! Experimentation agenda (May 2016 – 2017)



DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON FRAMEWORK TRAINING PLAN AND GUIDELINES

During the initial activity of the experimentation, all members of the consortium came together to get information about the FITT! project and the FITT! model. Participants then drafted a first version at a framework training plan (*piano formativo quadro*). At the end of a 3-day session, the consortium decided to continue with this new approach and agreed with the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) on a common working plan for the next months.

After the first session, representatives from the major training providers, the Ente Bilaterale (representing the employers and employees side and responsible for the quality control of the traditional apprenticeship contract “*apprendistato professionalizzante*”) and two field experts from the hospitality sector with teaching assignments established the core working group. They took part in a capacity-building training in Germany. They explored the German dual training system, focusing on the different learning and training premises (companies, school) as well as on cooperation patterns and responsibilities of the German major VET stakeholders and competent bodies (BIBB, professional bodies, social partners, Chamber of Commerce). Back in Italy, the working group finalised the common framework training plan and elaborated information guidelines for its implementation.

Hospitality is by far the most popular vocational education and training subject in Italy. Currently, more than 100,000 pupils are enrolled in the regional training courses. The FITT! model developed framework training plans for two qualifications in hospitality:

- 1 “operatore per la ristorazione”, in the subjects of “cucina” and “sala e bar” at level 3 of the European Qualification framework (EQF)
- 2 “tecnico di cucina” and “tecnico sala bar,” two additional qualifications at EQF level 4 (comparable with the three year German dual training occupations)

THE ROLE OF THE FRAMEWORK TRAINING PLAN

- To increase the quality of professional qualifications and students' professional skills through consistent training programs
- To organise and run in-company training on the basis of common standards
- To create a flexible tool for the training activities in the company that can be applied to different sectors.

The development of the framework training plan requires collaborative work of professional field experts from the business, social partners and VET providers as in the FITT! core working group. The framework training plan identifies the competences necessary to carry out the main job functions for each professional qualification, the learning environment (school/company) for each year.

Importantly, the framework plan serves the purpose of stimulating social dialogue and communication between the companies and the VET providers, and forces to use a common language and to agree on the requirements of a specific job, according to real market needs and educational standards for youth in compulsory education/training.

It also takes into consideration the general provisions of the Law (*repertorio nazionale delle qualifiche*), the essential levels of performance in school, and the main requirements for the final exams. It allows for customization of individual learning plans for dual paths, which are compulsory for the work-based training and apprenticeship.

In this respect, 78 individual training plans for students enrolled in the new dual VET paths of the Veneto Region were developed on the basis of the framework training plan. The first trainees began their fourth year based on the new general training plans in autumn 2016 - for the first time as part of the dual model.



TRAINING TRAINERS TO TRAIN IN-COMPANY TUTORS

Although the apprenticeship legislation foresees training for in-company trainers, FITT! has identified a lack of training standards for this important figure. Therefore, the FITT! model includes a training program for trainers and in-company tutors, especially linked to their pedagogical and knowledge-transfer skills rather than focusing on regulatory or technical job-related skills.

In line with the development of the framework training plan, the trainers learn how to effectively use training plans to support apprentices to acquire professional and personal competences through work-based learning (pedagogy of work-based learning).

The FITT! project has trained trainers of in-company tutors as multipliers for the newly-learnt best practice. The trainers received a training on how to develop a customized training curriculum for in-company tutors and run a training session with a first group of in-company tutors. The training programme and related material can be used in all sectors and for all kinds of companies. The training and its impact have been monitored and evaluated in the general FITT! M&E system.



TELLING OTHERS ABOUT THE FITT! MODEL

The FITT! model includes communication and awareness raising among companies and intermediaries in Italy. It ran two workshops organized by partners (October 2016; November 2016). On these occasions, FITT! partners shared the project's work by informing on benefits and novelties that the new reform has introduced in the apprenticeship and dual paths. Further events took place in March 2017 at regional and national levels.

The whole process of co-creation of operational tools and support material to improve the attractiveness of the dual path and apprenticeship has been monitored, and its impact evaluated, by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in a final report that contains recommendations for the mainstreaming of the model.

AND NOW WHAT?

The FITT model has drawn the interest of many stakeholders in Italy but also in Germany. Its mainstreaming activities include sharing its tools, results and general approach with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Veneto Region and other regional authorities and different stakeholders, including other VET providers.

The Veneto Region is now in the process of including some of the FITT! tools in its dual training system. Plans to apply the tools and methods to other important sectors are in place, with the collaboration of other regions in Italy, leveraging on the cooperation with the German authorities, national and local bodies in Italy.



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