

Exchange of Practices in Education for Climate Targets (EXPECT) project

Visit to Vienna, Austria

The Expect project is an EU-funded Erasmus project involving vocational and technical education professionals from 7 European countries: Austria, Finland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK. Our 8th national visit took place in January 2023 in Vienna, where we were guests of the Spengergasse Vocational College set in a beautifully converted older building with some modern extensions.

We were welcomed to Spengergasse by the principal, Gerhard Hager, and then received a helpful overview of the Austrian VET (Vocational Education and Training) system from 3s Chief Executive Stefan Humpl. In Austria, 65% of students in upper secondary education are on a vocational pathway. Of those, roughly half are waged apprentices on a 'dual' employment/education programme and the other half attend a vocational college full time. It's worth noting that all the Austrian vocational pathways have a substantial general education common core, and that 'full time' represents around 30 hours teaching time per week. This is very different from our experience of the English VET system which has no general education core (beyond English and maths to level 2) and far less contact time.

We learnt more about some of the most innovative curriculum developments in sustainability education from Nicole Prisching from the Vienna Ökolog Netzwerk – a Network of schools developing programmes which aim to raise awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to improve students understanding of the natural world. Monika Auzinger and Julia Fellingner from 3s outlined the work of the Green VET Centre of Excellence, and Thomas Prigl, Vice Principal of a Construction Vocational college in Vienna, described a scheme which involved the Chamber of Commerce funding tablets and the development of video training resources for every student in the college.

We also heard an employer perspective on VET from Stephan Baufeld, Head of Education and Apprentices at ÖBB - the Austrian Federal Railways. Austria has a highly integrated transport network and the ÖBB plays a pivotal role in supporting sustainable mobility of all kinds, which means that investment in net zero can be rapid and impactful. Stephan offered us a fascinating insight into their apprenticeship programme which is the start of a lifelong approach to staff training. He gave examples of how the innovative ideas of trainees are valued and rapidly applied across the system – a great case of the practical 'worker intelligence' being used to support research and development.

Daniela Seitz, Spengergasse's committed and energetic ÖKOLOG coordinator gave us a tour of the college which has excellent industry-standard facilities in design, control, manufacturing and analysis. Spengergasse students welcomed us to their various workshops and were happy to explain what they were working on and to demonstrate their skills. Their Diploma course requires them to produce a substantial personal project to address a real-world challenge and then 'defend' it to a jury in a viva session. This had some similarities to the Italian PCTO (Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento) and the English EPQ (Extended Project Qualification).

We heard from 2 of Daniela's students, Benedict and Tomas, about their prototype designs made from recycled materials. One was a mobility aid for people with disabilities and the other was a space saving system to support urban gardening. Both Benedict and Tomas had developed their understanding of the 'throwaway' culture and built-in obsolescence and a keen interest in supporting local upcycling initiatives. These are great examples of an applied project based approach to learning organised around real-world challenges and developing key transversal competencies, or Gestaltungskompetenz.

Vienna has seen many 'flash'-demonstrations by climate activists and the issue is high on the city's political agenda as it was on ours. This was another truly inspiring visit and thanks must go to our EXPECT Austrian colleague, Sabine Schwenk from 3s consultants, who organised such an excellent programme and also helped us discover some of Vienna's cultural treasures.

As we come to the final stages of EXPECT, it's clear that all the project countries are aiming for net zero and have clear emission reduction targets. Each country has different curricula and pedagogical approaches, a different qualification system and different relationships between education and the labour market but all are committed to mobilizing their vocational education and training (VET) systems to help achieve these targets and support the development of green skills.

In order to realize our ambitious climate targets, we will need to innovate and adapt education and training programmes in various ways. Some existing jobs will be at risk and new jobs will emerge and this innovation will need to reflect major shifts in employment and the skills needed at work. The transition towards sustainable energy, a more circular economy and digitisation will have a major impact on the labour market and consequently on vocational education and training. A new generation of workers will require new skills and the current workforce will need reskilling and upskilling. The transition requires not only

technical change but also citizen support and behaviour change. Our final EXPECT report will address the question of how Vocational Education and Training (VET) can contribute to responding to all these challenges.

Our Latvian project partners have created a fifth EXPECT newsletter which details the recent visits to Latvia and Finland. The newsletter is available to download below.





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