



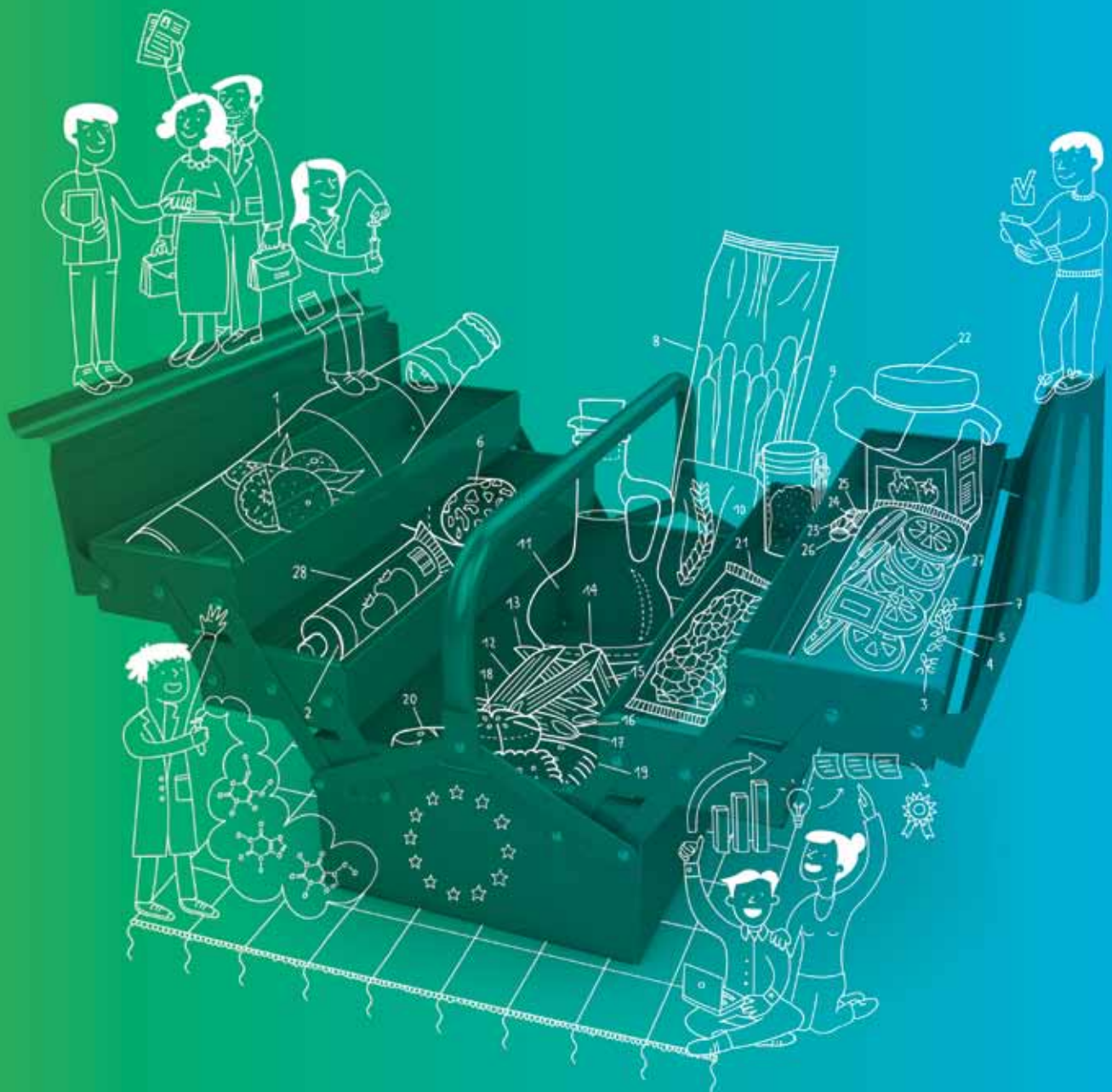
CASE STUDY REPORT:

THE FOOD TECHNICIAN - CREATING A NEW APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME IN AUSTRIA IN A JOINT SOCIAL PARTNER APPROACH

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KEY FACTS

- Initiation of a new apprenticeship scheme (VET) for food technicians in Austria
- Aimed at meeting current and future skill needs of the sectoral labour market and at helping improve the image of the food and drink manufacturing industry.
- Joint social partner approach of the Fachverband Lebensmittel and Pro-Ge Austria
- Successful cooperation of social partners, business chambers, the Economic Research Institute for Education, company representatives and vocational school teachers
- 119 young people have successfully passed their apprenticeship exam as food technicians - as of 2015.

BACKGROUND

Starting in 2008, young people are being trained under the newly created food technician apprenticeship scheme in Austria. The apprenticeship takes 3½ years. The underlying concept was the idea of the Austrian social partners Fachverband Lebensmittel¹ (the food and drink employer association) and the trade union Pro-Ge², who mutually decided a joint project to create this new apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship provides detailed knowledge of all phases of the food production process. Food technicians develop manufacturing processes and recipes for food and drink products, and may also work on new ingredients to create innovative products. Handling, repairing and maintaining the equipment used in food production also belong to the job description, as well as checking and maintaining hygiene, working in laboratories to perform physical, chemical and microbiological tests, quality control, the processing and storage of raw materials and packaging. Food technician apprentices enjoy practical company-based training mixed with theoretical school-based training at the vocational school Wels I.³

Originally starting as a pilot scheme, the apprenticeship was awarded permanent status by the Austrian Ministry of Education after the first batch of students successfully passed their final exams as food technicians in 2011. While the class of 2011/2012 had 20 successful apprentices, numbers have since almost doubled, with 39 passing their exams in 2014/2015. The share of females has also increased. Originally just 15%, the vocational school stated that the share of females among food technicians has since increased significantly, now reaching 59% (23 females of 39) in the new semester starting their VET in 2015. As of 2015, 119 young people have successfully passed their exams, gained their apprenticeship

diploma and have all – to the knowledge of the vocational school and the social partners – found permanent employment in Austrian food manufacturing companies.

OVERVIEW OF STUDENTS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING THE “FOOD TECHNICIAN” APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
CLASS 2011/2012	3 (15%)	17 (85%)	20
CLASS 2012/2013	5 (17%)	25 (83%)	30
CLASS 2013/2014	9 (30%)	21 (70%)	30
CLASS 2014/2015	8 (21%)	31 (79%)	39
CLASS 2015/2016*	23 (59%)	16 (41%)	39
TOTAL	25	94	119

Source: Berufsschule Wels I Austria (Vocational school Wels I in Austria), 2015. *The class of 2015/2016 has not completed the apprenticeship scheme yet

VET SYSTEM IN AUSTRIA

The Austrian VET system has a long and well-established apprenticeship tradition. After completing compulsory education at the age of 16, more than 75% of all youngsters choose to take up an apprenticeship. There are some 200 legally recognized apprenticeship occupations in Austria⁴ with various specifications. Half of them are mainly school-based, while the other half are dual track, involving both company- and school-based training (dual VET). Usually a dual track apprenticeship takes two to four

¹ Fachverband der Lebensmittelindustrie Österreich is the Austrian employer association representing the food and drink manufacturing industry. See: <http://www.dielebensmittel.at>.

² PRO-GE – Die Produktionsgewerkschaft is the Austrian trade union representing workers in the food and drink manufacturing sector and an affiliate of the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Union (EFFAT). See: http://www.proge.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=Po1/Page/Po1_Index&n=Po1_o.

³ The vocational school Wels I (Berufsschule Wels I für Baumaschinentechniker, Fahrzeugbautechniker, Maschinenbautechniker, Schweißtechniker, Schmiedetechniker, Lackiertechniker, Lebensmitteltechniker, Landmaschinentechniker und Karosseriebautechniker) offers courses for the school-based training phase of apprenticeships for several technical occupations in Wels, Austria. See: www.bs-wels1.ac.at.

⁴ Cedefop: Spotlight on VET, Austria. 2015.

years depending on a person's level of educational achievement and the occupation. Company-based training takes up to 80% of the time. In the case of the food technician apprenticeship, the relevant regulation – the “Lebensmitteltechnik-Verordnung” – further specifies the structure and content of the training curriculum for the vocational school.⁵

COSTS AND FUNDING

In Austria, an apprentice has a specific apprenticeship

contract with his/her company, which is registered at the apprenticeship office of the relevant trade chamber. The cost of the in-company training is covered by the company. Within the Austrian educational system, vocational schools are state-funded and hence no further costs accrue to the apprentice or the company. The apprentice receives a salary from his/her company, set in the sector-specific collective agreement. After successfully passing their final apprenticeship exams, graduates are awarded an apprenticeship diploma representing a full professional qualification.⁶

INITIATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS: REASONS AND MOTIVES

A number of reasons prompted the Austrian social partners to initiate and develop the new apprenticeship scheme. On the one hand, there was the need to provide a long-term solution to the skills mismatch between potential employees and job vacancies in the industry and hence to provide training in line with labour market needs. The overall aim was to equip people with the right skills needed by the industry, both today and tomorrow. On the other hand, the social partners wanted to contribute to a better image of the industry as a place to work offering interesting career perspectives to young people.

According to Martin Lotz from Fachverband Lebensmittel, there was no specific job profile or apprenticeship scheme responding to the actual skill demands of many companies in the various subsectors of the food manufacturing industry. No scheme combined a complete insight into the entire food production process and profound knowledge of hygiene standards. In his view, one major reason for initiating discussions with the Austrian trade union Pro-Ge to create a new apprenticeship

was to fill this gap and to respond to the needs of member companies and the sector in general.

Trade union secretary Gerhard Riess from Pro-Ge emphasized that both social partner organizations wanted to do something new and set a positive example for the industry. Until then, many food and drink manufacturing jobs were seen as unattractive and not first choice for young people leaving school. Faced with increasing labour shortages in particular with regard to young people, for him it was important to properly position this new apprenticeship and to attract better qualified and maybe even “older” candidates by setting the monthly wage for apprentices at a comparably high level for the food industry.⁷ For Pro-Ge the creation of interesting job perspectives in the sector providing good working conditions for young people and especially females was a key aspect. He further stated that food technicians who have passed their apprenticeship exams are very well received by employers and follow career paths often leading to middle management positions such as department managers.

FOCUS AND TARGET GROUP, INITIATOR AND PLAYERS INVOLVED

In the initiation and orientation phase, the cooperation between Fachverband Lebensmittel and Pro-Ge started with an internal working group at the employer association discussing basic questions and terms and conditions: What are our objectives? Who can contribute to the initiation and implementation process? Do we need external help? Who is an expert in the legal and administrative field? How do we want to structure our work? Who will be in charge of the project? In a second step, two representatives of the social partner organizations met to define common objectives for this joint social partner initiative, set up project management structures, rules of procedures, “no-go areas” and a timeline for the project.

Both social partners highlighted this development and coordination phase as being very constructive. Throughout the entire initiation and implementation phase, these working rules proved to be helpful in clearly defining project aims, focus areas as well as terms and conditions of cooperation. These rules were adhered to by both social partners and facilitated highly efficient and constructive cooperation. The subsequent five project working group sessions were used to collect and discuss expectations and objectives and to set the agenda of the participating social partners in an open discussion process. To promote efficiency, all aspects were listed, clustered and subsequently subjected to a feasibility check. As a result, a number of adjustments were made to the list of objectives in order to better focus on core areas

of work. It was agreed for instance that the food technician apprenticeship scheme should specifically address females, while other objectives such as a stronger academic orientation were left aside.

One great advantage determining the successful and comparably fast implementation of the new apprenticeship scheme was that both social partners were clearly willing to cooperate in this field, sharing a common understanding of the resulting “win-win situation”. Individual interests and positions were temporarily put on hold and kept out of this cooperation. Martin Lotz of the employer association emphasized that, in a project based on a joint social partner approach, success is dependent on both parties clearly agreeing on the targets and being aware of the mutual benefits. He further highlighted that the entire cooperation was based on democratic rules and voting procedures. This common understanding facilitated and significantly accelerated the work.

The quick implementation – only one year from the very first brainstorming session to the official submission of the complete apprenticeship concept to the Ministry of Education of Austria – was also viewed very positively by Martin Lotz. In this context, Gerhard Riess of Pro-Ge stated that one major success factor was the early involvement of all stakeholders in a very transparent and highly constructive manner. Potential interference and obstacles were avoided by opting for such cooperation.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED, LESSONS LEARNED AND SUCCESS FACTORS

There were no major problems encountered during the implementation phase. The school-based training phase began in 2008 at the technical vocational school Wels I, with a class of 25 students. The vocation school Wels I is the only educational institution in Austria providing training for food technician apprentices. Both social partners spoke highly of the vocational school and the teachers responsible, referring to a high degree

of motivation and dedication. According to Nicole Schmitt, the teacher in charge of the food technician course, the fact that school-based training is centralized at one school was advantageous with regard to:

- **Meeting training quality standards:** she stated that all her students have in-depth knowledge and skills in all fields required by the curriculum. The fact that with only one exception all

⁵ Bundesgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich: 103. Verordnung: Lebensmitteltechnik- Ausbildungsverordnung, Jahrgang 2008.

⁶ Tritscher-Archan, Sabine: Austria. VET in Europe – Country Report. 2014, p. 22.

⁷ Under the collective agreement for the food industry in Austria, apprentices receive a monthly wage of 765,80€ in their first year, 961€ in their second, 1,397,30€ in their third year and 1,554. 80€ in their fourth year, when over 18. Apprentices under 18 receive a slight

119 apprentices have so far successfully passed their final exams proves that the students have been trained and supervised well.

- **The great feeling of group belonging and cooperation among apprentices:** Coming from all over Austria, students live at the school during the school-based training phase. They help each other in study groups when preparing for exams.
- **Well-established contacts between the vocational school and the companies offering the apprenticeships:** Teachers get regular feedback from companies on actual skills needs, allowing them to make adjustments to the technical training aspects in the curriculum. Several participating companies also hold regular and specific in-house courses for their apprentices, preparing them for school exams. In many cases such courses are part of the company-based training phase for the apprentices.

The social partners' motivation and dedication to mutually achieve something new largely determined the successful establishment of this new apprenticeship scheme. A number of success factors are worth mentioning:

- **Constructive and productive cooperation** between the social partners in the food and drink manufacturing industry. The working group was able to develop and submit a complete and well-defined apprenticeship concept to the Ministry of Education within just one year.
- The newly created food technician apprenticeship scheme was a **practical response to current skills needs in the Austrian food manufacturing sector**. On account of companies' mandatory membership in their employer association, Martin Lotz of the Lebensmittel

Fachverband knew most HR managers personally and was well aware of current skill needs at company level. Getting companies to participate in the training phase was no problem.

- **The steering group** still meets regularly to supervise the apprenticeship scheme and check whether quality standards are being met.
- Since 2008, **119 apprentices** have successfully passed the final examination as food technicians (as of 2015). Only one student has so far not passed the exam. Minor drop-out rate.
- **Women successfully addressed:** the share of female apprentices has increased to over 50%. The social partners paid specific attention to minimizing physical burdens in designing the apprenticeship scheme. Food technician work can thus be carried out until retirement age.
- **Vocational school Wels I:** Good cooperation between the social partners and the school together with well-established contacts between companies and school.
- Positive feedback from participating companies on the qualification level of apprentices.
- **High demand for food technicians:** All 119 food technicians found permanent jobs directly after passing their final exams. They are well received by companies and often offered career perspectives reaching up to middle management positions.
- **Positive feedback from apprentices** on the curriculum and career perspectives. They highlighted that, even though the training was very demanding, they had gained a very detailed and hence better knowledge of the entire production process than anybody else in the company.
- The status of the apprenticeship scheme was upgraded to regular by the Austrian Ministry of Education after the first batch of students successfully passed their final exams in 2011.

for rules of cooperation. Among the social partners there was agreement to leave individual interests and demands aside for the duration of the project.

- **Principle of democracy:** Acceptance of other opinions within the working group and of democratic voting procedures and results.

As regarded project implementation, the persons interviewed referred to the following aspects:

- **Do not underestimate the legal framework** of each regional or national educational system. Carefully check the educational system with regard to VET aspects in the respective country or region. Bureaucracy in the initiation process can be complex. It might be

advisable to seek external help.

- **Address company-level HR management** to collect information on current skill needs: Is there a factual need for a new job profile? What kind of qualifications are needed? What is of practical relevance?
- **Establish and actively leverage cooperation with companies** for regularly exchanging information. Keep in touch with "routine life" and developments in the industry.
- **Recruiting participating companies and potential apprentices:** How can they be approached? Presence at job fairs and information days in schools, development of media and PR campaigns to attract young people, cooperation with job centres.

CONCLUSION

This case study report on the newly created food technician apprenticeship scheme in Austria illustrates a good practice example of a joint social partner-driven initiative in the food and drink industry. The report shows that well-prepared and structured cooperation based on democratic principles and the early involvement of all stakeholders

can lead to great results within a short period. All 119 successful apprentices immediately found permanent positions in food manufacturing companies in Austria. This and the high demand for trained food technicians show that this initiative has been a successful response to the current industry skill demands.

ASPECTS FOR TRANSFERABILITY TO OTHER REGIONS AND COMPANIES

The newly created food technician apprenticeship scheme is the result of a joint social partner approach. The following aspects throughout the initiation and development phase with regard to cooperation and project management rules proved to be highly effective and therefore

qualify as transferability aspects:

- **Involving all relevant stakeholders from the very beginning** in a transparent manner. Transparency enables and facilitates acceptance, support and successful implementation.
- **Common understanding of objectives**, respect

The following telephone interviews were conducted in the context of this case study report:

Mr. Gerhard Riess, Pro-Ge trade union secretary, Austria (09 June 2015)

Mr. Martin Lotz, Fachverband der Lebensmittelindustrie, Austria (21 July 2015)

Mrs. Nicole Schmitt, Coordinating teacher at the Berufsschule Wels 1 Oberösterreich, Austria (08 July 2015)



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