

The Italian way to a ‘dual system’ in VET

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Vocational education and training (VET) in Italy

VET in Italy is managed by the regions¹ (regional VET) and by the Ministry of Education (State VET)². At upper secondary level, the following programmes are available:

- Five-year programmes, leading to technical and professional education diplomas (State VET, EQF 4);
- Four-year programmes, leading to vocational diplomas (regional VET, EQF 4);
- Three-year programmes, leading to vocational qualifications (regional VET, EQF 3).

At higher levels, VET is offered in the form of:

- One-year post-secondary non-academic programmes (IFTS), leading to high technical specialisation certificates (regional VET, EQF level 4);
- Two or three-year post-secondary non-academic programmes (ITS Academy), leading to high-level technical diplomas (State VET, EQF level 5 or 6). Any ITS Academy programme includes practical and theoretical training and students should spend at least 30% of the time in a company as trainees, also abroad. Experts from the world of work should make up for at least 50% of the teaching staff in the school-based part of the programme.

Table 1: VET in Italy

Final qualification	EQF	Duration (years)	Provider	From age
1. Technical institute diploma	4	5	Technical institute	15
2. Professional diploma	4	5	Professional school	15
3. Vocational diploma	4	4	Regional VET centre	15
4. Vocational qualification	3	3	Regional VET centre	15
5. High technical specialisation certificate	4	1	IFTS partnership*	19
6. High-level technical diploma	5 or 6	2 or 3	ITS Academy foundation*	19

Source: ETF, 2023

* IFTS and ITS Academy partnerships include upper secondary schools, regional VET centres, universities or academic institutions, and companies.

¹ There are 20 regions in Italy and two autonomous Provinces.

² See Figure 1 in Annex for a graphic illustration of the system.

In school year 2022/2023, less than half of Italian students who chose State education at upper secondary level, opted for VET (options 1 and 2 as for table 1)³. Among these, about one third enrolled in technical institutes (30.7%) and the rest opted for [professional schools](#) (12.7%)⁴. Piedmont reflects the national distribution: 33.3% in technical institutes and 12.1% in professional schools⁵.

In 2020, 250,194 students chose upper secondary VET programmes offered by the Regions (options 3 and 4), 23,231 of which in Piedmont, which is the third region in terms of number of enrolments⁶. In 2020, 1,887 students enrolled in IFTS (option 5). Currently, there are 19,137 people enrolled in ITS Academies (option 6).

Story 1: VET pathways at different levels (site visit 1)

Elena is 15 years old who wants to work in the Tourism sector. She enrolls in a four-year regional VET programme offered by 'La piazza dei mestieri' to become a *hospitality operator* (EQF 4). Part of the programme is delivered in alternance-training, through an internship in the business unit hosted by 'La piazza'. At the beginning of the fourth year, she is hired by the same company as full-time employee with an apprenticeship contract. She will spend 50% of her time in the company, combined with training at the VET provider, following an individual training plan. Upon graduation, she enrolls in a one year higher technical education and training course (IFTS) leading to a certificate as *Tourism promotion technician* (EQF 4). This certificate gives her access to a Higher technical institute programme to achieve the *hospitality manager* diploma (EQF 5).

The Italian way to a 'dual system'

In the past twenty years, in an attempt to increase the labour market responsiveness of education and training and to reduce youth unemployment, Italian governments have made of work-based learning a mantra for education and training policies. In this context, the 'dual system' was first introduced in 2015⁷ and then revamped in 2021⁸. It refers to a training approach based on alternance between learning at a vocational school and learning at the workplace, grounding on strong cooperation between education and training institutions and companies⁹. It is nowadays the preferred training modality for young and adults, since it allows tailoring training plans to individual needs and developing labour market oriented competences. Dual programmes are offered in general education and in VET at upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level. They are delivered through:

³ According to UNESCO data, in 2020 the share of all students in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational programmes was 52.5%. Indicator: Share of all students in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational programmes (%) from [UIS Statistics \(unesco.org\)](#)

⁴ [a25d09d7-f803-d2db-703e-8bc52cb69fb0 \(miur.gov.it\)](#) [last access, 21/07/2023]

⁵ [a25d09d7-f803-d2db-703e-8bc52cb69fb0 \(miur.gov.it\)](#) last access 21/07/2023

⁶ INAPP (2022), [XIX Rapporto di monitoraggio del sistema di Istruzione e Formazione Professionale e dei percorsi in duale nella leFP a.f. 2019-2020 \(inapp.org\)](#) In 2020, the total population aged 14 years old was 565,871 in Italy and 38,154 people in Piedmont.

⁷ Legislative decree 81/2015 and law 107/2015.

⁸ Decree 14 December 2021 (21A07649).

⁹ State-Regions Conference Agreement 158/CSR/2015, 24 September 2015.

- a) Alternance training (regional VET) or pathways for transversal skills and guidance (State VET)¹⁰;
- b) The simulated training company model;
- c) Apprenticeships.

Alternance in regional VET is compulsory for 400 hours each year. In 2019/2020, 37,866 students participated in the regional dual system, half of which in Lombardy Region (19,164). In Piedmont, enrolments in regional dual VET were 2,568¹¹. In State VET, the minimum duration of pathways for transversal skills and guidance, offered in the last three years of each programme, varies: 210 hours for professional schools; 150 hours for technical institutes; 90 hours for lycées.

The simulated training company is an experience which reproduces the operational dynamics and processes of a company (organisation, environment, relations and working tools)¹². It may be realised in a non-profit organisation, internal or external to the school, or set up ad hoc virtually to involve students in the delivery of services or the production of goods.

Story 2: a company opens its door to dual VET (site visit 2)

Gerla is a historical pastry shop in Turin, since 1927. Together with the VET provider ENGIM, in 2019 it opened an academy offering 'dual training' opportunities to hundreds of students, in a structured and continuous way in the Hotelierie Restauration Cafe sector. Classes take place inside the restaurant as a form of on-the-job training; students also undertake internships during the school year, and those enrolled in the last years of training participate as apprentices (type 1, see below).

Apprenticeships in IVET in Italy

Apprenticeship in IVET was first introduced in 2003 in Italy, but it took a long time for it to take off. It is actually still used in small numbers and not with equal success in all Italian Regions.

There are three types of apprenticeships in Italy but only two lead to recognised formal qualifications (both from general education and VET) and belong to the 'dual system': type 1 and type 3.

- Type 1 is open to 15-25 years old learners and leads to upper secondary qualifications (vocational qualifications, vocational diplomas and general education diplomas) and post-secondary high technical specialisation certificates.
- Type 2 apprenticeship is for 18 to 29 years old people and can be used in all sectors. Training should amount to maximum 120 hours over three years. The scheme is outside of the vocational education and training system, since the final qualification is associated only to an occupational qualification as defined in collective labour agreements.

¹⁰ This is what used to be 'alternance training', renamed as 'Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento' PCTO by Law 30 December 2018, n. 145, article 1 paragraph 784 [Linee+guida+PCTO+con+allegati.pdf \(miur.gov.it\)](#)

¹¹ [INAPP XIX Rapporto monitoraggio sistema duale iefp 2022.pdf](#)

¹² [L'Impresa Simulata.pdf \(miur.gov.it\)](#)

- Type 3 apprenticeship is open to 18-29 years old people for the achievement of university degrees, Higher Technical Institutes diplomas (ITS, option 6 in table 1), and doctoral degrees¹³.

All schemes are underpinned by an employment contract. Upon graduation, the apprenticeship contract may terminate. Otherwise, if not explicitly stated, the apprenticeship contract turns into an open-ended standard employment contract and the person is paid as a qualified employee. The maximum duration of apprenticeships may not exceed the duration of the school/university-based programme and varies depending on the final qualification to be achieved¹⁴. The employment and training components are regulated by inter-sector and national collective labour agreements. They generally refer to all apprenticeship types and typically regulate apprentices' hiring conditions, trial period duration, contractual framework, contract form, salary, company tutorship, apprentice training, training standards.

In 2019, there were about half a million 'apprentices' in Italy (531,035), 97.7% of which were type 2. There were 11,920 type 1 apprentices and 1,166 type 3 apprentices, respectively about 2% and 0.2% of all apprenticeships¹⁵. The 'dual system' apprenticeships are a 'rare phenomenon', even more so in some Regions of Italy.

In 2020, more than half of all Type 1 apprentices were in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (33.5%) and in Lombardy Region (21.8%). 56.4% of all contracts were signed by micro enterprises (up to 9 employees), followed by small firms (10 to 49 employees), 27.8%. About one fourth of Type 1 apprentices were hired in the accommodation and food services sector (around three thousand contracts in 2020). Manufacturing (but metalworking), construction, commerce and social services record similar levels of participation, between 1,200 and 1,500 contracts. Type 1 apprentices were mostly males (70.3%) and young adults aged 18 to 21 (50.3%), followed by minors (19.2%). About 90.0% of the students who started a type 1 contract in 2020 were still in the programme after one month. This figure, however, drops to 72.4% after three months (down to 68.5% for female apprentices), suggesting a potentially relevant drop-out problem.

In 2020, Type 3 apprentices were mostly used for university masters (about 70%). 18.1% of type 3 contracts was signed to achieve Higher Technical Institutes diplomas (ITS, option 6 in table 1), while the figures for doctorates (5.8%), bachelor's degrees (4.2%) and research activities (2.9 %) were much smaller. Masters are more appealing because they are more flexible in the design phase, especially compared to regular university degrees. They allow companies to hire highly qualified staff and codesign curricula with universities in view of specific needs linked to innovation and competitiveness. The majority of high-level apprentices enrolled in Master courses were in Piedmont in 2020 (454).

¹³ It may also be used for research activities, leading to a contractual qualification, like 'type 2'.

¹⁴ The Regions/Autonomous Provinces, in agreement with local level social partners and education and training providers, define the actual maximum duration of apprenticeships by qualification.

¹⁵

Story 3 – Becoming an Industrial Automation Specialist through apprenticeship (site visit 3)

The Polytechnic of Turin offers a second level specializing Master's in Industrial Automation with the format of type 3 apprenticeship, in collaboration with IVECO. It has a 2-year duration, and it is based on a joint project between the University and the company. Before the programme starts, the company hires the student with an apprenticeship contract. As a general rule, the apprenticeship contract duration is equivalent to the duration of the Specializing master's Programme, i.e., two years. Training activities at the Polytechnic (lectures and practical classes) last approximately 400 hours. Training activities at the employer's premises last approximately 1,100 hours.

In Piedmont, the 2020 reform¹⁶ introduced more flexibility and some new features, including the possibility for learners to sign more than one apprenticeship contract to achieve higher qualifications. For example, after type 1 apprenticeship contract, a second type 1 contract can be signed to achieve a different qualification, or a type 3 apprenticeship contract for a higher level qualification. The Region invested 10 million euros only for 2021 to subsidize apprentices' training (mainly VET centres, in charge of apprenticeship training supply)¹⁷. This is the result of a strong participative process of all actors involved, with an important role for the Chambers of commerce, the public employment service in coordination with private employment agencies.

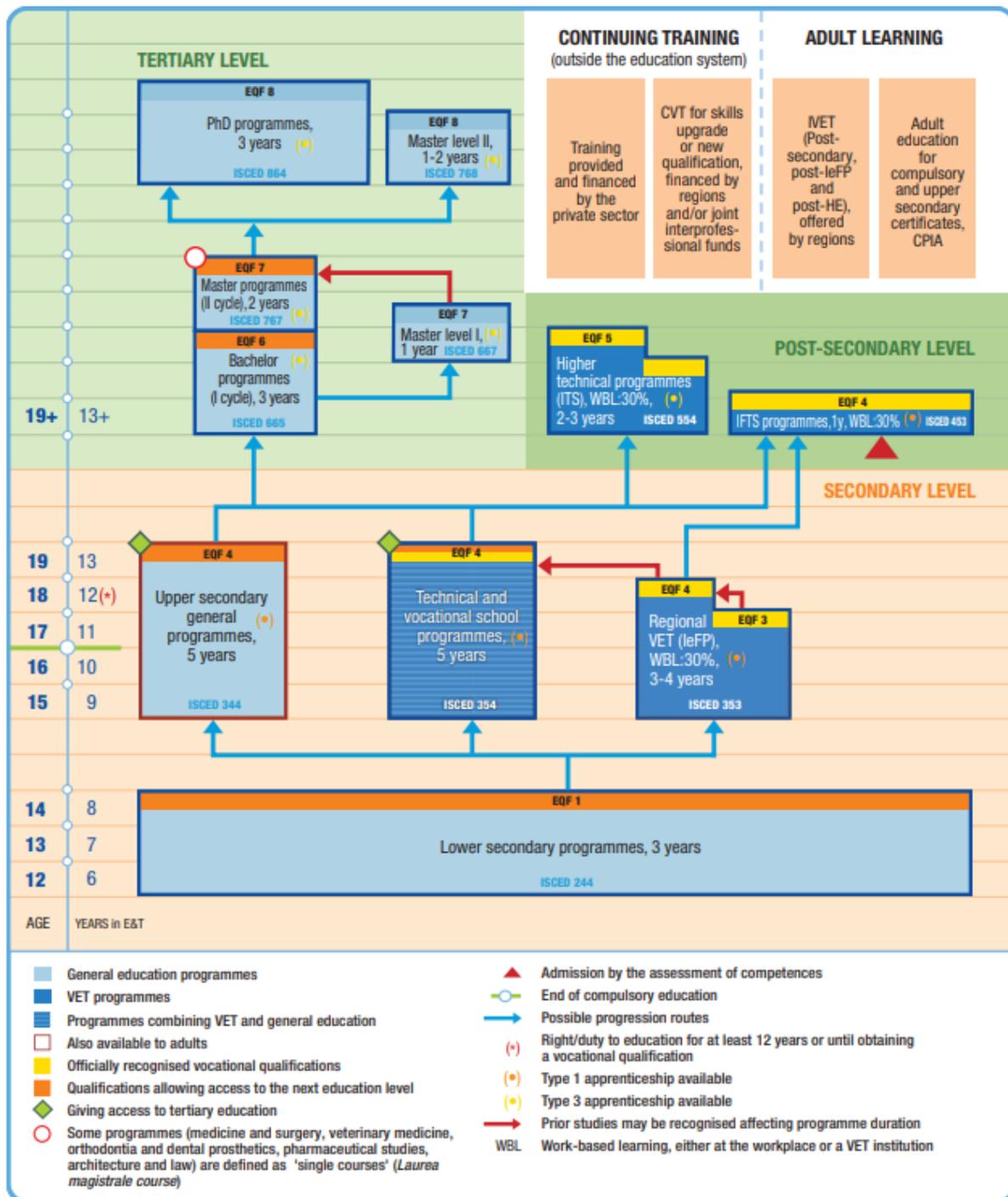
Piedmont is one of the good practices of dual VET in Italy. Otherwise, a number of challenges hampering type 1 full scale implementation have been identified in the system, at different levels, and recommendations have been formulated accordingly¹⁸.

¹⁶ The Regional directive n. 8-2309, 20 November 2020, approved an agreement between the Region, the social partners at regional level, the Regional school office, three universities and the Polytechnic, seven ITS (higher technical institutes) and the Ministry of Labour technical agency, which regulates general principles to implement apprenticeship, its training standards, and contractual aspects, with regard to each qualification achievable. [DGR_02309_1050_20112020_pdf \(regione.piemonte.it\)](#)

¹⁷ [Firmato il Testo unico regionale dell'apprendistato. Opportunità anche per disoccupati over 30 | Regione Piemonte | Piemonteinforma | Regione Piemonte \(last access 24 July 2023\)](#)

¹⁸ [Apprenticeship review: Italy. Building education and training opportunities through apprenticeships \(europa.eu\)](#)

Annex – Figure 1



Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Italy, 2019 [Vocational education and training in Europe | Italy | CEDEFOP \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europecollege.edu.it/)