

*BBZ Olten, SDK-Forum "Exchange and Mobility", 16 January 2020, 09.15-15.20, Aula GIBS, report for website, FB and SDK secretariat*

### **SDK Forum "Exchange and Mobility"**

This was the main topic of the Swiss Directors Conference of VET-schools SDK on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020 at its meeting at the Vocational Training Centre BBZ Olten. The inspiring guests from abroad, who motivated the attending SDK members to work in the future, offered exciting insights.

The SDK board's strategy of promoting exchange and mobility at vocational schools met with great approval in the survey among members. The vision of the Swiss Confederation and the cantons is farsighted: all young people in training or in transition to working life should spend at least one longer stay of (over three months) in another language region. Improving language skills, deepening social and interdisciplinary skills and strengthening their own prospects on the employment market are all clear advantages for an exchange or mobility activity. As Georg Berger, President of SDK, said at the beginning of the forum, the vocational schools want to help shape this opportunity as actors. The current rate of around 3 percent is too low and should at least be doubled for the time being, even if this would be an immense amount of work.

### **From "why" to "why not"**

After a first short podium, Rea Tuominen from GRADIA, Finland gave an insight into her work, thanks to which 23,000 students can take part in an exchange. The fact that no one had wanted to come to Finland to visit them in the past was certainly an important motivation to set-up mobility programs. The question of "why" has long since ceased to be an issue for her, and "why not" is central, since the aim is to offer young people the best possible opportunities in their lives. At the beginning it is certainly important to stay simple, Mrs Tuominen emphasized, to take small steps to achieve the desired goal.

### **Three steps to success**

Frans and Ellen van Schaik travelled from Alkmaar NL to present their school, ROC Horizon, as an example of best practice. So, there was no need to reinvent the wheel, as Mr van Schaik said. Their approach is to proceed in three stages. All of her approximately 12,000 learners have the opportunity to collaborate virtually with other learners in an international environment. This also enables whole classes to get a first impression of mobility. Anyone who has been infected by fire afterwards can take part in a three-week exchange with another school in the second step. This is a combination of theory in school and practice in the working environment. The third step is then a long exchange, which is organized through the working world and further strengthens the already existing network.

### **Find partner schools in Europe**

In addition to cooperation with industry, such mobility programs need an international network. In the European environment this is offered by the "European Forum for Vocational Education and Training EFVET". Vice-President Stefano Tirati presented this possibility, which is still lacking in Switzerland. Prior to the forum, the organization had 202 affiliated members, but as the forum leader and moderator Daniel Kehl from St. Gallen suspected, this number would increase right after the SDK Forum.

### **Exchange programs for all learners**

Even before the forum, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) had set the target of greatly expanding opportunities in the area of mobility. The individual cantons have a fundamental mandate to implement the vision, which is a vision and not a utopia, in a policy that makes an exchange program possible for all learners and students. In doing so, they provide the vocational schools with the necessary mandate so that they can actively and significantly increase the participation rate in exchange programs with practical models and tools. After the concluding question and answer session in the afternoon, Georg Berger concluded the forum by pointing out three important fields of action from the perspective of vocational schools:

Exchange is a question of the culture and motivation of the school, the mandate of the own canton and the standardization of mobility programs. Even though Switzerland is located in the heart of Europe, it is on the periphery of this issue, but participation is possible if there is a firm commitment to it.

*Text and images: Christoph Henzmann, Communications responsible BBZ Olten*