

How to build a homegrown talent pool with dual vocational training

Companies such as Repsol and Nestlé have found that vocational training is a way to address the shortage of qualified technical professionals.



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Spain is experiencing a shortage of professionals — in maintenance, electromechanics, electrical engineering, logistics, healthcare and manufacturing. In fact, the labor market faces a shortage of intermediate-skill-level workers in general. As a potential solution, dual vocational training — in which young people split time between education and on-the-job training — can be a strategic approach that promises to improve youth employability and strengthen business competitiveness.

This is the argument we put forward in a new report on [vocational training in Spain](#) from a business perspective, prepared in collaboration with the Exit Foundation and Empieza por Educar under the auspices of IESE's [Business Leadership and the Future of Work Chair – Joaquim Molins Figueras Foundation](#).

We have identified the main barriers and drivers affecting the implementation of dual vocational training (known as *formación profesional* or FP in Spanish), with a particular focus on basic vocational training. Our findings are based on interviews conducted with executives from 21 companies of various sizes and across different sectors, and while we looked at Spain, a [wider conversation around vocational training](#) is happening around the world.

What companies value about vocational training

Companies that offer dual vocational training programs view them positively. They value their ability to attract, develop and retain talent, and they believe that vocational trainees bring practical skills, more realistic expectations about work, and the ability to integrate well into work environments.

In addition to improving employability, these programs help strengthen organizations' talent strategies: Companies can build their own talent pool or internal pipeline, facilitate generational succession, and develop both technical and soft skills. In companies with well-established programs, success is linked to a strategic vision, collaboration with educational institutions, structured programs and specific investments.

Main barriers to implementing vocational training

Despite its potential, the executives interviewed believe that the implementation of dual vocational training faces various barriers.

- In the business sector, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the main challenges include a lack of familiarity with the system, a shortage of resources to manage agreements and monitor students, and the difficulty in finding

mentors with the necessary time and training.

- In the education sector, there are persistent mismatches between curriculum design and the actual needs of the job market, a lack of flexibility in updating content, and organizational constraints related to schedules and deadlines.
- Added to this are the social barriers, as vocational training is still widely viewed as inferior to a university education. This limits its appeal, especially in technical trades and among women.
- Finally, from an institutional perspective, the report highlights excessive bureaucratic complexity, regulatory fragmentation among different regions, and a lack of sufficient economic incentives to facilitate participation, particularly by SMEs.

How to maximize vocational training

We identify proposed actions for business to promote vocational training, drawing on the initiatives currently being carried out in the companies we interviewed.

- **Collaborate with educational centers and help design programs.** Nestlé maintains relationships with nearby vocational schools and has helped adapt course content in IT and technical sales. Measures like these expand the pool of participants and help produce a more flexible and attractive system that aligns with local business needs.
- **Be a catalyst in models of industry collaboration.** Airbus is driving aerospace vocational training by coordinating companies in its supply chain, educational institutions and other agencies. In the automotive sector, Talentia, part of the Volkswagen Group, connects vocational training centers, group-specific training and paid internships at dealerships.
- **Provide trained company mentors.** At Premium PSU, students are integrated into real projects from the start and develop skills for their career path.
- **Treat vocational training as a strategic talent pool.** Repsol has hosted more than 1,700 interns since 2012, and nearly 48% have gone on to join its talent pool — a number that rises to between 60% and 70% in industrial settings.
- **Create or strengthen roles that connect educational centers and businesses.** The Exit Foundation and the Mahou-San Miguel Foundation have developed a vocational training program in hospitality and tourism, while AECOC, an association of manufacturers and distributors, organizes workshops and sessions to identify skills, tailor programs and facilitate internship opportunities.

Those are tips for business, but the education sector can also take steps, by updating curriculums, training teachers to incorporate AI and other emerging workplace elements, integrating skills such as resilience, communication and teamwork, and improving the social perception of vocational training.

Finally, government bodies need to simplify red tape, harmonize regulations between regions and provide specific aid to businesses, especially SMEs.

Taken together, these recommendations point toward a shared roadmap involving companies, the education sector, government and intermediaries. Implementing them would help reduce barriers, expand the participant base and consolidate a dual vocational training system that is more flexible, attractive and aligned with the needs of the business community.

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