



Kanton Zürich
Bildungsdirektion

International Congress on Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET Congress)

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Department of Education

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Introductory remarks

Welcome to the Congress on Vocational and Professional Education and Training here in Winterthur! As Canton Zurich's head of education I'm always delighted to meet such an international audience and talk about the dual vocational training system we have here in Switzerland.

As you've probably noticed, the whole of Europe is currently in football fever. I have to admit that I was not one of the fans cheering for our national team yesterday in the match against France. But I'm a great fan of Switzerland's approach to vocational and professional training. Our dual system has a long tradition.

Its roots go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Swiss guilds of craftsmen were abolished in seventeen-ninety-eight, giving way to freedom of trade. In eighteen-fifty-eight the Canton Zurich parliament approved a credit of five thousand francs to create the foundation for the first state vocational school.

We've come a long way since then. The challenges we face these days are things like globalisation and the technology revolution. Our dual system has faced these changes head-on. And it has managed to adapt successfully – not least because vocational and professional training has never been left entirely to the public sector here. The fact that

the private and public sectors continue to collaborate intensively means that our training and education remain highly practical and are a direct response to the needs of our economy.

In recent years our system has become even more open and transparent. People of all ages now have limitless opportunities to train existing skills and learn new ones. There's no longer only one route to success: many roads lead to Rome.

One huge benefit of this open system is that in Switzerland you don't necessarily need a degree from an elite university to be successful in business. We have many businessmen and women who originally did an apprenticeship, and are proud to say so in public. Let me give a few well-known examples.

Many of you will have heard of Sergio Ermotti, CEO of the Swiss bank UBS. He started out as a banking apprentice in Lugano, in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Monika Walser is another good example. She's now CEO of De Sede Switzerland, a successful, internationally well-respected manufacturer of exclusive leather furniture. She started out as a dressmaker. In Switzerland we're proud of Peter Sauber, who for many years ran his own Formula One team. He originally did an apprenticeship as an electrical fitter with the aim of following in his father's footsteps. All these prominent figures have one thing in common: they all started their career with a dual vocational apprenticeship: a solid and practice-based education made in Switzerland.

And they're not the only successful businesspeople who did so: In the last nine years there have been more than two hundred people in the managements of the one hundred largest Swiss employers who launched their career with an apprenticeship. This shows very clearly that many people in our country are able to gain important professional qualifications in our dual apprenticeship programmes.

As the head of education in the canton of Zurich, my goal is to make sure that as many young people as possible get suitable educational and training qualifications. For this reason we also assist under-performing students during their transition to the world of

employment. Our aim is for ninety-five per cent of all young people in the canton to earn a qualification.

In closing, I'd like to say again how delighted I am to have you with us today. I'm proud that Canton Zurich can serve as a platform for dialogue and exchange on the topic of vocational and professional education and training. I wish you all a successful and enjoyable conference here in Winterthur. We will work hand in hand to improve quality even more and continue to propagate our successful model of dual vocational training and education.

I would also like to thank you for your dedication to vocational and professional education and training. I'm convinced that you're not just doing business a favour, but the whole of society. For many young people, a successful career start is a crucial foundation for their professional and private future. A recognised training qualification enables them to gain a foothold in the world and in the workplace. Ultimately, prosperity, peace and justice throughout the world depend on people having good training and education.

Thank you for listening. I wish you all an enjoyable evening, and look forward to our sharing insights and ideas.