

## Portugal: Learning Courses

### Introduction

**Title:** Learning Courses

**Country:** Portugal

**Type of tool:** Learning Courses allow to obtain a school and professional certification, privileging students' insertion in the job market, boosted by a strong component of training carried out in companies (known as alternance support entities), and the continuation of studies of higher level. Students who accomplish their Learning Course get a diploma of level 4 of qualification (National Qualification Framework) and complete the secondary education (12<sup>o</sup> schooling year). Thus, they are able to enter the labour market due to their professional qualification, or go to university. If the student cannot accomplish all units or training components, a qualification certificate will be issued in addition to registering the competences acquired by the student in the individual competency book, in accordance with the applicable legislation.

**Target group:** Young people under 25 years old, with 9th year of schooling or higher without completing the 12th year (secondary education).

**Potential transferability:** Possible, given the fact that these courses are based on professional referential (describe knowledge, competences and skills students must develop to become professionals in a given area).

Learning courses have a duration of **3700 hours** (two and half years).

Each Learning Course consists of a **curricular plan** (that indicates the different training components of the course, their short-term training units and the number of hours of each of those units distributed by the three periods of the learning course). Short-term training units manual explain to practitioners (trainers/teachers) what are the subjects/topics to be developed during the course, their contents and objectives in order to help them organize their classes.

The **training components** of a Learning Course are:

- Socio-cultural (composed by short-term training units in the areas of languages (Portuguese and English), personal and social development, IT and contemporary society (with topics related to the professional area of the Learning Course));
- Scientific (depending on the professional area of the Learning Course, this component can focus on Psychology, Biology, History, Languages, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, Sociology, Law, Design, Geometry, etc... and has also short-term training units);
- Technologic (based on the National Qualification Catalogue, this component focuses essentially on the technical aspects of the professional area of the Learning Course, teaching students how to do their work – e.g. Geriatrics Technician Learning Course/Ethics and Deontology in Geriatrics short-term training unit);

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- Work based learning (developed by students in a company from the professional area of the Learning Courses. With a total duration of 1100 to 1500 hours, this component involves the person responsible for the pedagogical aspects of the course, and the tutor in the company (who performs the technical-pedagogical follow-up of the trainee in the WBL period). It can be developed by the end of each training period, distributed in small blocks throughout each training period, with a certain weekly or monthly frequency. The workload must not exceed 8 hours per day and must be adjusted as much as possible to the companies' hours of operation).

Practitioners are allowed to choose their **assessment methods** (summative and formative approaches). Practitioners can use written tests, practical activities (e.g. simulations, group discussions), continuous assessment (based on students' behaviours, involvement in the activities, assiduity and punctuality, etc.).

There is a **final evaluation test** (PAF), which consists of an integrated set of practical activities to evaluate the skills acquired throughout the training and is held before a jury constituted for this purpose. The duration of PAF varies between 12 and 18 hours, according to the competences to be assessed.

The **final classification** of a training period is obtained by the average of the classifications of each training component; the final classification of the course is obtained by the average of the classifications obtained in each training period (0 to 20).

The curricular structure of the learning courses includes the following **training components**: a) Socio-cultural, which contributes to the development of personal identity and social, cultural and use of new technologies; b) Scientific, which aims at acquiring scientific knowledge and structuring skills for the respective course; c) Technological, which aims to acquire specific knowledge and skills necessary for the development of the activities inherent to the profession; d) Practice, carried out in a work context, aimed at the development and acquisition of technical, relational and organisational knowledge and skills relevant to the exercise of professional activity.

Training planning should articulate the different components to ensure that learning takes place in an **integrated** and **interdisciplinary** way.

The **training groups** consist of a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 20 trainees. In specific, duly substantiated circumstances, IEFP, I. P., may authorise the opening or operation of classes with a number different from that established in the previous number.

The entities that provide the practical training component, in conjunction with the training entity, hereinafter referred to as **alternance support entities**, may be natural or legal persons. The alternance support entities shall be evaluated by the training entity with regard to the conditions of hygiene and safety, as well as the technical, human and material resources capable of providing the necessary professional training appropriate to the qualification for a profession.

The trainee's activities during practical training are monitored and evaluated by a **tutor** and must be governed by an individual activity plan agreed between the trainer and the alternance support organisation, and the trainee must be familiar with the trainee's plan or, when minor, of its legal representative. The tutor is appointed by the support organisation to alternate between its collaborators with adequate professional experience and can accompany up to five trainees.

The **practical training** should be carried out alternately throughout the training process, and may be given in blocks coinciding with the end of each training period. The hours of practical training shall not exceed the duration of the normal working period of the alternance support

## Implementation

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organisation and the timetable shall correspond to that of the same entity. The trainee is ensured a daily rest of eleven consecutive hours between the end of one day's activity and the beginning of the next day's activity. The practical training may be carried out on weekly rest days in situations where this is advantageous for the trainee's learning, provided that the work is performed on those days by workers of the alternance support organisation and with the consent of the trainee or his/her legal representative. In the case of the trainee being younger, the number of hours of training and their realisation at night is governed by the norms provided for in the labour legislation of minors.

## Description of the target group

Young people under 25 years old, with 9th year of schooling or higher without completing the 12th year (secondary education).

## Policy context

The **National Qualifications System** aims, among other things, to promote the generalisation of the secondary level as a minimum qualification of the population and to ensure that the vocational courses for young people confer double certification, school and professional, also contributing to the resolution of the early abandonment of the system education.

The apprenticeship courses are one of the training modalities of dual certification and confer both level 4 of vocational training and a secondary school qualification. These courses promote the initial training of young people with a view to increasing their employability in view of the needs of the labour market and, in addition, make it possible for them to progress at school and at work. The curricular structure and the hours of the learning courses were revised in order to give greater flexibility to their organisation, maintaining the alternation between training and work contexts, which is a characteristic element of this modality of training, and in which the role of companies as training partners is particularly relevant.

The training courses are developed by the vocational training centres of the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training, IP, by other entities under the supervision of the Ministry responsible for vocational training, as well as by other public and private training providers certified in the field of vocational training system of certification of training entities and are organised based on references of skills and training that are part of the National Qualifications Catalogue.

As learning courses are dual-certified and publicly funded, they depend on administrative authorisation which assesses compliance with established training standards and, on a more general level, the adequacy and rationalisation of training, taking into account the needs of the individual companies.

## Impact for assesses

Learning Courses led the strategy of pedagogical diversification in teaching secondary education, considering the total number of students they covered and their relative. The high growth of the volume of students in the Professional Courses is explained by the introduction of Vocational Courses in public schools, given that «the Professional courses in private schools have remained stable from the point of view of the quantitative so far» according to ANESPO. The current policy objective is geared towards the reinforcement of the supply of learning courses with a «goal of 38,000 young people in 2013 and 100,000 in 2020», according to the IEFP.

The analysis of the **quality of the employment** of the alumni of the Learning Courses, according to data provided by the IEFP referring to the trainees who completed their course in

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2006, three months after the conclusion of the courses, showed that 27% of the trainees had a permanent contract, 61.8% had a fixed-term contract and only 11.2% were under service or another situation. For the trainees who completed it in 2010, it was found that 23.1% had a permanent contract, 64.1% had a fixed-term contract and 12.8% were in a service or other situation. Despite a recent degradation in the contractual linkage, in all likelihood related to the evolution of the context of the youth labour market, a comparison between the sample of students of 2010 and that of 2006 showed a reinforcement of the relation between the functions performed in employment and the training received. Under the «Strategy for Growth, Employment and Industrial Development 2013-2020», launched by the government, it is planned to strengthen vocational education and the dual system of improving the coordination between Professional Courses and Learning and increasing the experimental component and professional practice of these courses. In this context, convergence seems to be the best modality for a common system of «dual training».

On the other hand, the **expected expansion** of the Learning Courses will lead to an increase in the number of students: there are currently around 22,000 young people in these courses, and the target figure for 2013 was 38,000; by 2020 it is intended to reach 100,000 young people as well as to expand to other levels of education, i.e. level 2, 4 and 5 learning will be made available, similar to what happened at an early stage of the system of learning.

Despite the relevance of this strategy to the very evolution of the education and vocational training in Portugal, there are some **reservations** regarding the fulfilment of the targets launched by the government (100,000 students by 2020). The interlocutors evaluated whether this reinforcement will be feasible; whether it will be a genuine contribution to a more diversified and adapted to different profiles of young people; if the educational and training system will fit in the national fabric of production, the framework and culture, the motivation and the willingness to collaborate in this project, particularly in view of the fact that there is now some difficulty in encouraging companies to accept trainees; or what effects this strategy will have on competition between dual certification offers currently available.

The **implementation** of this strategy will certainly require a strong commitment to young people and families, above all encouraging motivation and preference for training courses and more industrial professions, which are sometimes still considered unappealing. Being training that requires more investment of technological resources and materials and a continuous modernisation of these resource, it is fundamental to invest in collaborative work solutions between the education and training entities, with technical knowledge and technologically differentiated, and between these and the business fabric. In addition, the role of companies should be broadly reinforced at various levels. This will be decisive for the affirmation of the very logic of the dual learning system in Portugal and for new prospects of employability for young people. The government's strategy foresees 15,000 partnership agreements between entities of the education system and companies by 2020.

From the point of view of reducing the rate of early leave of education and training, this strategy can actually become very important. The aim is to reinforce the relevance of training to accelerate the trajectory of reducing the rate of early leave of education with the target being 10% in Portugal by 2020.

## Link

<https://www.iefp.pt/cursos-de-aprendizagem>

## Personal comments

The learning courses are a tool to combat early school leaving and also to bring to the system all those who have dropped out of school. the learning courses allow a strong connection to the labour market, as well as a response to the needs of companies.

## Interviewee

Orquídea Pereira –Responsible of Learning Course in CEFPI (see also video interview).

