Curriculum, subjects, number of hours

Vocational upper secondary education

Branches of study

School-based vocational education lasts five years and is available at technical institutes and vocational institutes.

Technical institutes

Technical institutes offer courses in the economic and in the technology sector.

The economic sector offers the following two programmes:

- Management, finance and marketing
- Tourism

The technology sector offers the following programmes:

- Mechanics and energy
- Transport and logistics
- Electronics and electrical engineering
- ICT and telecommunications
- Design and communication
- Chemistry, biotechnology
- Fashion design
- Agriculture, food and agriculture, agroindustry
- Construction, environment

Vocational institutes

Law 107/2015 has introduced a reform of the offer at vocational institutes. The reform applied to the first grades in 2018/2019 and will complete the application process in school year 2022/2023. The reform has the purpose of revising the study programmes in order to avoid overlapping with the technical paths and with the vocational training organised at regional level.

The previous six branches of studies have increased to 11 and the percentage of time dedicated to branch-related learning has increased to 40% in the first two years of study and to 50% in the last three years.
According to the reform, vocational institutes offer the following programmes:

- agriculture, rural development, development of local resources and management of forest and mountain resources
- commercial phishing and phish production
- industry and handicraft for ‘made in Italy’
- maintenance and technical assistance
- water management and environment restoration
- commercial services
- food and wine and hospitality
- cultural services and entertainment
- services for health and social assistance
- optician
- dental technician

The vocational offer previous to the reform that still applies to the remaining grades up to school year 2022/2023, covers the service sector and the industry and crafts sector.

The programmes available in the service sector are:

- Services for agriculture and the development of rural areas
- Social and health services
- Hotel and catering
- Commerce

The programmes available in the industry and crafts sector are:

- Industrial and craft products
- Maintenance and technical assistance

**Competences in compulsory education**

For teaching purposes only, the five years of study at technical and vocational institutes are organised into a two-year period and a three-year period. In the three-year period, students are expected to acquire and develop content specific to programme attended, in order to fully achieve the specific competencies of their professional sector, as set out in the educational, cultural and professional profile (PECUP). Once acquired, these competences enable students to go further in their studies at a higher level or to go directly into their professions.

The first two years of upper secondary level of education, whether general or vocational, are compulsory. Thus, in order to ensure that education and training is the same in all types of school (general or vocational), the Ministry has defined what knowledge and competencies all students are expected to have acquired on completion of compulsory education. Knowledge and competencies integrate the current upper secondary curricula, specific for each type of school.

These knowledge and competencies are organised into four ‘cultural areas’: languages, mathematics, science/technology and historic/social studies. Knowledge and competencies are also the basis for building learning pathways aimed at acquiring key skills that can help students in adulthood and for lifelong learning. Key competences are: learning to learn, planning, communicating, collaborating and participating, acting autonomously, problem solving, creating connections and relations, acquiring and interpreting information.

**Curriculum**
The curriculum of technical education is defined in National Guidelines for the first two-year period (Ministerial Directive n. 57/2010) and for the last three years of study (Ministerial Directive no. 4/2012).

The curriculum for vocational institutes that will apply up to school year 2022/2023 is defined in National Guidelines for the first two-year period (Ministerial Directive n. 65/2010) and for the last three years of study (Ministerial Directive n. 5/2012).

The new curriculum for vocational institutes gradually applied from school year 2018/2019 starting from the first grade, is defined by the Ministerial Decree n. 92/2018 [1].

All these documents set out the specific knowledge and skills a student is expected to acquire, for each sector and branch of specialisation, in each subject included in the relevant study plan. In addition to knowledge and skills necessary for building the competencies of students, the documents also include the student's educational, cultural and professional profile (PECUP), representing what a student should know and be able to do at the end of upper secondary education.

The curriculum also includes the teaching of 'Citizenship and Constitution' that schools must include in their educational offer PTOF. 'Citizenship and Constitution' is not a separate subject and its contents are developed by individual schools through teaching projects included in the history and geography subject areas.

CLIL is compulsory in the fifth year at technical institutes.

Catholic religion is optional for students and mandatory for schools. Its specific learning objectives are defined in agreement with the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) and are included in a separate document.

Through their educational offer plan (PTOF), schools can offer additional courses that must be consistent with the Educational, Cultural and Professional Profile (Pecup) of each technical and vocational study plan. Such courses are optional for students. Once a student has chosen an optional course, attendance is compulsory and performance is assessed on a par with all compulsory subjects in the study plan.

Optional teachings are included in the student’s digital curriculum, which collects also all data on the student’s course of studies, the acquired competences, traineeship experiences and all extra-curricular activities (culture, arts, sport, voluntary service).

For technology courses at technical institutes, the annual teaching time also includes laboratory lessons taught by two teachers. The amount of hours dedicated to laboratory lessons varies according to the study path.

Students attending the last three years of upper secondary education carry out traineeship activities called ‘Paths for transversal skills and guidance’ (Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento). The aim is to deepen students’ knowledge and competences in order to increase their job opportunities and to facilitate their choice of further study.

Traineeship activities engage students for at least 150 hours in technical institutes and for 210 hours in vocational institutes. Apart from the minimum number of hours, the organisation and methods of carrying out these activities are the same as for general upper secondary education (licei).

Subjects and number of hours
The timetables for each branch of study in technical and vocational pathways show the compulsory number of teaching hours for each subject. The weekly timetable is calculated on an average of 33 weeks/year. Lessons last 60 minutes. Schools can decide to have shorter lessons, providing that the compulsory annual amount of teaching time for each subject is met.

Timetables for technical institutes are published in the Annexes B and C of the DPR no. 88/2010.

Timetables for vocational institutes are published in the Annexes 3A to 3M of the Ministerial Decree n. 92/2018.

**Regional vocational education and training (IFP)**

Three-year and four-year IFP courses do not refer to national study programmes that are specific to the different subjects.

The main IFP offer, which is an alternative to the school offer, is organised in two large areas: courses organised and run by training agencies accredited by the Regions and courses organised and run by upper secondary vocational institutes in partnership with training agencies. In the second case, schools follow the guidelines of their Regions for the organisation of these courses.

Training providers prepare teaching projects based on the tasks and skills that are specific to the relevant professional profiles. Generally, teaching projects are modular and cover basic, transversal and technical or vocational skills.

The first two years of IFP courses correspond to the last two years of compulsory education. So, as in mainstream general and vocational upper secondary education, the curricula include key competencies for citizenship, which learner should have acquired by the end of compulsory education (please see above). In courses organised by vocational upper secondary institutes, school teachers usually teach general subjects and technical and vocational subjects are usually taught by trainers from partner training agencies. Conversely, trainers on courses organised by training agencies, including those specialising in key competences, are mainly recruited by the training agencies themselves, according to the criteria set for the accreditation of agencies.

In most Regions, guidance activities are incorporated and spread across the years of study, with a concentration of career guidance time in the third year. In other Regions, individual courses include an additional block of time for guidance and teachers decide how to tailor this time to the specific needs of individual learners.

Learning and training objectives refer to the technical and professional standards set for 26 three-year vocational qualifications and 29 four-year vocational qualifications. These standards are organised into work processes/activity and the acquisition of the competencies that are typical of the professional qualification. Competencies are described in terms of skills and knowledge. The 26 three-year vocational courses lead to the qualification of ‘worker+’. The 29 four-year courses lead to the qualification of ‘technician+’ (Agreement 1° August 2019).

The purpose of three and four-year vocational training courses (IFP) is to qualify 14/17-year olds who wish to enter the labour market after a short period of training.

However, these courses ensure that students acquire the key competencies and skills required on completion of compulsory education.
Teaching methods and materials

Vocational upper secondary education

Information on teaching methods and material are the same of general upper secondary education.

Regional vocational education and training (IFP)

The main teaching aspect of IFP courses, especially on courses organised by upper secondary vocational institutes, is the use of guidance-centred teaching methods. This teaching approach makes it possible to: a) link training to the future profession more clearly and emphatically; b) rethink students’ choices, if they do not correspond to their training needs and their initial training path.

In addition to this aspect, the Regions also provide training agencies with methodological guidance on approaches and techniques based on active teaching, particularly through projects, simulated business experiences and other simulation techniques (e.g. role play and case studies). They also strongly recommend the use of problem-solving methods.

Hence, in addition to traditional active teaching methods, training institutions are often open to local opportunities and participate in extracurricular initiatives such as study visits, competitions and twinning experiences.

These methods aim to facilitate the learning process and meet the needs of learners to acquire cultural and technical/professional competences through practice. In this regard, work placements are a much appreciated learning experience for learners.

The Regions establish the length of work placements, taking into account individual qualifications. However, in the first year, placements are guidance-oriented and take place through visits to local enterprises. In subsequent years, placements have a practical and training focus. Learners work within the company and their training is organised and coordinated by the placement tutor in the training institution and the tutor at the host company.

The publishers of textbooks for vocational training are the same as those of school textbooks. Teachers are free to use textbooks and other teaching materials.

Legislative references

Law 28 March 2003, no. 53 (reform of the education system, traineeships)

Law 30 October 2008, no. 169 (Citizenship and Constitution)

C.M. no. 86 of 27 October 2010 (Citizenship and Constitution)

DPR 15 March 2010, no. 87 (organisation of vocational institutes)

DPR 15 March 2010, no. 88 (organisation of technical institutes)

DM 22 August 2007, 139 (competences compulsory education)

Directive 15 July 2010, no. 57 (Guidelines first two years of technical institutes)
Directive 16 January 2012, no. 4 (Guidelines last three years of technical institutes)

Law 6 August 2008, no. 133 (textbooks)

Law Decree 18 October 2012, no.179 (textbooks)

Ministerial Decree 27 September 2013, no. 781 (textbooks)

Law 13 July 2015, no. 107 (reform of the education system, traineeships)

Dlgs. 13 April 2017, no. 61 (reorganisation of vocational institutes)

DM 24 May 2018, no. 92 (study plans and timetables)

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