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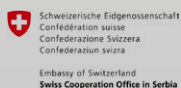
International conference

“WORK-BASED LEARNING: A ROAD TO OPPORTUNITIES”

Belgrade, 12 June 2018

Report prepared by Centre for Education Policy

IN COOPERATION WITH



AUSTRIAN
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AGENCY



Content

1. Overview of the Conference..... 3

The Conference speakers/panellists..... 5

Key note speech 5

National model of dual education -
Recent developments in Serbia and current practice..... 6

Expert interviews and discussions:

Models of cooperation between public and private sector on WBL in WB countries
AND achieving complementarity between skills and labour market – mission possible?..... 8

Work-based Learning – Mission Accomplished..... 9

How can we wisely approach an unpredictable future?..... 11

The Conference closure..... 12

The Conference participants 12

2. Working groups..... 13

Working Group 1 - Employment..... 13

Working Group 2 - Quality management..... 15

Working Group 3 - VET Permeability..... 17

Working Group 4 - Youth at risk..... 19

3. Evaluation of the Conference..... 21

1. Overview of the Conference

The conference focused on different aspects of work-based learning (WBL) and took place in Belgrade on 12 June 2018. It was organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (MoESTD), Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, together Austrian Development Cooperation and Swiss Development Cooperation, as partners.

The conference was organized under the German Development Cooperation project “Reform of Vocational Education and Training in Serbia”, implemented by GIZ. The project started in April 2013, with the aim of providing support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia in introducing elements of dual training in the

formal VET system. Reform of the formal VET system has been in focus of Serbian education policy for many years, and work-based learning is the mechanism that will additionally modernise VET by enabling students’ access to modern forms of work and empowering them to acquire competences in a real work environment. This will enable them to acquire appropriate qualifications that will facilitate their employment after graduation, and additionally strengthen the link between VET system and the labour market.

The aim of the conference “Work-based Learning: a Road to Opportunities” was to present the course of development and establishment of work-based learning policy in Serbia, the perspectives of schools and companies, and to present and discuss different aspects related to the WBL policy.





Inter alia, the conference participants had an opportunity to engage in following topics:

- Models of cooperation between public and private sector on WBL in WB countries;
- Achieving complementarity between skills and labour market;
- Employment;
- Quality Management;
- VET permeability;
- Youth at risk in VET.

The Conference summed up the results achieved in the establishment of work-based learning/dual education policy, and identified the areas that will become crucial in the following period, especially by the time of full implementation of the legislative framework regulating work-based learning in Serbia.



The Conference speakers/panellists

Renowned guests from national and international institutions and organisations took part in the Conference.

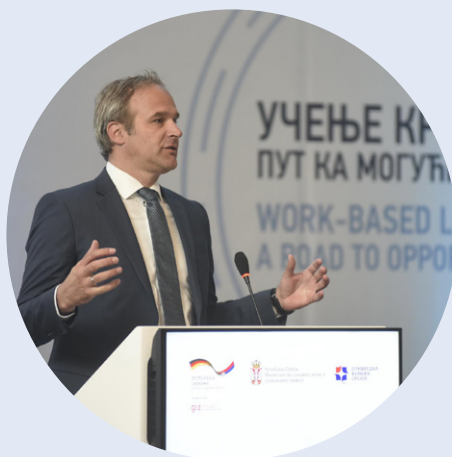
The welcome speeches were delivered by representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and German Embassy to Serbia.

The main moderator of the conference was Dragan Ilić, a renowned journalist.

Key note speech

The key note/opening speech was delivered by Mr Thomas Mayr, Managing Director, ibw Austria – Research & Development in VET. Mayr focused on the main policy questions, such as how to make dual VET attractive for individuals and for companies to get involved. He shared his advice on several important dimensions of implementing quality dual education, such as responsiveness to companies'

skills needs, standards and qualifications (professions vs. jobs), mechanisms for quality assurance etc. Besides, he pointed out that each system has to be cautious about promotion of financial incentives for companies to get involved in dual education. Mayr also presented European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (adopted in March 2018 by Council of the European Union), related to criteria for learning and working conditions, and compared it with state of the art in Serbia, and concluded that positive legislation in Serbia is in compliance with this document.



National model of dual education - Recent developments in Serbia and current practice

Gabrijela Grujić, Assistant Minister for dual and entrepreneurial education, shared that the key message for young people is that education must become a life philosophy, where acquiring knowledge does not mean just acquiring theoretical knowledge, but also acquiring knowledge in a real working environment. Grujić sees as responsibility of the government to ensure quality companies that meet the criteria envisaged by the Law on Dual Education and to provide young people with opportunities to be recognised by employers as competent employees. She also shared that National model of dual education is not only intended for immediate employment after graduation, but also for students who

want to continue their education, to establish their own enterprises etc. The special value, as she noted, lies in the fact that all players' efforts are being coordinated and directed in the same direction, and that cooperation is ensured by companies but also schools, students and parents etc. Below is the short quote illustrating her motivational speech:

The quality of VET is ensured by having quality schools and teachers who have armed their students with theoretical knowledge, key competences and quality and safe work-based learning in companies. The Ministry has worked closely with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, schools, Institute for the Improvement of Education, and companies. The Law on Dual Education was adopted, and the focus is on ensuring the quality of knowledge, trained instructors who work with students in companies, and other benefits. Students in companies also acquire social skills, communication and analytical skills.





Mirjana Kovačević, Head of the Center for Education of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, noted that the most important benefit for the economy and society are educated youth with functional knowledge. She stated that 900 students (5 profiles in 16 schools) and 60 companies gained experience in dual education under pilot projects, and shared that more than 1200 companies from 52 local governments expressed their inten-

tion to cooperate with schools. According to Kovačević, entrepreneurs still maintain their opinion that young graduates do not have functional and usable knowledge at the end of VET, which is not advantageous in the reality that calls for work experience and entrepreneurial traits.

Following their speeches, both Grujić and Kovačević were leading a panel discussion with guests representing three schools and three companies, all involved in dual education. The school representatives included Dragan Tucaković, Principal of the Technical School from Užice, Milivoje Đorđević, Principal of the Technical School from Vlasotince and Mirjana Lekić, Principal of the Trade School from Belgrade. The representatives from companies included Vladica Stanković, Gruner Serbian from Vlasotince, Nataša Pančić, Copper Mill from Sevojno and Dragan Kovačević, VIP mobile from Belgrade. The panellists shared their experience in collaboration, emphasising the necessity of common understanding of all involved players, and on-going coordination between schools and companies. One of



the main challenges was to reach the point where interests of all parties are identified and fulfilled; this is the process that calls for flexibility and openness of all parties involved, since reform steps demand stepping out of the comfort zone, and implementing and managing the change process.

Expert interviews and discussions: Models of cooperation between public and private sector on WBL in WB countries AND achieving complementarity between skills and labour market – mission possible?

The following part included two experts' interviews. Tina Šarić, Director of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERISEE) was the interviewer, while interviewees included Alper Dincer,

Principal Economist, European Bank for Reconstruction (EBRD), and Stefan Thomas, VET Specialist, European Training Foundation.

Dincer shared EBRD views on economic inclusion, more precisely mentioning that EBRD had developed and adopted its Economic Inclusion Strategy in May 2017, with one of the main goals to support its countries of operation in transition to sustainable free market economies. In order to become a sustainable free market economy, a country needs to demonstrate one of the most important qualities of the sustainable free market economy, and that is to ensure equality of opportunities for all. In this demanding task, EBRD is focused on several target groups, not just in Serbia, but in the entire Western Balkans region, and these groups include women, population living in underserved areas and youth. As for youth, according to Dincer, the most challenging is dealing with youth inactivity and youth employment. Therefore, when deciding on investment proposals, EBRD is paying



special attention if those proposals have the capacity to improve skills and employability of young people, and currently several such projects are on-going in Serbia. Dincer also shared that there is one area that requires more attention – public procurement, as in this area private and public sector are naturally encountering, making it the area where more opportunities could be drawn for public-private partnerships. Besides, Dincer shared EBRD experience and practices from other relevant countries.

Thomas stated that although Serbia made a significant progress in the previous period in bridging the gap between skills and labour market demands, such as inclusion of business sector in the education process, there is still a lot to be done, mainly in relation to systemic solutions that will provide sustainability and increase complementarity in this field. One of the solutions could be establishment of functional sector councils, which is in the forefront

for Serbia. It is very challenging to adapt the process of attaining skills to the future market needs and to reach their full complementarity, and one of the actions to resolve this challenge could be to focus on developing key competences of students. More use can be made of ex-students' reflections on the education they gained as in this way both school-based learning and work-based learning could be evaluated and improved. Thomas suggested that government should not attract companies to become involved in dual education through financial incentives, but rather through provision of quality education system where students gain relevant competences. Another suggestion he shared in this area is to consider non-financial incentives (e.g. training of in-company instructors).

The afternoon part of the Conference started with four parallel working groups (the next chapter provides in-depth information on this segment).





Work-based Learning – Mission Accomplished

In continuation of the conference and before the closing speeches, two ex-students' testimonies took place. As confirmed by many conference participants, their stories are regarded as very successful. Besides, this segment was probably the highlight of the entire conference, as stated informally by many conference participants.

In this part of the conference, Dragan Ilić, the main moderator, skilfully interviewed two ex-students and current employees. Zoltan Kuti, a former student of the Technical School from Subotica, and current employee of Montavar Metalna Lola, and Miloš Tatić, a former student of the Technical School from Pecinci, and current employee of Robert Bosch LLC had an oppor-

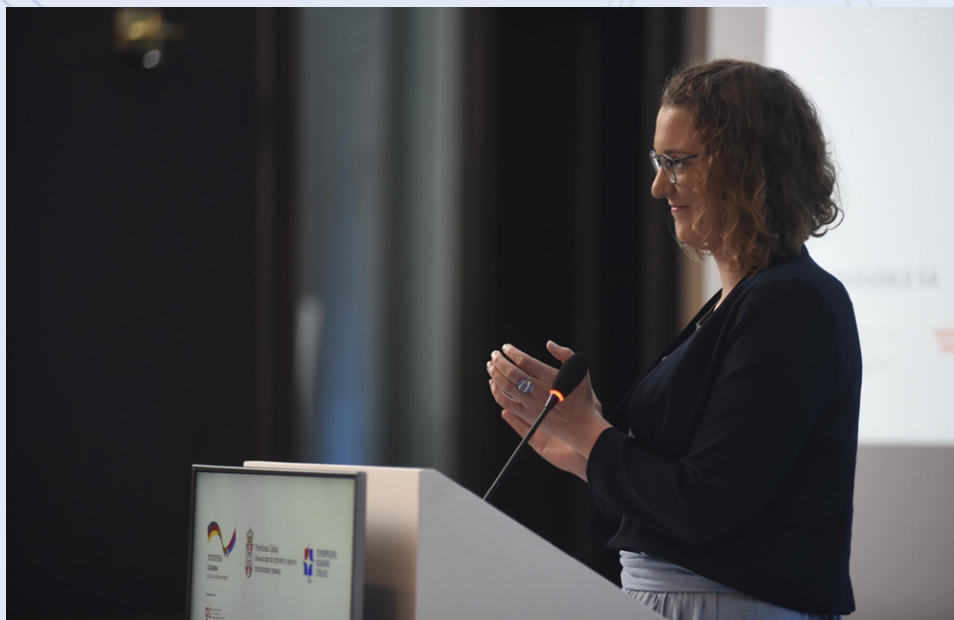
tunity to present their perspectives of the work-based learning, as well as their personal experience, having in mind that both have attended the work-based learning in companies that became their first employers after graduation. They emphasised how their VET education provided them with various opportunities, such as to become young professionals and employees who don't require additional training in companies to be able to start working but are very familiar with the work process instead. In addition, they stated that becoming financially independent earlier than majority of their peers, was a great advantage for them that stemmed out of their WBL. Also, they are regarded and accepted in their work place as competent and capable of handling responsible tasks. One of them, Zoltan Kuti, is also a winner of various competitions in his profession - currently he is the first-ranked in Serbia in MAG welding.

How can we wisely approach an unpredictable future?

The closing speech was delivered by Mr Clemens Wieland, Senior Project Manager, Bertelsmann Stiftung. Wieland pointed out that the main issues as regards preparedness for future are related to economic performance and equal opportunities. More precisely Wieland's speech dealt with questions how we can secure the need for skilled employees in an ever-changing world of work, as well as how to professionally qualify as many young people as possible in view of the increasing requirements in the world of work. Some of his recommendations regarding

the issues raised included keeping the institutional framework flexible for adaptation and development of new professions based on requirements of the world of work; teaching “learning to learn” instead of only accumulating know-how; using digitalization to give students the power to learn in the way they prefer and at their own pace and level; using small group instruction to empower students to develop critical thinking, communication and problem-solving skills etc. Wieland concluded the Conference with motivational sentences, or “food for thought”, stating that dual education has a head start in terms of digital competences compared to other forms of education, and that it is clearly beneficial to undertake apprenticeship in a company with economical interest in using state-of-the-art technology.





The Conference closure

Ann-Kathrin Hentschel, Leader of the project “Reform of Vocational Education and Training in Serbia”, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, closed the Conference as representative of the main hosting organisation. Mrs Hentschel expressed special gratitude to all speakers, guests and participants for their contributions to such a successful event. In addition, she promised that she will mention the main conclusions from the working groups at the WBL conference to take place in Berlin in early July. She also expressed her gratitude to the teams organising and supporting the event.

The Conference participants

A total of 211 participants attended the Conference, and they included representatives of VET schools and companies involved or planning to get involved in work-based learning and dual education, followed by representatives of government institutions, bodies and organisations, but also from civil society sector. Representatives of international and regional organisations and agencies in the field of education were also among the attendees.

Conference also attracted journalists coming from more than 10 media (media coverage is not a part of this report).

2. Working groups

A part of the afternoon session was dedicated to discussions regarding several crucial topics linked with work-based learning, more precisely employment, quality management, VET permeability and youth at risk.

All conference participants were divided into four working groups (WG) according to their preferences expressed in advance of the conference.

The groups convened in parallel sessions, and each started with an introductory speech delivered by national and international experts, with national experts facilitating the group work. All parallel working groups followed the same structure, the first part being dedicated to introductory speech/es, the second being the discussion, and the third part being agreement on the joint conclusions.

Working Group 1 - Employment

This working group was opened by three speakers: PhD Lara Lebedinski, Researcher, Foundation for Economic Science Development and Institute of Economic Science, Tijana Samardžić, HR partner, VIP Mobile, and Miloš Bogunović, HR Manager, Cargo Partner.

The goal of this working group was to examine the effects of work-based learning

on employment. The main points for discussion were whether WBL is on the right track to meet one of its most significant goals, i.e. to provide the conditions for acquiring, upgrading and developing one's competences in accordance with the labour market needs, as well as to ensure the conditions for employment after finishing education. Lara Lebedinski presented the results of the survey that measured the effects of the employability of students who graduated from dual education profiles in 2017. The preliminary results of a rather small sample showed that six months after graduation 68% of students received employment, 21% continued their schooling, and 11% did not find employment since their WBL was organised in public institutions where employment ban is in force; the remaining part were not offered employment, or they decided to take up





something else. Lara Lebedinski emphasised the importance of short-, mid- and long-term monitoring of the results of students' employment. Tijana Samardžić presented the experience of VIP Mobile that will, as of September 2018, have the third generation of students attending the educational profile trader according to the dual model. Mrs Samardžić reflected on students' development, how they advance in their schooling and show rising interest to be independently involved in the working processes, thus giving their own contribution. Furthermore, she shared forecasts regarding employment of students for the next year, after they have graduated. Miloš Bogunović expressed his company's expectations and motives to be a part of the dual education system, having in mind that this company will receive students for WBL for the first time in September 2018, for the educational profile technician for logistics and freight forwarding. Moreover, Bogunović underlined possible challenges in this process, such as absence of contractual obligation of the student to stay in the company where they have attended their WBL or the fact that companies are insuf-

ficiently involved in the placement process (selection) of students who are to attend WBL in the respective company.

The questions raised and discussed among the participants and speakers were mainly related to legislative framework and articles regulating contracts to be signed between students and companies, such as, conditions for termination, placement of students and accreditation of companies.

After introductory speeches and group discussion, participants concluded the following:

- Dual Education promotes employment and employability;
- Companies involvement in the selection process of students is one of the crucial success factors;
- Measuring effects of employment entails the short-, mid- and long-term monitoring system of students' performance.

Ana Stojanović and Ivana Kovačević of the CCIS were the group moderators.

Working Group 2 - Quality management

As an introductory speech, a successful example of the EFQM model of excellence application at the Economic-Trade School in Bečej was presented by the school principal Mrs Gordana Kovačev. The presentation underlined the developmental perspective of the school since 2002, when the school was involved (as a part of the Reform of Vocational Education and Training supported by GIZ) in the development of new educational profiles, which was followed by the intensive professional development of teachers, equipping the school and applying IT in teaching. Assumptions on which the quality model was built implied a different organisational structure of the school (special teams with clear tasks and objectives were formed) through which delegation of responsibility for certain areas of work was achieved. Within

the model, the importance of establishing a Document Management System was pointed out, that enables monitoring of the effects of team work and transparency of their work. This approach to quality management made it easier to apply the envisaged quality standards for self-evaluation, and the school received the highest grade in the external evaluation.

WG participants discussed various aspects of the quality and challenges schools face in managing change, such as the introduction of the work-based learning concept in the dual education model. As school management representatives were highly represented at the Conference, it was concluded that human resources management is the biggest challenge for school principals, i.e. rewarding and affirmation of teachers





who are actively and constructively involved in processes and procedures of importance for establishing and maintaining quality assurance. Among the participants were guests from countries of the region, who pointed out that aspects related to the quality of teaching process outside the classroom, i.e. in company are a common topic, and that in their respective countries they also face many challenges even today.

At the end of the working group, conclusions were made in reference to quality management at the school level. It is crucial that in quality management the following steps are taken:

- Establishing an appropriate organisational structure,
- Investing in intensive professional development of teachers,
- Inclusion of IT in teaching and documentation,
- Monitoring of teaching process,
- Establishing and following procedures and documentation processes.

Besides, key challenges related to quality of the work-based learning process have been identified:

- Placement of students for WBL in environments/local governments where there is no developed economy and where small and medium sized enterprises prevail,
- Ensuring an adequate number of trained instructors,
- Capacities for monitoring of students WBL by the WBL coordinator when WBL is being conducted in a large number of companies,
- Achieving coordination and joint responsibility of schools and employers, as well as the framework of their cooperation,
- Monitoring the quality and effects of the dual model at the school and system levels.

Tatijana Glišić of the Institute for the Improvement of Education was the moderator of this WG.

Working Group 3 - VET Permeability

Kurt Schmid, Senior Researcher, ibw Austria – Research & Development in VET, delivered the presentation on VET permeability as an introductory speech and inspiration for participants' discussion. During his presentation, he pointed out that there are several aspects of permeability, and that this theme should be understood in a broader sense, since one can talk of both vertical and horizontal permeability, as well as of initial VET (IVET) and continuous VET (CVET), general education vs. IVET etc. Schmid sees goals of permeability to be fostering equal opportunities, giving second chance options, fostering attractiveness of IVET, broadening access to

higher education, fostering upward skill-ing of workforce etc.

WG participants engaged in discussion on why and how to foster permeability in Serbian IVET, and the possible role of companies in this undertaking.

The WG concluded that it is important to foster permeability in Serbian VET system, since it could contribute to greater equality (having in mind that lower level of education is very much associated with lower socio-economic status, and that students from marginalised groups tend to be overrepresented in three-year profiles), as





well as to higher level of attractiveness of vocational education in general, and dual education in particular. Fostering permeability is also very much in line with the philosophy of life-long learning mentioned as one of the strategic directions of the Serbian education system. Here it is also important to establish and implement the system of recognition/validation of prior learning, as well as to investigate the motivation of students in reference to their further schooling. Working group participants mentioned that “opening” the education system for further education for those who are already employed is very much needed. Bearing such opinions, companies’ representatives underlined that they are in need of the employees who are highly specialised for particular working operations, and that they are ready to support and finance their employees continued education should it lead to further strengthening of their professional competences.

Therefore, the main conclusions can be systematised as follows:

- Possibility for continuation of education should be secured for all students since attractiveness of VET is fostered, which is very much in line with principles of equity in education and life-long learning.
- System of recognition/validation of prior learning should be created and established as soon as possible.
- Employers are willing to support and contribute to further professional development of their employees.

Jasminka Čekić Marković and Dejan Stanković of the Centre for Education Policy were moderators of this WG.

Working Group 4 - Youth at risk

Lida Kita, Specialist in VET and Social Inclusion - Country Desk Serbia and Turkey, European Training Foundation, provided introductory speech for the working group that had vulnerable youth in VET in its focus, being the expert on VET and social inclusion.

The main topics of introductory presentation were the following: how to bridge the gap between the education system and the future labour market, and possible role of WBL; moving from industrial education to personalised/student-centred education; the role of WBL in inclusion of youth at risk; how to make WBL attractive for all interested parties (WBL as a win-win for the economy and society); understanding

of the costs and benefits of WBL as an important step to identify how to shift the balance to make it more attractive for employers to offer work-based learning opportunities to youth at risk; challenges for youth at risk etc.

The above issues were an excellent inspiration for a fruitful discussion within the working group, and participants discussed potential supportive measures needed to involve and prepare youth at risk to uptake quality WBL. On the other hand, working group participants discussed what should be done as a support for young people at risk as well as for companies to provide opportunities and quality WBL.





Major recommendations/conclusions offered by the working group are the following, and they all relate to significant steps to be undertaken in order to support youth at risk:

- Provision of adequate information for different stakeholders about values and implications of dual education (such as specific targeted brochures with key information and messages from the Law on dual education and its respective bylaws, tailored to the needs of schools, companies, families);
- Organising continued awareness raising campaigns at the local and national levels;
- Mapping of potential incentives for companies and youth at risk to increase their interest in taking part in dual education;
- Improving professional orientation and carrier guidance processes by holistic approach and involvement of families and companies, as well as youth;
- Conducting capacity building activities in local communities, and joint trainings involving different interested parties, peer reviews etc.;
- Ensuring representation of social inclusion aspects and criteria in bylaws;
- Ensuring presence of social inclusion aspects as one of the criteria for licencing companies interested to get involved in dual education.

Moderator was Jelena Markovic, consultant.

3. Evaluation of the Conference

In general, according to the data obtained in the evaluation of the Conference, it can be concluded that participants were very much satisfied with all the Conference aspects – from content-related to organisational matters. Namely, the participants highly evaluated selected conference topics, their sequencing and usefulness for further implementation and development of dual education in Serbia. Working in groups was highly appreciated since it provided opportunity to participants to discuss relevant topics in more detail, and students' "first-hand" experience is seen as essential for understanding values of work-based learning. All the Conference materials were in majority of cases evaluated as useful, whereas 51% of participants mentioned the huge benefit of the Conference for getting an overall insight in the WBL policy in Serbian VET. The Conference has also supported identification of topics for the next conference, with different evaluation of dual education results, further elaboration of the cooperation arrangements between education and economy sectors, financing and promotion of work-based learning being the most frequently mentioned topics.



