

REPORT FROM STUDY VISIT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM EXPERTS, ISTANBUL, 10-11 MARCH 2015

The aim of the Higher Education Reform Experts seminar titled *Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the Erasmus+ Partner Countries neighboring the EU: Partnership for socio-economic development* in Istanbul was to exchange experience between Partner Countries and EU countries how higher education could support vocational education and training.

In order to promote importance of vocational education and training our mission as HERE is to do our best to disseminate good practice, firstly from countries where vocational education and training have very respectable place in educational scheme (Denmark, Finland, Holland), necessity of good quality of VET providers, independent information relating to vocational education and training to governments, the sector, industry, and the community as a whole. Montenegro, following advanced countries in VET and short cycle opportunities, has to base VET system on teaching industry standards and learning outcomes, via training packages or more intensified so called dual system. If we stream to have students who will be in position to demonstrate specific skills and to meet industry standards our main motto must be 'competency based' training. As we know the education process always results in some kind of outcomes but their nature is often vague and undefined. In vocational education as well, programs with imprecisely defined outcomes are not rare and this results in the "production" of people with formally recognized qualifications, but who lack some elementary work competencies that they are expected to possess. As we heard, during the seminar, the crucial role in creation of competency based student is competency of teacher, student counseling and cooperation between social partners, the world of work and education providers. Cooperation between them, in the EU and some Partner countries, is institutionalized within different type of institutions which primary task is to be mediator and facilitator with the common aim to get competence based and flexible curricula, proper teacher qualification and good in service training. Their role, beside responsible actors for educational policy, is to promote vocational education and training not as a second choice option of young people. VET has to be at the very high position at the policy agenda in order to decrease unemployment, especially of youth. At the same time it is very important to make no barriers between VET and higher education on the contrary to enhance permeability by strengthening the links between them. Good VET education means strengthening partnerships and networks between companies, VET providers and higher education institutions and entrepreneurship as well. As precondition of finding the real place of VET is good understanding of VET itself, how could it be provided at the best way, within short cycle programs, university education, higher professional school or dual higher education. Very good example in that sense is Slovenia, where growing number of unemployed HE graduates is evident and lifelong

learning has increased importance, with 2 year so called short cycle higher education. Such kind of program is structured in a such way that 40% of curricula is in company work based learning. Enrollment in short cycle program has increasing trend, bearing in mind that 97% of short cycle graduates are employed and that their diploma theses usually solves concrete problems in companies. Slovenian experience in short cycle could be very useful for us in Montenegro where academic and applied (professional) programs are running under the same umbrella. Within external evaluation of University of Montenegro (where study 85% out of total students' population) it is recommended to think about the possibility of performing applied studies and academic studies separately within University, i.e. to establish a school of applied studies. This would allow the University quality improvement and better ranking in the future.

Very inspiring is experience of Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries (MESS) which confirms the necessity of close cooperation between VET colleges, Council for Higher Education and Ministry of Education in preparation of national occupational standards and national qualifications in automotive and metal sectors and bringing together apprenticeship programs, secondary VET programs and Level 5 programs under same institutions. In order to enable vertical mobility their efforts are concentrated on ensuring program complementarity among VET and HE programs

Also, seminar was occasion to highlight the importance of recognition of prior learning not only in the context of VET, but generally. Using experience of EU countries and some PC, we have to create real conditions and circumstances for recognition of prior learning knowing that students may have gained prior skills through informal or formal training, experience in the workplace, voluntary work, or social or domestic activities. It will be additional impulse for further development of persons who are out of formal educational system, but who are very interested in better position at the labor market and acquiring new knowledge through flexible learning paths.

Seminar was organized perfectly. We enjoyed hospitality of our very kind host who were at our disposal at every moment and gave us feeling of full respect.

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