

## POLICY DESIGN FOR WORK BASED LEARNING IN VET SCHOOLS IN KOSOVA

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### Abstract

The aim of this research is to understand more about the attendance of professional practice by students in companies and contribute in policy design for work based learning. That would lead to improvement in students' professional practice in companies, development of competencies and training programme that suits with their need, for responsible persons for the cooperation between schools and businesses like Business Liaison Officers at school level or In-Company trainers and Work Place Instructors at company level, including their Continuous Professional Development. The following aspects were analysed: attendance of students' professional practice in the VET system in Kosova, types of professional practice, students' assessment, roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, and satisfaction of schools and businesses in this regard. Based on this research a key and general Competence for Business Liaison Officer and training programme have been developed and key policy aspects for legislation framework is proposed.

**Keywords:** Professional practice, Work Based Learning, WBC, VET, School, Company.

## INTRODUCTION

The working age population in Kosova from 15-64 years old, based on the results of the Labour Force Surveys (LFS) in Q2 2019 (LFS, 2019) the unemployment rate was 31.4% (38% Female), while the unemployment rate is for the age group 15-24 with 57.3%. Higher employment of males (45.2%), while female is 12.7%, long-term unemployment of young people (15-19), who have been unemployed for more than 12 months for Q4 is 38.2%, while NEET (aged 15-24) is 29.4%. Females are mainly employed in education, trade and healthcare sectors (52.9%), while males are mostly employed in trade, construction and manufacturing sectors by (44.1%).

Based on these facts many companies are facing with difficulties in meeting their labor demand. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in Kosova is conducting and extensive reform on harmonising Vocational Education and Training with labor market requirements in the country and abroad. In terms of VET, the focus is on improving the relevance of school programmes to labor market needs, the development and harmonization of policies to support VET reform, of a VET specific core curriculum, aligned to the Kosova Curriculum Framework, the systematic provision of high quality work experience and professional practice, and, specific to the Kosova context (MEST, 2016).

The structure of the profiles in offer by VET System in Kosova does not reflect the labour market needs. This has led to over- and undersupply of certain profiles in the regions. VET schools that are better equipped and have benefited from different donor programmes seem to perform better, but their capacities need to be strengthened to ensure effective and sustainable implementation of VET supply (Likaj R. a., 2018).

Kosova is studying possible varieties of VET systems to move from two typical extremes: a purely full time school based VET system and a purely VET system with predominantly company based training. Between these two extremes, mixed systems can be conceived which offer full time school based and with elements of dual VET (BMWFW, 2016). In order to deliver a work based (WB) VET a proper legal basis should be developed and harmonized, including some pre conditions such are: working contract, WB VET plan that follows In-company training Standards and VET Standards (BIBB, 2016), multi stakeholder's examination boards, funding aspects, inputs for updating/development of national WBL standards and demand-driven VET standards for delivery in both learning venues. While in Kosova there is a little commitment of key stakeholders for development and implementation of new policies and strategies and bridging the gap between policies and their implementation (Likaj R. , 2016).

However, the results of the interviews and the survey strongly emphasize that further cooperation between MEST, public and private providers and businesses is needed although some good examples of this are already taking place. VET teachers in Kosovo say that they are using traditional and modern teaching methods. Approximately 40-59% of teachers frequently or always use progressive approaches such as group work and differentiated work for students. It is less common for students to use ICT in classes (19% frequently or always) although 34% of teachers said they were using ICT frequently or always to prepare instructional materials. Most teachers declared that they frequently or always are able to simulate work tasks in the classroom. However, direct interactions with employers are unusual for about 50% of teachers and lecturers so they cannot benefit from an up to date understanding or a social contact with the world of work. However, around 40% of Kosovar vocational students do benefit from a significant period of work-based learning. The survey suggests that the teachers encounter motivated students and are enjoying the teaching process with their students (Likaj R. , 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

The mixed method is used for the research, which is intertwined with elements of quantitative research method. This research is part of the project „School meets Business“, supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and KulturKontakt Austria.

For the quantitative research, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), a sample of 26 vocational schools was selected; these schools offer programs in different areas: technical, agriculture, hotel-restaurants, tourism and IT and they cooperate with the selected vocational schools, running their activities in the above-mentioned areas. Consequently, this questionnaire was answered by a total of 22 respondents from vocational schools and a total of 16 respondents from businesses that cooperate with vocational schools.

The questionnaire mainly included closed questions, where the representatives of vocational schools and businesses could choose one of the options offered as a response in the respective question. Whereas, in the end of the questionnaire there were open questions included, related to duties and responsibilities of the person responsible for professional practice, the competences this person should have to coordinate cooperation between school and businesses, shortcomings in cooperation between schools and businesses and recommendations for the improvement of this cooperation in the process of professional practice attendance.

## Results of quantitative research with vocational schools

The results of quantitative research show that 48% of schools involved in the research mostly implement the professional practice form in companies during the school year, in accordance with the school plan and legislation into force in regards to professional practice; 38% implement it moderately and according to grades 10, 11 and 12, whereas 14% do not apply at all a professional practice in companies. Professional practice (PP) is organized based on the curriculum;

- Grade 10, 6 hours per week, in school labs and workplaces
- Grade 11, 9 hours per week
- Grade 12, 12 hours per week

But, it is not clearly defined what the students precisely learn in terms of competences achieved during professional practice in companies. Students in the company usually spend from 6 to 12 hours per week, but there are rare cases of organizing professional block.

In regards to the question of availability of WBL in school, forms of practical training, roles and responsibilities, satisfaction with the practical training, responses are presented below:

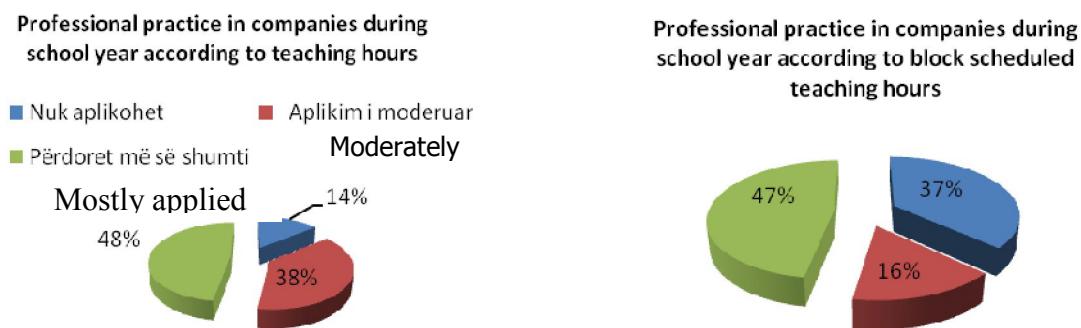


Chart 1: Professional Practice in companies

Most of schools answered that professional practice takes place mostly in the form of visiting companies, rather than as a work based learning, 57% answered mostly applied and 43% answered moderately applied. Whereas in regards to companies' visiting schools, 47% declared that companies with which they cooperate do not visit their vocational schools.

In regards to WBL (practical learning/training in companies), during the school year only 11% state that it is not applied and this is in contradiction with the previous question about the type of professional practice. In regards to professional practice of VET students attended during school summer holidays, 79% of respondents state that this type of practice is not applied in their school. Same is valid for school holidays as per the calendar of official holidays published by MEST.

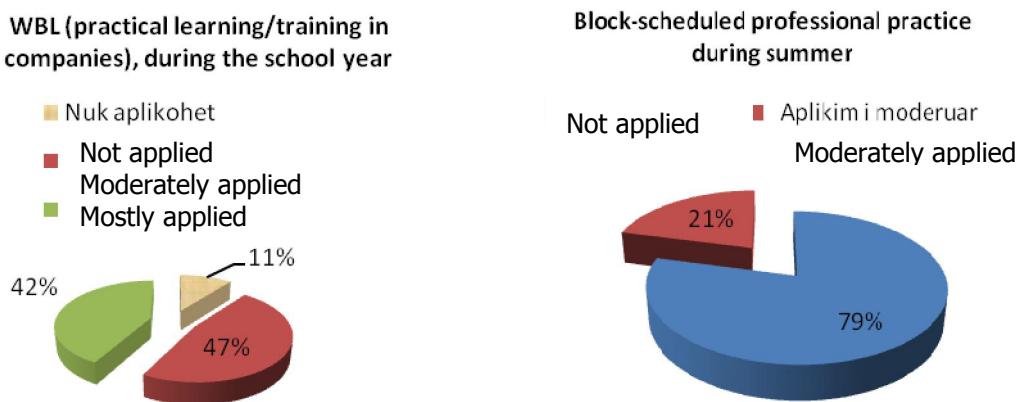


Chart 2: Professional Practice in VET Schools

In regards to the question "Is school important to the company?", 18% of respondents state a little, whereas the others in average or a lot.

In regards to the companies' interest in VETs in the respective region, 76% of respondents state that there is a moderate interest from companies, whereas 12% state that companies' interest in their school is low.

In regards to Memorandums of Cooperation between schools and companies, 38% of respondents state that they have signed 5-10 memorandums, whereas 43% from 5-10; in regards to implementation the results are approximately the same.

60% of respondents state that the school regularly updated the list of companies available for WBL attendance, whereas 15% state that update is not done regularly.

In regards to criteria used to define which company is available for WBL in specific qualifications, the answers have been provided below:

- The school and enterprise share the same professional area,
- Conditions offered by company in regards to space, technology, behaviour, profession requirements, number of students that the company can accommodate,
- Qualified staff in professional and methodical aspect to supervise students during the practice.
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- Distance between school and company!!! In regards to school's reaction in cases when the company cannot offer professional practice/work based learning (WBL) to meet qualification requirements, 60% of respondents state that the school sends students to other companies to meet qualification requirements, whereas 32% state that this part is compensated in school workplaces. While the fact that none of the schools sends their students to Vocational Training Centers in MLSW is concerning.

In regards to forms of cooperation between schools and enterprises, results are a bit contradictory because 42% of respondents state that the cooperation takes place through students' professional practice attendance, whereas 44 % through visits to companies; 6% state that the companies visit their schools.

In regards to the question "Who organizes the placement of students from your school for WBL in companies with which cooperation is established?", the results are presented in the Figure below, where 61% of respondents state that this task is carried out by professional practice teacher.

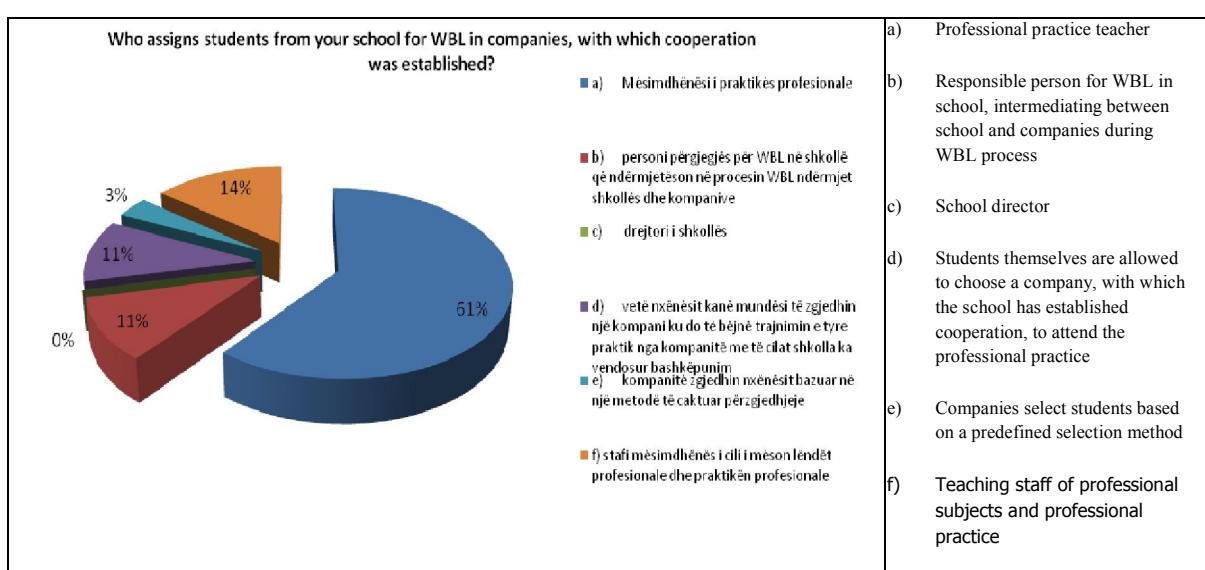


Chart 3: Assignment of the students from VET schools to the companies

While professional practice duration for grades 10 and 11 is in accordance with the legislation into force, for grade 12 none of respondents states that students of grades 12 spend 3 days of 6 hours in the company, 6% of them justify by stating that they send students in block scheduled professional practice.

In regards to student's travel expenses, 85% of respondents state that they are covered by parents and 15% by school; this means that companies, MED or MEST do not contribute in this aspect.

In regards to meals offered to students, 60% state that students are not offered any meal in the hosting company during professional practice, whereas 40% state that they do; whereas in regards to meal provided, 63% state that the meal expenses are covered by companies, whereas 37% by parents.

In regards to students' monitoring during professional practice or WBL, 67% state that monitoring is mainly done by practice teacher, whereas 33% by supervisor or instructor assigned by company.

In regards to the question "How it is assessed which of the trainings can be offered in the company?", 44% of respondents state that this is done by school, whereas 20% by the company supervisor; whereas in regards to liaison officers between school and company the response is negative.

In regards to the frequency of visits of professional practice teacher, 76% of respondents state that these visits take place once a week, whereas 14% even once a month. This is concerning because companies have asked school representatives and MED to visit and be present much more to supervise students because they have considerable remarks about their behavior and engagement.

The majority of respondents state that students' participation is supervised by company 89%, whereas only 11% state that the company does not supervise the participation of students during professional practice.

In regards to the question "How the professional practice teacher/instructor is assured that there is a full alignment of practical training program in school and work based learning in company?", 40% of respondents state that the working plan in the company is compared to teaching plan, 48% state that, in cooperation with the company's supervisor, the teaching plan is adjusted to correspond to company's working plan, whereas 12% admit that no previous analysis takes place and the children are directly accommodated in the company.

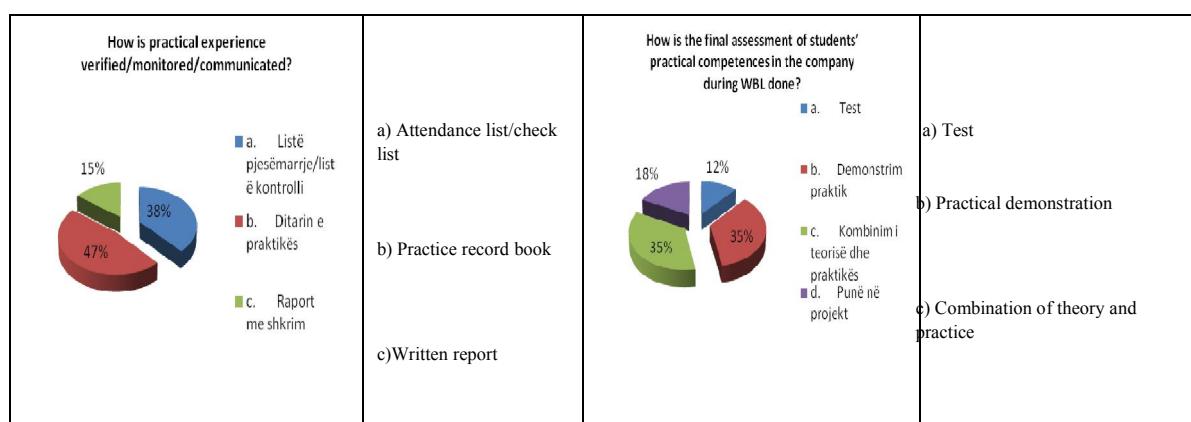


Chart 4: Assessment of practical achievements of the students

In regards to verification of practical experience and communication and final practice assessment of students during WBL, 47% state that this is done through practice record book, whereas 38% through

a check list; assessment through practical demonstration is stated by 35% of respondents and 35% responded that this is done through a combined theoretical and practical test.

In regards to feedback from parents for the practical training WBL of students in companies, 60% of respondents state that the school organizes meetings and communicates directly with parents, whereas in 34% of cases communication takes place by phone.

In regards to the question Are you satisfied with the cooperation with companies, 73% of respondents state that they are partially satisfied, 18% very satisfied, whereas 9% are not satisfied at all.

In regards to the program of professional practice, 91% of respondents state that the program is prepared by professional practice teacher or someone at school, 9% by any professional member of the team, but no representative from companies is part of it.

In regards to workload of persons/employees in the school who organize professional practice and the time required for that, 45% state that the work load is insignificant and it does not take much time, whereas 55% state that it is a significant workload.

In regards to the question "Do you think you need a person employed at school, whose main task would be to organise professional practice WBL and cooperation between school and company?", 81% of respondents state that they need such a position, therefore it is necessary for the decision-making institutions to address the issue seriously.

56% of respondents state that their teachers, especially professional practice teachers have previous experience in private sector or industry, whereas 38% responded negatively in this question.

### **Conclusions from the quantitative research with schools**

In regards to duties and responsibilities of the person responsible for professional practice WBL, the majority of respondents provided the following responses:

- Serves as a coordinator along with a responsible person at the company in regard to scheduling and other practical issues
- Identifies the opportunities offered by company
- Undertakes the responsibility for the attainment of practical competences by students as per the curriculum,
- Monitors students' participation, behaviour and progress,
- Staff relations and behaviour toward students in companies,
- In cooperation with the practice teacher, he/she should be able to assess the level of achievement of competences by students

In regards to competences the responsible person should have to be able to coordinate the cooperation between school and companies, we summarized respondents' answers below:

- Great communication, negotiation and organisation skills,
- Knowledge and skills in the professional area to align the professional practice program with company's working plan,
- Be familiar with the methodology of planning practical modules,
- Be able to assess teachers' needs and provide guidance for professional practice to them,
- Be prepared to guide, monitor and assess students' behaviour and achievement,
- Be able to prepare theoretical and practical assessment tools,
- Be able to guide school management to interrupt professional practice in cases when there is no appropriate treatment of students, no appropriate conditions and support is provided for children and their ill-treatment,
- To verify the professional practice record books

In regards to other parties/institutions currently involved in organizing WBL process and their responsibilities, the majority of respondents answered that no one has any interest in it except for the school but there have been other answers where it is stated that time to time they are supported by parents' council, municipality and projects from donators.

Shortcomings of cooperation between companies and schools mentioned include:

- Companies are not very much interested to take in students for practice purposes, but they are interested in having skilled workers,
- The poor quality of VET's offer in schools and lack of appropriate training of students to meet company requirements
- Insufficient communication and lack of information about companies' requirements and opportunities,
- In some cases, the curriculum, to a great extent, is not in line with the competences a students can attain in a company,
- Transport,
- Lack of sufficient places in a company for offering WBL, because the number of students is higher compared to companies' capacities to take them in,
- Lack of a national strategy and adequate legislation to regulate the forms of cooperation between school and enterprises in regards to work based learning,
- Most of companies do not have long term development and business plans,
- Lack of a Practice Coordinator in schools, whose position would serve as a liaison between school and enterprise.

### **Recommendations from the quantitative research with companies**

For the improvement of cooperation between schools and companies in the process of professional practice/work based learning WBL attendance are provided below:

- Each school should have a coordinator or responsible person for cooperation between school and enterprises,
- Communication between schools and companies should be improved and information exchanged,
- Companies should have a trained responsible person to take care of students during their professional practice,
- It should be regulated by law, so that companies are obliged to accommodate students for practice, offering them mitigation measures and stimulations,
- Accident insurance, transport and meals to be provided for students during work based learning/professional practice attendance,
- Develop a curriculum in accordance with labour market requirements and in certain cases make adjustments to have it correspond to the practice carried out in businesses,
- Students should be offered career guidance, so that they choose professions they love and succeed in them, and make companies trust more in students' competences,
- Have a practical work contract signed between students and companies in order for the students to have better conditions and opportunities, safety and better treatment and be allowed to perform the work as other workers do.

### **Results of quantitative research with companies**

64% of respondents state that they are not members of any business association, whereas 36% are members of different associations including Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, Business Association and other associations closely related to their activities.

It is important that 100% of respondents state that they are open to take in students for professional practice WBL in their company, in line with comprehensive school plans. But, at the same time, 100% of them state that there is not benefit for them in this opportunity offered to VET students.

The majority of respondents (81%) state that they have signed Memorandums of Cooperation with vocational schools to accommodate students for practical trainings (WBL); 6% are in the process of signing them and 13% have no official agreement signed with schools or responsible institutions.

Vocational schools have been more persistent to initiate cooperation with companies since 65% of respondents stated that this cooperation was initiated by schools, whereas only 30% by companies and 5% by other institutions, e.g. MED, MEST, etc.

In regards to models/forms of practical training currently used as part of cooperation between companies and vocational schools for WBL, the following answers are provided:

- 43% professional practice in companies during school year,
- 27% visits in companies,
- 6% companies visiting school,
- 12% work based learning,
- 0% block scheduled professional practice.

As noticed in the answers of respondents in regard to the number of students a company accommodates for professional practice, 44% state more than 20, 19% from 10-20, 19% from 5-10, whereas 18% from 0-5.

In regard to duration of professional practice or WBL, 39% of respondents state 2 days, 12 hours; 35% one day of 6 hours, whereas only 4% three days of 18 hours. Results correspond to a certain extent to answers received by schools, but it should be considered whether there is compliance with legal requirements in regard to professional practice for students of grade 12.

In regards to question "How do students attend WBL in your company?", 45% of respondents state that the person responsible in the company or the mentor for work based learning offers instructions to students, only 23% responded that students attend their practice working individually in the workplace, whereas 32% state that students work in a group in a workplace. The work in group is good, but students should have the opportunity and sufficient time to practice so that skills required are developed.

In 34% of cases, persons responsible for students involved in the process of professional practice/WBL are persons responsible or mentors from the company, 21% all company workers as per their working position, whereas 28% of cases teachers of professional practice.

In regard to selection of students for professional practice, 65% of respondents state that this is done by school, whereas 35% the school and the company, but in no case students are selected by the company.

Answers to question "Are students well prepared for WBL in your company?", are presented below:

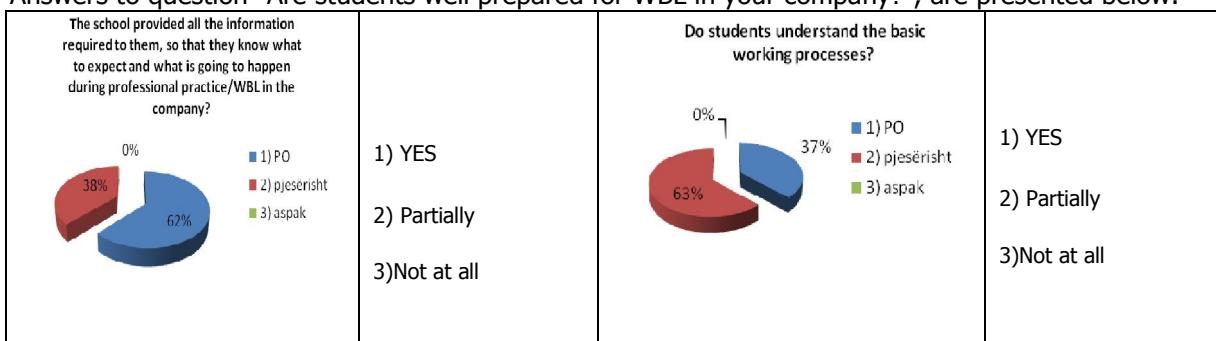


Chart 5: Professional Practice in companies

It means that the students are informed in most of the cases about what will take place during professional practice in the company, whereas in regard to the question whether students understand the basic processes, 37% of respondents answered yes, 63% answered partially. It means that the curriculum content should be updated to correspond to labour market requirements, and while drafting them there should be business professionals involved and teachers should work more with the students.

In regard to solving problems with students attending their professional practice/WBL in a company, 68% of respondents state that this is done by the person responsible in the company or the mentor in cooperation with the professional practice teacher, 16% state that they inform the school and teacher and only 16% state that the mentor communicates directly with the student.

In regard to who selects the mentor/responsible person for work based learning (WBL) in the company and what are his/her responsibilities/competencies, the following answers were provided:

- the company manager assigns a mentor, who monitors the process of professional practice, school along with the company.
- What is surprising, in the question whether the mentor/responsible person for WBL has extra education/training in pedagogical, andragogical and didactic areas so that he/she can work with the persons being trained in your company, 81% answered positively.  
Whereas 75% of respondents state that they have measured students' satisfaction with the quality of WBL in their company.

### **Conclusions from the quantitative research with companies**

Creative mechanisms used to identify knowledge, skills and competences attained by students through WBL in the company are:

- Control of practical work done during the practice in the working place in different stages,
- Independent work and compliance with working procedures and rules,
- Assessment form.

Participation of responsible person for WBL/mentor from the company in the process of assessing students attending practical training (WBL) has been described below:

- He/she is equipped with the Assessment form,
- Monitors the works done and reports to the professional practice teacher,
- Performs the assessment in cooperation with the professional practice teacher,
- Completes the check list and attendance list,
- Assesses and signs the professional practice record book.

The person responsible for WBL/WBL mentor has no specific benefit in the companies interviewed.

The majority of interviewed companies 69% state that they are very satisfied with the cooperation with schools, whereas 31% partially.

To the question whether other institutions can contribute in strengthening cooperation between companies and school and what are their competences, respondents provided the following answers:

- MEST, which in the curriculum content should include more information in regard to the educational part, group work, respect and behaviour
- MED, which as well should monitor more the progress of professional practice
- MLSW.

100% of companies believe that it is necessary to have a person employed at school, whose main duty would be to organise WBL and cooperation between school and company.

According to respondents, the competences of the responsible person for WBL include:

- Be familiar with the curriculum, company and be able to identify the places where students can attend their practical work within a company,
- Be communicative and cooperative,
- Plan and share the responsibilities for the work,
- Be able to monitor and assess the working tasks assigned.

Most of companies listed these problems encountered while organizing WBL with schools:

- Great number of students and their selection,
- Lack of accident insurance,
- Transport and other expenses not covered,
- Lack of equipment and work uniforms,
- Students' behaviour,
- Inappropriate supervision by other institutions except for the professional practice teacher.

### **Recommendations from the quantitative research with companies**

For the improvement of cooperation between schools and companies in the WBL process, have been given below:

- MED, MEST and GOVERNMENT should allocate a special fund for WBL, to cover the expenses for the raw materials and materials used with no productivity by students,
- Stimulate students through this fund, by covering the transport, meals, accident insurance and work uniforms,
- Have a system to guide students toward VETs,
- Work more in students' manners and discipline,
- Better preparation of students in theory and practice,
- Curriculum adapted to requirements of labour market,
- A more dedicated school to monitor students during WBL,
- Have MOUs signed,
- Train MEST instructors within companies to work with students,
- Have a form and sign individual training contract with students,
- Offer subsidies for businesses providing WBL.

### **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

Majority of respondents 77% state that the title they propose for the person employed at school, who will mainly work with the WBL organisation and cooperation between school and companies, is a Business Liaison Coordinator.

There is a great need to appoint a Business Liaison Coordinators in all VET schools. The role of the Business Liaison Coordinators in VET schools should be strengthened to support close cooperation with local businesses and other stakeholders.

The Business Liaison Coordinators has the main role in coordinating Work Based Learning (WBL) and other activities of VET schools with companies.

A general and specific competences including training programme was developed based on the findings of the research, which enables participants to perform their roles as BLC or WBLC, listed in the following functions:

- Identification, criteria and list of businesses
- Placement of students and decision on the format of WBL in the business
- Organization of the WBL in the businesses

**Monitoring of WBL in the business.**

A respective Legislation Framework for WBL in VET sector should be developed to support the implementation of WBL, in which the role of BLC at schools and In-Company Trainers or Instructors is defined, same as the criteria for validation and accreditation of training providers and assessment bodies for these two categories.

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