



Republic of Bulgaria
ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

RESOLUTION

on

"POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN BULGARIA"

(own-initiative resolution)

Sofia, 2017

The President's Board of ESC decided to develop a resolution on "Possible directions for the development of the system for vocational education and training in Bulgaria".

ESC President - Prof. Lalko Dulevski submitted the draft resolution for discussion to the Plenary Session

At its meeting held on 9 June 2017 The Plenary Session adopted the resolution.

1. The problems of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Bulgaria have been in the focus of the Economic and Social Council (ESC) since its inception. As early as in one of its first acts ESC found a number of challenges for the development of VET in the country, such as:
 - loss of competitive advantage in vocational education and training of the workforce, especially in the field of new industries and technologies;
 - lack of effective links between training institutions and employers and an inability to develop modern professional skills in a real working environment;
 - marked discrepancy between the professional competences acquired in the educational system and those required by businesses;
 - increasing shortage of professionals with secondary vocational education in key sectors such as machine building, chemical production, metallurgy, wood processing and food processing, transport, electrical engineering, tourism, etc.;
 - lacking system for regular and adequate identification and forecasting of the economy's needs in terms of vocational education and training;
 - lack of a unified and interdependent legal basis ensuring the necessary correspondence between the acquired professional knowledge and skills and employers' requirements;
 - outdated training facilities and textbooks.
2. Also, ESC, with the necessary concern, repeatedly alerted in its acts¹ about the problems concerning VET, namely:
 - the decreasing number of children enrolled in vocational schools amid a rising contingent of young people without or with low education and qualifications;
 - the quality and scope of VET;

¹ ESC Opinions: "The Problems of Vocational Education and Training", "The Education System in Bulgaria - Problems and Necessary Reforms", "Current Problems and Policies on the Labour Market", "Draft Act for Amendment and Supplementation of the Vocational Education and Training Act"; Resolution: "An Integrated Policy for Young People".

- the real opportunities to validate competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
 - the introduction of modular VET programmes and the need to apply a credit system - proposals that have already been reflected in Bulgarian legislation;
 - learning through work (dual learning) as an opportunity to acquire qualification in a real-life working environment;
 - insufficiently developed mechanisms for good cooperation with employers' organizations and trade unions in order to improve the quality of VET.
3. At the same time, ESC declares that the delay in reforms in the VET system puts at risk the achievement of good quality vocational education and training, while their stimulation and urgent action will lead to a radical turnaround in the employment of the low- and middle-level workforce and reduction of the share of young people not in employment, education and training.
 4. Already in 2005² ESC proposed that the National Assembly should adopt a National Concept of the Human Capital of the Nation, which would foreground the leading role of education for the future prosperity of the country. The long-term national strategy for developing education in Bulgaria was developed on the basis of such a concept and defined very clearly the priority directions for development at all educational levels.
 5. According to ESC, the national strategy for VET should be implemented based on medium-term national action plans prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in cooperation with all responsible ministries and representatives of the social partners.
 - 5.1. At the same time, national plans should set short-term tasks and lay down specific responsibilities for state institutions and social partners.
 - 5.2. ESC considers that the monitoring of the implementation of the national plans should be based on annual progress reports, and a system of indicators to measure this progress should also be adopted.
 6. In its acts ESC recommended the accelerated development of a National Strategic Framework and measures to improve the quality and

² ESC Opinion on "Problems of Vocational Education and Training".

effectiveness of the VET system. In this regard, ESC welcomes the adopted "Strategy for the Development of VET in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2015-2020", which reflected a number of ESC's main recommendations, particularly with regard to:

- Measures to improve the compliance of the VET system with the requirements of the labour market, incl. through mechanisms motivating the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences, adapting curricula and stimulating the supply of different forms of training at the workplace.
 - Measures to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, including through the application of a national approach to evaluation and self-assessment on the basis of uniform criteria for the quality of learning outcomes achieved in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET and the implementation of transparency tools and recognition defined in accordance with the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).
7. Nevertheless, ESC expresses a unified view on the need to restructure and further develop the VET system based on updating the VET Development Strategy and the wider application of the regional approach to the development of the infrastructure of this system.
- 7.1. In this regard, ESC recommends that the regional approach should be used more extensively in the subsequent optimization of the network of vocational schools by strengthening the role and importance of local government bodies.
- 7.2. ESC recognizes the crucial importance of the development of modern material and technical facilities in vocational schools and therefore insists on providing the necessary incentives for joint regional initiatives between training organizations, businesses and local authorities.
- 7.3. Moreover, ESC emphasizes the need to develop the regulatory framework by adopting first an entirely new Vocational Education and Training Act, reviewing and updating the secondary legislation in this area, refining the regulatory framework for the introduction of dual learning, including through necessary amendments to the Labour Code, the Social Security Code, the Health Insurance Act, the Corporate Income Tax Act, etc. Last but not least, the government should find an appropriate and balanced approach to creating sectoral

and regional qualification funds and stimulating the creation of vocational training clusters.

8. ESC is convinced that the next steps in the development and improvement of VET legislation should lead to the improvement and specification of the requirements for acquiring a degree of professional qualification based on an analysis of the nature and specifics of the work process for each particular profession. This is expected to result in restructuring professional areas, updating the state admission and updating of the curricula and programmes.
9. Also, according to ESC, it is imperative to carry out a detailed analysis of the existing vocational training system and to refine the existing licensing regime for Vocational Education and Training Centres (VETC) in order to allow only high quality education providers to enter the market.
10. ESC supports the creation of a system for external evaluation of the results of the vocational schools in order to increase the quality of the training and the objectivity of the assessment.
 - 10.1. According to the ESC, the financial decentralization of VET will reduce the dependence of vocational schools on budget subsidies and will increase the share of funding at the expense of scholarships and training contracts with employers.
 - 10.2. ESC insists on a more accelerated penetration of information and communication technologies into the learning process and to improve the material and technical facilities in state vocational schools by providing a much wider opportunity for adult education.
 - 10.3. More support is needed for professional training institutions in their efforts to restore good traditions in practical training for students. In this respect, incentives are needed for employers who provide production facilities and practical training equipment, as well as incentives for admitting trainees and enter into training, apprenticeship and apprenticeship contracts.
11. ESC identifies another important direction for the development of VET in Bulgaria in terms of providing support and improvement of the existing network of Information and Vocational Guidance Centres (IVGCs) to provide up-to-date information on labour market requirements and related vocational education and training opportunities.

- 11.1. It is particularly important to develop capacity and provide incentives for IVGCs to timely target pupils and adults to the most appropriate profession after an adequate analysis of their psychological profile and potential capabilities.
12. The development and adoption of an adequate methodology for the recognition of the acquired qualification through non-formal learning, as well as the periodic assessment of the available qualification of the employed are the next important steps in the development of the VET system in the country. Unfortunately, the validation system is still not deployed in its entire capacity and it needs promotion among the community.
13. Also, according to ESC, the development of VET should cover the development and implementation of a reliable system for the current identification, analysis and forecasting of the labour force with specific knowledge and skills, with emphasis on the establishment and implementation of a system for defining and forecasting the needs for qualifications at the regional level. On this basis the following must be achieved:
- Updating the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training (LPVET) in Compliance with the National Classification of Occupations and Positions.
 - Regulation of Criteria for the Compilation and Implementation of a List of Protected Occupations as part of the LPVET.
 - Regulation of the state-plan admission to increase admission in vocational schools, especially in the rare and unpopular programmes which produce qualification that is in high demand among businesses.
 - Adaptation of the experience and practices of leading European countries in partnering sectoral qualifications frameworks.
 - Updating the National Qualifications Framework, especially in the requirements for the fourth and fifth qualification levels.
 - Changes in the education system to ensure greater compliance with labour market needs and an easier and quicker transition from education to employment.
 - Increase of students enrolled in higher education institutions in programmes producing specialists that are in high demand among businesses.

14. Repeatedly in many of its acts ESC has found some reluctance on part of some students to continue their education in vocational schools, especially in professions that are becoming less and less common in the labour market in Bulgaria. Therefore, ESC considers that further efforts and actions are needed, such as:

- Performing periodic national and regional surveys of motivations for both the preferences and the unwillingness of young people to focus on vocational education and training.
- Conducting periodic awareness campaigns among students about the benefits and advantages of acquiring professional qualifications, especially in areas and professions, which in the medium term remain rare and in high demand for businesses. A key role in these campaigns should be the representatives of school and local authorities as well as those of the social partners and other professional and non-governmental organizations at the local level.
- Promotion and application of good European practices for early orientation of students to occupations in their region, incl. also through wider use of the social partnership system at the local level. It is necessary to provide mechanisms to enhance the prestige of unpopular professions, including by working with parents who often predetermine the choice of their children.
- Stimulation and wider development of out-of-class forms of learning through the organization of competitions, quizzes, workshops, etc. developing different specialties and professional skills which students can acquire at the respective school.
- Developing and implementing effective measures to increase the interest of the students in professions sought by businesses.
- Expanding the scope of protected professions and introducing additional incentives to train in them, incl. by providing scholarships to students.
- Introducing additional incentives for training in protected professions after their identification, incl. by providing scholarships to students.
- Introducing a talent promotion and a system for developing children's creativity. Assessment of students' capabilities and capacities and directing them to extracurricular forms according to their interests and attitudes, which would develop their interest in natural sciences,

mathematical and technical subjects, as well as additional practical skills as well as their use of interdisciplinary approaches to solve different case studies, develop specific projects and entrepreneurial skills.

15. Improving quality is another leading direction in the development of VET, in relation to which the ESC proposes:

- Development and implementation of a system for periodic updating of the curricula and training programmes, depending on the changing needs of the labour market and the learning outcomes, which are mainly reflected in the labour realization of the graduates.
- Regulation and implementation of a system for external quality assessment of VET, the results of which are used to improve the learning process and to prepare students.
- Enhanced involvement of employers in assessing the acquired knowledge, skills and competences of the specialties and professions for which students are trained in the VET system.
- Ensuring conditions and incentives for the active participation of prominent researchers and academics, teachers and practitioners in the writing of textbooks and teaching aids and in the training of relevant specialties and professions.

16. According to ESC, the decisive factor for the successful development of the VET system is the teachers and their motivation and preparation. With regard to this ESC recommends:

- Carrying out cardinal measures to stop the devaluation of the professional and social status of Bulgarian teachers.
- Timely implementation of an adequate system of material and non-material incentives to motivate teachers to constantly strive for improvement and career advancement. In connection with this ESC welcomes the first steps of the Bulgarian Government regarding the increase in the salary of teachers and will support all the next steps regarding the increase the authority, status and self-confidence of Bulgarian teachers.
- Application and wider popularization of good business partnership practices, higher education institutions and vocational schools that provide ongoing improvement of teacher knowledge and training,

especially in technological and technical fields that are characteristic of modern industries.

- Development and implementation of national and regional programmes with the necessary financial, material, household and other incentives to attract young specialists to the teaching profession, especially in areas with marked deficiency of teachers in certain specialties.
- Introducing a real and qualitative system for developing teachers' qualifications by enabling employers to be involved in this process.
- Developing and implementing a mentor training programme.

17. ESC attaches great importance to work-based learning (dual learning) and considers it particularly important to clearly regulate the rights and obligations of all actors in the process:

- trainees;
- dropouts from the general education system;
- students and graduates of secondary and higher education;
- employers (legal and natural persons, craftsmen, registered farmers, etc.), branch organizations of the social partners, vocational schools and vocational training centres, etc.

18. At the same time, ESC offers a clear distinction between the means of training through work for the different target groups, including by approving legal definitions, so that the model for training through work to cover four main groups of learners and learners:

- persons aged 16 to 24-29, who have left the school system;
- students from vocational secondary schools or general secondary schools;
- adults who have not completed secondary education to acquire their first professional qualification;
- employed persons practicing a profession for which they have not been trained or have not validated their knowledge and skills;
- training through work for secondary school graduates.

19. The ESC recommends that the regulatory framework that is being developed should encourage and stimulate employers, large enterprises, SMEs, craftsmen, start-up businesses, branch and trade associations, vocational schools and vocational training centres to:
- quickly build their capacity to ensure their effective participation in the system for training through work;
 - become involved in the preparation, discussion and approval of professional standards, curricula and requirements for production processes;
 - equip workplaces meeting the quality requirements for training and learning outcomes, safety and health at work;
 - train and ensure the qualification of mentors and trainers.
20. ESC insists that the statutory framework should provide for a clear mechanism for monitoring and controlling training through work by the respective competent state bodies (Ministry of Education and Sciences, the National Agency for VET, General Labour Inspectorate Executive Agency, Ministry of Health Care, etc.), incl. with regard to working conditions and training, compliance with curricula, learning outcomes, cost-effectiveness, etc.
- 20.1. ESC calls for the establishment of a system for the periodic evaluation of the realization of the graduates of vocational education, incl. by continuing their education to a higher level.
21. ESC considers it appropriate to regulate incentives and stimuli for employers participating and investing in the dual training system within this framework.
- 21.1. It is also necessary to regulate the creation of a unified information base and registration of enterprises and relevant jobs where dual learning is introduced.
- 21.2. The issue of certification and incentives for mentors in dual learning, which have a key role to play in its success, should also be addressed.
- 21.3. ESC finds it necessary to extend the scope of the educational establishments included in the dual training, incl. in the field of agriculture, art and culture.

22. ESC considers that the cost of companies for vocational education, incl. expenses made for scholarships, must be recognized as tax expense under the Corporate Income Tax Act.
- 22.1. According to ESC, there is a need for incentives for vocational schools that through students' practical trainings produce and offer specific products on the market./
- 22.2. ESC also pays special attention to the emerging health insurance problems of these students.
23. ESC is convinced that the funding provided under the two operational programmes "Human Resources Development" and "Science and Education for Smart Growth" creates the conditions for a more significant increase in the attractiveness and quality of the VET system and the improvement of its infrastructure as well as the development of further partnerships between education and training institutions and businesses. ESC also proposes:
- Accelerating the introduction of envisaged education planning systems in line with labour market needs at national and the regional level;
 - Greater use of flexible forms of learning in vocational education and training;
 - Targeted promotion of VET in the professional fields, preparing specialists for high-priority economic sectors;
 - Wider application of the modular system and the credit transfer system in VET.

(signed)

Professor Lalko Dulevski, Ph.D

PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL