



New Models in Work-based Learning

Overall Report on Focus Groups

Work package: 5. Stakeholder consultation

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I. Introduction

The focus groups discussions were conducted:

- in Slovenia on 23.10.2017;
- in Latvia on 02.11.2017;
- in Bulgaria on 18.10.2017 (VET response related focus group), on 24.10.2017 (awareness related focus group) and on 31.10.2017 (quality assurance related focus group).

In the three countries totally 90 stakeholders' representatives were involved:

- in Slovenia – 34 participants;
- in Latvia – 14 participants;
- in Bulgaria – 42 participants.

Focus group members in SI and BG represented institutions and organisations from different regions in the countries, while in LV – predominantly Riga region.

II. Information about the focus groups' participants

1. Type of institutions reached

In all countries representatives of relevant institutions and organisations were involved, as is obvious from the information presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of institutions reached by countries

Type of institution	SI	LV	BG
Chamber of commerce and industry - national - regional	X	X	X
Trade union - national - regional		X	X
Sector expert council		X	
School centre	X		
National VET institution	X	X	X

Policy makers - Ministry of Economy - Ministry of Labour - Ministry of Education	X X		X
Employment agency	X		X
Regional Education authority			X
Local authority (department of education)			X
Company	X	X	X
VET school		X	X
Vocational training centre			X
Career guidance centre			X
University (pedagogical department)			X

The information in the table and the details provided in the national focus groups report show that in all countries institutions and organisations related to the subject of discussions were involved.

2. Working positions profile of the participants

Focus groups members in the 3 countries occupy different positions in the institutions and organisations they represent. The largest number of participants **in SI** has the profile of regional or sectoral employers' organisations representatives (10 of 34). The high number is also due to the fact that the regional chambers represent interests at regional level. Second largest number of participants are VET school teachers in charge of WBL, followed by SMEs providing VET. **In LV** the stakeholder's representatives at managing positions (director, manager, owner, head of department) and at expert positions are relatively equally represented – respectively 8 and 6 participants. Similarly, **in BG** the focus groups members at managing positions are 23 and the rest 19 occupy mainly expert type of working positions (expert, coordinator trainings, teacher, trainer, career counsellor etc.).

The participants' working positions profile in the three countries is prerequisite for collecting the necessary feedback from different points of view and for reliability of provided opinions and suggestions.

III. Assessments, recommendations and suggestions of the focus groups' participants concerning the VET students' survey results

1. VET response related focus groups

The participants' opinion **in LV and BG** was similar. The results outline an optimistic picture of the way the students perceive their practical training – it is important for them. Most probably this is due to the fact

that usually in such surveys the good students take part, the intention to provide socially expected answers also influences the final results. In addition, the answers also give basis to conclude that in the 3 countries (SI, LV and BG) there are prerequisites for further development of WBL and in this sense support the measures proposed by the project partnership under the 3 Models and the Policy Recommendations. **In SI** the participants considered the survey results as not relevant to the discussed topic.

2. Awareness related focus groups

Again the participants **in LV and BG** have similar opinion - the fact that the majority of students consider that they receive enough information before practical training is a positive one and it is necessary to maintain and further develop this actions. In this context **in BG** it was underlined that WBL promotional campaigns should be organised for primary school students and their parents in order to improve VET attractiveness and image. This opinion is entirely in support of proposed measures under the 3 models related to career guidance improvement.

The participants **in SI** did not consider the results as realistic, nor did they see they would contribute to improve models or policy recommendations.

3. Quality assurance related focus group

As in the previous 2 focus groups the members **in BG and LV** share a common opinion - the fact that the students are satisfied with the support they receive in the company and by the school teacher for the development of their practical skills is positive. Additionally, in BG it was pointed out that this shows that the efforts invested in teachers' and in-company tutors' qualification give results and they should continue on regular basis and in systematic way as proposed in the 3 models and the Policy recommendations.

The participants **in SI** expressed concern that not all of the questions were easy to understand for students and they also pointed out the time that survey took place, which was last week of school year when there were many different factors that potentially affected students' responses and level of concentration.

IV. Assessments, recommendations and suggestions of the focus groups' participants concerning the structure, content and feasibility of Model 1

1. VET response related feedback

1.1. General content and structure of Model 1

The participants in these focus groups in the three countries agreed with the structure and content of Model 1 in general. In SI was underlined that the content provides a good basis for implementation, especially when there is a possibility of an upgrade in models 2 and 3. In BG it was also pointed out that the thematic areas are in compliance with the identified challenges and the measures proposed are relevant for the national context.

Regarding the most important measures in the model addressing the VET response challenge the participants from **SI and BG** shared common opinion, pointing out the measures included in thematic area

2. Improvement of VET system response to labour market needs, but also the ones proposed under thematic area 1. Guidelines / action plan for the introduction and implementation of WBL / apprenticeship and 3. Better career guidance. **In BG** also measures from thematic areas 4, 5 and 6 were also assessed as important because VET response to labour market needs is related with assessment of students' progress in WBL, as well as with the qualification of teachers and in-company tutors and the support provided to companies and VET students with respect to WBL. **In LV** the participants focused on thematic area 2, assessing as most important the following measures:

- Create the conditions for regular mid- and long-term forecasting of labour market needs in terms of qualifications and knowledge, skills and competences of VET graduates;
- Regulated enrolment in VET school based on qualifications forecasts;
- Definition of curriculum and time schedule for WBL / apprenticeship, skills and competence profile the VET students has to acquire with more active participation of employers.

1.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 1

The participants in these focus groups in the 3 countries shared different opinions regarding the feasibility of VET response related measures in the model. **In SI** the focus group members consider most feasible the measures defined under thematic areas 1, 2 and 3 – the same they pointed out as most important for the VET response challenge. **In LV** no comments with respect to feasibility were provided. **In BG** opinions about most feasible were considered measures in the model were provided - under thematic areas 1, 3, 6 and 7 related mainly with awareness raising campaigns among companies, counselling and support of students and their parents, national coordination of support network, regional/ local partnership and exchange of experience among stakeholders. In the 3 countries no suggestions for improvement of measures' feasibility were provided.

1.3. Timeframe of the Model 1 VET response related measures

The participants **in the three countries** shared the opinion that the time frame of 1-2 years might not be enough for implementation of the measures. **In LV** to change the period to 4-5 years was suggested, especially considering the time needed for Definition of curriculum and time schedule for WBL / apprenticeship, skills and competence profile.

1.4. Support to the VET response related Model 1 measures implementation

In all countries the participants expressed readiness to support the practical implementation of the proposed measures. **In SI** it was pointed out that most of the participants are already at least partly included in activities regarding the pilot implementation of the apprenticeship in the country and are all stakeholders in VET system and some level of collaboration is already functioning. **In LV** Sector skills councils are involved in majority of measures, except in Elaboration of annual reports on short term forecast on employers needs in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, mid- and long-term skill forecasting, labour market changes and other challenges – this activity goes to Ministry of Economics and Ministry of Welfare. **In BG** all declared readiness to sign a frame agreement for cooperation the Bulgarian project partners.

2. Awareness related feedback

2.1. General content and structure of Model 1

The participants in the three countries shared the opinion that the content and structure of the model address appropriately the challenges identified. **In SI** except measures included in thematic area 3. Better career guidance, the ones under thematic area 1. Guidelines/action plan for the introduction and implementation of WBL/apprenticeship are important with respect to awareness challenge. Focus group members **in LV and BG** also confirmed the high importance of thematic area 3, assessing the measures included there, as almost equally important. The participants in BG additionally provided proposals related to the implementation of the first measure - Intensification of VET promotion:

- The VET schools and companies in each region to provide up to date information about the economic development, active companies, vocational training offered in professions and specialties, prospects for career development in the different professions etc. The information collected should be provided in a video and distributed using various channels - regional television, school's Facebook page etc.;
- The employers in the regions to be invited at parents-teachers' meetings in primary schools to present their activities, working conditions, qualification and skills needs, etc.;
- The parents to be involved in career guidance activities – to present their profession and career in presentations with photos (the presentations to be collected by Regional Departments of Education and published on their web site), to organize visits for students at their workplace;
- In the schools' web sites and Facebook pages to include sections for parents containing the necessary information related to VET system in the country, stressing that graduation of VET school gives access to higher education, WBL/dual system, good practices in WBL provision, including in transnational mobility, choice of profession, especially work activities and conditions, prospects for career development, payment for different professions;
- The companies to organize regularly "Open doors days".

2.3. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 1

The participants **in SI and BG** consider the first and the third measure in thematic area 2 more feasible than the one related with obligatory involvement of companies in career guidance provision. No suggestions for improvement were provided in the three countries.

2.4. Timeframe of the Model 1 awareness related measures

The focus groups members in the three countries shared the opinion that the time frame (1-2 years) is relevant for implementation of the measures addressing the awareness challenge.

2.5. Support to the awareness related Model 1 measures implementation

The participants **in SI** were highly motivated and ready to collaborate further on this matter. Most of the participants are already at least partly included in activities regarding the pilot implementation of the apprenticeship, all are VET stakeholders and some level of collaboration is already functioning.

In LV most of the measures have already been implemented. More enterprises should be involved in systematic approach. National level employers' association should be considered.

In BG all participants expressed readiness to participate, according to the competence of the institution they represent, in the implementation of measures proposed under Model 1.



3. Quality assurance related feedback

3.1. General content and structure of Model 1

In general participants in the three countries highly appreciated the models' content and structure. All confirmed the importance of the measures included in thematic area 5. Ensuring qualified VET teachers and in-company trainers for organization and provision of quality practical training/WBL/apprenticeship. **In SI** the participants considered as also important thematic area 4. Improve the assessment of practical training/WBL /apprenticeship. **In BG** thematic area 6. Development of support measures to companies providing WBL / apprenticeships, especially national coordination of the support network and thematic area 7. Better stakeholder's involvement and establishment of networks to promote, provide and create the conditions for WBL/apprenticeship were also included in the list of most important for quality assurance measures.

In LV proposals were provided *the measures about teachers and in-company tutors training to be moved to M2. In M1 more important is set legislation about training needs and training content.*

3.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 1

The focus groups in **SI and BG** shared similar opinion. They assessed as most feasible the measures defined under thematic area 4. Improve the assessment of practical training/WBL /apprenticeship. It was pointed out that the implementation of the measure Restructuring of duties of VET teachers, adaptation to new needs under thematic area 5 might face difficulties – it will need to make legislative changes in discussion with the teachers, so that possible concerns and resistance among them could be overcome. The implementation of the measures under thematic area 6 and 7 require except legislative basis strong commitment of stakeholders and good national and regional coordination. In this context the importance of initiative and activeness of both national and regional authorities and of national and regional organisations of employers was stressed.

In LV the participants underlined that responsible agency for quality in WBL should be settled by legislation in order to ensure the quality assurance measures implementation.

3.3. Timeframe of the Model 1 Quality assurance related measures

The focus group members **in the three countries** agreed that the proposed timeframe of 1-2 years for implementation of proposed measures is relevant, if there is a political will and readiness of cooperation at national level. The participants **in LV** additionally stressed the importance of networking of in-company trainers and VET teachers in WBL is important.

3.4. Support to the Quality assurance related Model 1 measures implementation

The participants **in the three countries** were highly motivated, ready and willing to participate in implementation of the measures defined. The VET stakeholders' institutions represented in the focus group **in SI and LV** are already or at least partly included in activities regarding the pilot implementation of the apprenticeship in the country and some level of collaboration is already functioning. The focus group members in **BG** expressed readiness and shared the opinion that it will be good to sign a framework agreement between the respective institutions and the project partners from the country.

V. Assessments, recommendations and suggestions of the focus groups' participants concerning the structure, content and feasibility of Model 2

1. VET response related feedback

1.1. General content and structure of Model 2

The focus groups **in the three countries** have shared the opinion that the content of Model 2 is well structured and the most important aspects are considered. No suggestions for improvement were provided.

According to the participants **in BG** the VET response related measures are equally important. Most of participants supported the opinion that an effective mechanism for regular mid- and long-term forecasting of labour market needs is definitely needed and its creation should be included in Model 1. Similarly, the focus group members **in SI** pointed out the measures in the majority of the thematic areas as most important:

- Thematic area 2. Maintaining of as VET system responsive to labour market needs;
- Thematic area 3. Implementation of evidence-based VET policy with focus on WBL / apprenticeship development;
- Thematic area 4. Maintaining an effective career guidance system;
- Thematic area 5. Ensuring support to all actors in planning. Organization and provision of practical training /WBL/apprenticeship/on regular basis;
- Thematic area 7. Networks and cooperation.

The participants **in LV** consider the following measures, included in thematic area 2, as most important:

- Implement regular mid- and long-term forecasting of labour market needs;
- Regular monitoring of enrolment in VET school based on qualifications forecasts;
- Regular up-date of learning outcomes for WBL / apprenticeship training based on skills needs forecasts.

1.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 2

In the three countries no suggestions on improvement of feasibility of the VET response related measures were provided.

The participants **in SI** assess thematic area 2. Maintaining of as VET system responsive to labour market needs as most feasible. **In BG** measures, proposed under different thematic areas were pointed out:

- Regular monitoring of enrolment in VET school based on qualifications forecasts;
- Ensuring active participation of employers in the definition of curriculum and time schedule for WBL / apprenticeship, skills and competence profile the VET students has to acquire;
- Regular research on labour market needs;
- Intensive VET promotion through effective measures targeted at students and their parents;
- Strong involvement of companies (their representative organisations) in the career guidance provision;
- High support for VET students in career planning;



- National, regional and local partnerships for VET are active and involved in all VET processes with clear responsibilities and tasks for these stakeholder groups (regulative framework) and the respective capacities.

1.3. Link between the VET response related measures listed in Model 1 and Model 2

The focus groups **in the three countries** shared the common opinion that the logical links between the VET response related measures in Model 1 and Model 2 are clear and appropriate.

1.4. Support to the VET response related Model 2 measures implementation

Similarly, as with respect to measures included in Model 1, the participants **in the three countries** expressed readiness to participate in VET response related measures proposed under Model 2. **In LV** particular responsibilities were defined for Ministry of Education and Science and its subordinated institutions and for Employers' Confederation. **In BG** willingness to sign frame agreement with the project partners in the country for the measures implementation, stressing that the process should be initiated by the responsible institutions and organisations at national level.

2. Awareness related feedback

2.1. General content and structure of Model 2

The focus groups **in the three countries**, as the previous ones agreed that the general content of Model 2 is well structured and the most important aspects are considered. There were not any specific suggestions concerning the improvement.

The participants **in SI and BG** shared similar opinion that the measures under thematic area 4. Maintaining an effective career guidance system are most important for addressing the awareness challenge but also the ones included in other thematic areas:

- Thematic area 1. Implementation of WBL/apprenticeship - for the participants **in SI**;
- Thematic area 7. Strong stakeholders' involvement through national, regional and local networks to promote, provide and create the conditions for WBL/apprenticeship – for participants **in BG**.

Some initiatives at regional level were proposed **in BG** related to career guidance measures' implementation:

- The career guidance centres could organise "job expo" – where companies in the region present the work opportunities to students and their parents;
- Regional Departments of Education to publish on its web site – good practices of partnerships between VET schools and companies.
- The participants **in LV** consider the first two measures under thematic area 4 (Intensive VET promotion through effective measures targeted at students and their parents and Strong involvement of companies (their representative organisations) in the career guidance provision more important than the third one (High support for VET students in career planning).

2.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 2

The measures included in thematic area 4 were assessed as applicable in practice by the focus groups **in the three countries**. Additionally, it was pointed out **in BG** that if Model 1 is fully implemented the

necessary prerequisites for Model 2 implementation will be ensured. Consequently, no suggestions for improvement of measures feasibility were provided.

2.3. Link between the Awareness related measures listed in Model 1 and Model 2

According to the participants' opinion **in the three countries**, the link is clear and logic and the measures in Model 2 represent continuation of the ones proposed in Model 1. No improvement is needed in that sense.

2.4. Support to the Awareness related Model 2 measures implementation

The participants **in the three countries** were highly motivated, ready and willing to collaborate further on this matter. Most of the participants **in SI** are already at least partly included in activities regarding the pilot implementation of the apprenticeship in the country. Institutions **in LV** already supports measures proposed in Model 2. All participants **in BG** consider that the institutions they represent will support implementation and will be ready to sign a framework agreement with the Bulgarian project partners for that purpose. Those at management positions directly expressed their willingness to do so.

3. Quality assurance related feedback

3.1. General content and structure of Model 2

The three focus groups shared the opinion that the structure and content of the model are well developed and had no recommendations in this respect.

The participants **in SI and BG** except measures proposed under thematic area 8. Further improvement of the quality assurance assessed as most important the ones included in other 2 thematic areas:

- Thematic area 5. Ensuring support to all actors in planning, organization and provision of practical training/WBL/apprenticeship on regular basis;
- Thematic area 6. Maintaining of effective support measures to companies providing WBL/apprenticeships.

As important factor the strong stakeholders' involvement, commitment and cooperation was also pointed out.

The focus group **in LV** pointed out 2 measures, defined under thematic area 5, as most important from quality assurance perspective:

- Regular up-dating of materials for WBL/apprenticeship for VET students;
- Establishing a system for constant improvement of VET teachers and in-company trainers' qualification.

3.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 2

The participants **in the three countries** agreed that the measures are applicable in practice since they did not have any suggestions regarding feasibility improvement. As important factor for implementation of the measures the strong stakeholders' involvement, commitment and cooperation was pointed out **in SI and BG**. In LV it was underlined that Quality standards at EU level were elaborated.

3.3. Link between the Quality assurance related measures listed in Model 1 and Model 2

The **three focus groups** shared the opinion that there are relevant logic links between quality assurance measures in both models. In **SI** some participants consider that quality assurance measures should be more elaborated in Model 1 but suggestions in that sense were not provided.

3.4. Support to the Quality assurance related Model 2 measures implementation

The focus group members in **SI and LV** expressed readiness to collaborate further on this matter. Most of the represented institutions and organisations are at least involved in some measures implementation. The participants in **BG** shared the opinion that the institutions they represent will support model's implementation and will be ready to conclude framework agreements with the project partners from Bulgaria for that purpose.

VI. Assessments, recommendations and suggestions of the focus groups' participants concerning the structure, content and feasibility of Model 3

1. VET response related feedback

1.1. General content and structure of Model 3

The participants in **the three countries** agreed with the structure and content of Model 3, which according to them provides vision about the future of WBL/apprenticeship considering all important aspects. The focus group in **LV** proposed to add Analyses of graduates' performance at the workplace.

Focus groups in **SI, BG and LV** considered thematic area 2. VET system and labour market needs as most important, highly appreciating the proposed Functioning mechanism for translation of labour market needs into VET school enrolment plans and learning outcomes for acquiring qualification in different professions. Additionally, participants in **SI and BG** recognized as also important the following thematic areas:

4. Maintaining an effective career guidance system; /
5. Ensuring support to all actors in planning, organization and provision of practical training/WBL/apprenticeship;
7. Networks and cooperation.

In **BG** the measures included in thematic area 3. VET policy with focus on WBL/apprenticeship development were also considered important for ensuring adequate VET system's response to labour market needs and business requirements with respect to practical skills and competences.

1.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 3

Although they find thematic area 2 most important in relation to the challenge 1, the participants in **SI and BG** shared the opinion that it would be most challenging to achieve the functioning mechanism for translation of labour market needs into VET school enrolment and learning outcomes for acquiring qualification in different professions. At the same time, they expressed positive expectations – if model 1 and 2 are fully implemented with the commitment and in cooperation of all stakeholders, then it will be easier to implement the proposed under model 3 measures.

The focus group in **LV** did not express any concerns with respect to measures' feasibility.



1.3. Appropriateness of the Model 3 VET response related measures

The **three focus groups** agreed that all the measures included in Model 3 are appropriate in relation to VET response. None of them should be moved to Model 1 or 2, as there are measures elaborated there which, if implemented, would lead to Model 3.

1.4. Correlation between national and EU levels of implementation of the VET response related Model 3 measures

The participants in **SI, LV and BG** consider the measures included in Model 3 applicable at national and regional level. There are not measures that cannot be successful if not introduced at EU level since all measures are in line with the EU policies in VET.

The focus group in **SI** additionally stressed the necessity to ensure regular national financial resources for implementation apprenticeship, currently funded from EU funds. The participants think that it would be helpful for the developments in the country if EU obliges Member States to monitor labour market needs.

2. Awareness related feedback

1.2. General content and structure of Model 3

The **three focus groups** shared the opinion that the content and structure of the model are well developed. They also underlined that the measures included in the different thematic areas appropriately ensure continuation of actions proposed under the previous two models.

The participants in **SI, LV and BG** assessed all measures proposed in thematic area 4. Maintaining an effective career guidance system, as equally important. However, **in BG and LV** they highlighted the crucial importance of the first three measures for the effectiveness of the system - Responsive to company needs and skill forecasts (regional economic development) and Ensuring various opportunities in terms of information, counselling and involvement in practical activities that support informed choice of occupation by students (and their parents) and of appropriate for their interests, abilities and plans VET option/path.

The focus group in **SI** consider the measures defined under thematic area 5. Ensuring support to all actors in planning, organization and provision of practical training/WBL/apprenticeship as also important.

The participants in **BG** underlined that Networks and cooperation (thematic area 7) are also very important from awareness challenge point of view. Comments were provided that this is equally important for appropriate addressing of all challenges.

2.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 3

According to the participants **in the three countries**, the measures defined in thematic area 4 are feasible, in case awareness related measures in model 1 and 2 are fully implemented. The same applies to the functioning partnerships for cooperation at all levels, proposed in thematic area 7. **In SI** concerns were shared with respect to implementation of the measures included in thematic area 5, related mainly with the fact that it is not clear who will be responsible for measures implementation. In our opinion this issue should be clarified at national level taking into account the VET system's specifics.

2.3. Appropriateness of the Model 3 Awareness related measures

The opinion shared by the participants **in the three focus groups** was that the awareness related measures defined in the model are appropriate for this visionary stage. Comments were provided **in BG** that the

implementation of the previous models most probably will give basis for further specification and enriching the model, now it is too early.

2.4. Correlation between national and EU levels of implementation of the Awareness related Model 3 measures

The **three focus groups** stressed that the measures are applicable and should be implemented at all levels in order to maintain really effective career guidance system.

There are no measures that cannot be successfully implemented, if not introduced at EU level, considering that the defined ones are in line with EU career guidance policy.

3. Quality assurance related feedback

3.1. General content and structure of Model 3

The majority of participants **in the three countries** pointed out that the content of the model is in compliance with the objective defined and well structured. No suggestions for improvement were provided. The measures included in thematic area 8. Further improvement of the quality assurance were considered as most important.

In the different countries additionally other thematic areas were also assessed as important for addressing quality assurance challenge:

In SI – thematic area 1. Implementation of WBL / apprenticeship; thematic area 6. Maintaining of effective support measures to companies providing WBL/apprenticeships;

In LV - thematic area 5. Ensuring support to all actors in planning, organization and provision of practical training/WBL/apprenticeship;

In BG - thematic area 2. VET system and labour market needs; thematic area 3. VET policy with focus on WBL/apprenticeship development; thematic area 7. Networks and cooperation.

Obviously the stakeholders represented in the focus groups understand the complex character of quality assurance of VET, particularly of WBL and that it is an integrated result of various interventions.

3.2. Feasibility of the measures already included in Model 3

The **three focus groups** consider the measures applicable in practice. The participants **in LV and BG** did not share any concerns about measures' feasibility. **In BG** it was pointed out that prerequisites for Model 3 implementation should be ensured by the full implementation of models 1 and 2.

The participants **in SI** assessed that it would be most challenging to achieve the quality in every step of the quality circle, mostly due the financial and organizational issues. They see cooperation as a vital ingredient of achieving the quality assurance measures. To achieve this, they consider the measures in thematic areas 1 and 6 as most feasible.

3.3. Appropriateness of the Model 3 VET response related measures

The participants **in the three countries** consider all measures proposed relevant to the model's objectives and the stage of development addressed.

3.4. Correlation between national and EU levels of implementation of the VET response related Model 3 measures

According to the focus group participants all quality assurance related measures in the model could be successfully implemented at national and regional level and they are in line with the EU policy regarding quality assurance in VET and WBL in particular.

VII. Assessments, recommendations and suggestions of the focus groups' participants concerning the structure, content and feasibility of the Policy recommendations proposed

1. Feedback related to improvement of the Policy recommendations proposed

The participants in all focus groups in the three countries agreed with the structure and content of the Policy recommendations proposed by the project partnership. Only the VET response focus group in BG suggested some changes, mainly related with the order of listing of actors in themes 2 and 5. Another proposal in theme 1- instead of Economic and Social Council to write Representative organizations of Employers.

2. Feedback related to adding of additional issues in the Policy recommendations proposed

The suggestions for additional recommendations in theme 1, were provided by focus groups in SI namely:

- establishment of an institutional body with clearly defined roles, obligations and responsibilities (consisted of representatives of ministries of economy, education and labour, chambers, employment service and field experts); employment service should be responsible for recording and reporting needs for personnel, chambers for forecasting and labour market and future trends research.
- obligatory recording and reporting business needs (for personnel) by companies should be (again) regulated by law.

Proposals for specification and redefining of some items in theme 1 were defined by focus groups in SI and BG:

- Item c. Strategy for national career guidance – which includes starting activities in this field from early school years and envisage the necessary conditions (activities in school curriculum, extracurricular and out of class activities, teachers' training, school counsellors' training etc.) and defines additional training of the career counsellors in VET, labour market and industry needs related issues;
- Item d. Image campaigns – which are based on developed all VET actors' common strategy for awareness raising and promotion of VET;
- Item e. Strategy for support to companies: tutor training, development of materials, measures – to add preparation of a coaching programme;
- Item f. National coordination – to add based on commitment from highest policy level;

- Item h. Financing plan / resources (structural funds, national funding, social partners, ...) – to add not depending on short term EU funding sources.

In SI proposals for specifications of in themes 4 and 5 were also provided:

- Theme 4, item b. work placements - to be replaced by exchange programmes;
- Theme 5. Provision of methodological support to VET schools and companies on regular basis with respect to planning, organization and provision of WBL – to add including online (through maintaining an information portal)

3. Feedback related to the feasibility in national context of the Policy recommendations proposed

The participants in the three countries shared the opinion that the proposed policy recommendations are applicable considering the national context. In SI and BG, it was pointed out that the themes requiring decisions and actions at national level (theme 1 – national coordination body, financing, career guidance and establishing support network) will be easier than the ones related to theme 2. Regional partnership. This, according to the participants' opinion in BG, is due to the fact that the actors at national level have gained more experience and achievements in cooperation and implementation of joint objectives. That is why it will be necessary to develop the capacity of local actors in this respect. Some comments were provided that there are good practices at local level that is necessary to share and multiply.

4. Feedback related to the applicability of the Policy recommendations proposed to EU level

The opinion of participants in the three focus groups **in BG** is that theme 1 in the Recommendations is applicable for EU with minimal relevant changes and it could be defined as follows:

EU partnerships – Employers' organizations, Trade Unions, VET Providers

- a. Monitoring of labour market needs*
- b. Skill forecasting*
- c. Image campaigns*
- d. Strategy for support to companies: tutor training, development of materials, measures, ...*
- e. Round table on VET*
- f. Financing plan / resources (structural funds, national funding, social partners, ...)*
- g. Work placements*
- h. Monitoring and evaluation of the reform process.*

In SI and LV so suggestions were provided.

VIII. Overall conclusions

Based on the results from the focus group discussions the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. With respect to models developed

1.1. Models, structure and content

- The stakeholders represented in the focus groups in the three countries agreed with the structure and content of all models, underlining that they cover all important aspects.
- The approach of gradual development of WBL/ apprenticeship in the national VET systems was highly appreciated by all participants.
- The links between proposed measures under the different models were assessed as clear, logical and relevant.
- The content of each model corresponds to the objectives defined and the respective stage of WBL/ apprenticeship development. Only in LV a proposal was provided the measures about teachers and in-company tutors training in Model 1 to be moved to Model 2 with the argument that in M1 more important is to set legislation about training needs and training content.
- The stakeholders' opinion in the three countries regarding the most important measures that address the VET response, awareness and quality assurance challenges shows that the measures proposed are appropriately interrelated and ensure integrated result at VET system's level. The importance of strong commitment and cooperation between the stakeholders in national and regional partnerships was assessed as crucial for successful actions targeted at all challenges discussed in the focus groups.
- The models are enough comprehensive considering the fact that no suggestions for additional measures were provided by participants. Only different comments regarding implementation process were registered in the three countries.

1.2. Models' feasibility

- The measures proposed in the three models were assessed as feasible in general. There were opinions regarding difficulties and challenges that might be faced in the implementation process, mainly of Model 1 measures, in the different countries reflecting respective specifics in the current national situation.
- The full implementation of Model 1 ensures prerequisites for implementation of Model 2 and both are basis for achieving the objectives of Model 3.
- Each model's implementation should be monitored and adequate corrective actions should be undertaken and appropriate changes in the following model should be made in terms of the measures' planning, implementation and actors involved.



1.3. Time frame envisaged for models' implementation

- The common stakeholders' opinion is that the time frame of 1-2 years for Model 1 is relevant for the measures addressing the awareness and quality assurance challenge, but arguments were provided to prolong the duration of Model 1, considering the complexity and the time necessary for VET response related measures.
- No proposals for changes in the time frame of Models 2 and 3 were provided.

1.4. Stakeholders' support to models' implementation

- The participants in the three countries were highly motivated, ready and willing to participate in implementation of the measures defined under all models.
- The VET stakeholders' institutions represented in the focus groups in SI and LV are already or at least partly involved in activities regarding WBL implementation and some level of collaboration is already functioning. The focus groups members in BG expressed readiness and shared the opinion that it will be good to sign a framework agreement between the respective institutions and the project partners from the country.

2. With respect to Policy Recommendations proposed

- The stakeholders represented in all focus groups in the three countries agreed with the structure and content of the Policy recommendations proposed by the project partnership.
- The Recommendations were assessed as applicable in national context.
- The proposals provided by the focus groups in SI and BG with respect to adding recommendations under theme 1. National partnerships and the specifications of some items under other themes are reasonable. It is necessary to discuss them in the partnership and use them accordingly in the elaboration of the final text of common and country specific policy recommendations.