

Vocational Education and Training – a step to broaden professional horizons

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A system of Vocational Education and Training (VET) was introduced by law in Bulgaria in 2016. Since then various pilot projects have been implemented in cooperation with partners from Switzerland, Germany and Austria. The VET system relies on the duality principle according to which a qualification is acquired through education and training at two learning locations – educational provider and a company. The dual system aims at providing special knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform skilled professional activities. It is a serious step to broaden professional horizons, competitiveness and personal development.

In the period October 2017 – February 2021 the Technical University of Varna (TUV) is a key partner in project „DYNAMIC – Towards responsive engineering curricula through Europeanisation of dual higher education“. In general, the project aimed at development, implementation, test and validation of dual practice-integrated engineering programmes at higher education level. The vocational components were jointly designed with industrial partners, who are directly involved in the programme delivery through periodical practical training during in-company phases. This type of cooperation between university and industry provides a model for more flexible pathway for acquisition of currently required industry-related competences by students. The model is also seen as an opportunity to improve the relevance of higher education curricula within higher degree of freedom from the existing legislative framework.

This paper aims to present the main aspects of the organization of dual training of engineering students at the TU Varna in Bulgaria in the frame of the DYNAMIC project. In particular, the paper analyses the challenges faced during the design and pilot implementation with special regard to the existing legislative restrictions at higher education level. To attain the main objectives a detailed analysis of the Bulgarian professional education and system is presented as well as attention is placed on project DYNAMIC and the implementation of dual education for marine specialties at the Technical University of Varna.

The methodological framework of the described analyses is comprised on the one hand of secondary analysis of existing country-specific conditions under which the implementation was conducted. On the other hand, the study uses empirical components for primary data collection through qualitative methods. For this purpose, a self-evaluation for feedback generation was conducted with students from the pilot dual study programmes. In addition, a peer review on the TU Varna was used to capture the experience and impressions of all direct stakeholder gained through the pilot implementation.

The outcomes of this study will be used to propose measures aiming to increase the efficiency of implementation and improve dual higher education. The findings can be applied to attain various dual study models, analyse and overcome problems in order to arrive to effective development and application of the VET in Bulgaria.