



PROJECT NAME: EXPANDING BEQUAL BENCHMARKING TOOL AND COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (BEQUAL +)

Work Package 2: Initial Study

Short Country Study: BULGARIA

<p>1. Research method and data gathering tools</p>
<p>Review of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing documents and studies related to VET systems in importing countries. - Existing quality assurance arrangements – regulations, national qualification frameworks, reports, studies, assessments, etc. - Good practices and VET institutions reports. - Comparative studies of different research organizations and international institutions related to quality assurance in VET (e.g. CEDEFOP, European commission, EQAVET Network, etc.) - Results from related LLP projects.
<p>2. Please, describe the basic characteristics of VET system in the respective countries?</p>
<p>According to the Vocational Education and Training Act (VET Act) the institutions in the system of VET are: vocational schools, vocational secondary schools, arts schools, sports schools, vocational colleges, centers for vocational training and centers for information and vocational guidance.</p> <p>Vocational schools provide initial training for acquiring first and second degree of professional qualification or qualification part of profession with total duration of up to four years long. They admit students who have completed at least 6th grade.</p> <p>Vocational secondary schools provide education for acquiring second and third degree of professional qualification with total duration of four years long. They admit students with completed basic education or completed 7th grade. Vocational secondary schools can also</p>

conduct vocational training for acquiring first, second and third degree of professional qualification as well as qualification in a part of profession. Vocational schools and vocational secondary schools can also organize training of persons aged 16 years old.

Arts schools provide vocational education for acquiring third degree of professional qualification with total duration of up to four years long after completing basic education.

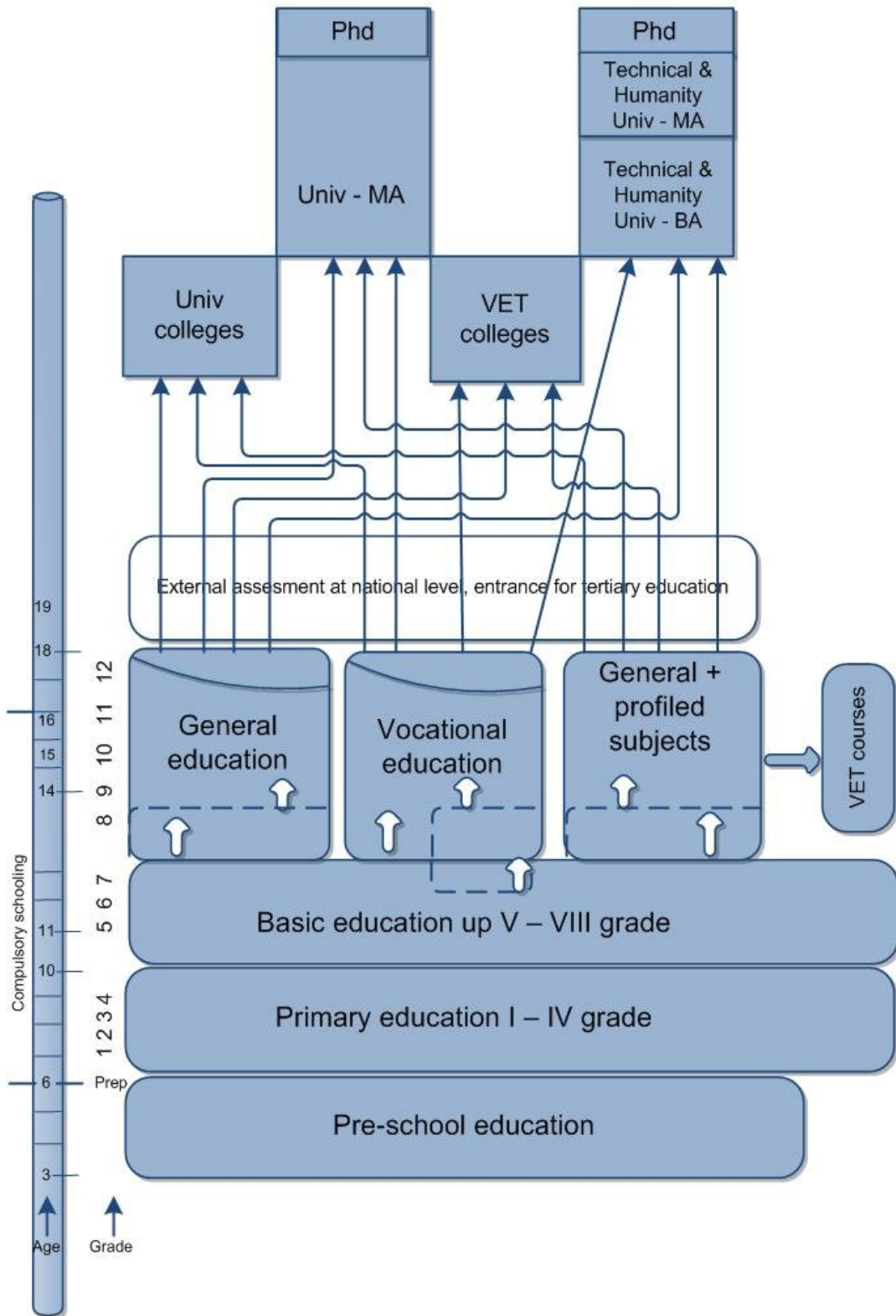
Sports schools provide vocational education for acquiring third degree of professional qualification with total duration of up to four years long after completing basic education.

Vocational colleges provide vocational education for acquiring fourth degree of professional qualification with duration from two to four years long according to the already acquired degree of professional qualification. They admit students who have completed secondary education.

Centers for vocational training provide vocational training of persons aged 16 years old.

Centers for information and vocational guidance provide vocational guidance to students and other persons.

Bulgarian Education System



ISCED 5A

ISCED 4C

ISCED 3A

ISCED 2A

ISCED 1A

ISCED 0

3. Please, provide brief description of legal framework: How is the issue (of quality assurance) addressed in the law? What are the mandatory requirements, if any?

In national legislation there is no definition of quality of VET and it is not systematized and regulated in any way the cycle of quality assurance in VET. In the meaning of the 2009 European Parliament Recommendation the cycle of quality assurance in VET consists of four interrelated stages:

- Planning – establishing clear, measurable and relevant objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks, human resources.
- Implementing – establishing procedures to achieve the objectives, creating partnerships, distributing resources.
- Assessment- assessment of outcomes and processes, based on exact numbers.
- Review or feedback- periodic review of the achievements, defining actions to introduce changes, adjustment of goals, plans and procedures.

The characteristics of the Bulgarian assessment system emanate from the characteristics of the education system, which is undergoing reforms to assure in a greater extent the guaranteed by the National Education Act and VET Act the right to vocational education and the right to access to continuous vocational education. The main institutions at national level which determine the policy of VET quality are the **Ministry of Education Youth and Science** and the **Ministry of Labor and Social Policy**.

Institutions supporting quality assurance in VET are the **Centre for control and assessment of the quality in education**, which develops models and mechanisms for internal and external assessment, as well as systems of analysis and assessment of education quality, and The **National Agency for Vocational Education and Training**, which coordinates activities with the social partners for developing state educational requirements for acquiring qualification in professions, the List of professions of VET and also issues licenses to centers for adults' training.

In the **National program for development of school education and preschool education and training (2006-2015)** established by the **Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MYES)** main priority is "quality assurance of education to achieve knowledge society". Important component of this priority is to build a "modern and effective system for monitoring, control and assessment of the accomplishments of state standards in secondary education".

Main activities of MES are directed to assuring high quality of vocational education and training by:

- Policy focused to direct involvement of the social partners in the processes of VET, namely developing state educational requirements for acquiring qualifications in professions, developing training plans and programs, collaboration in practical training in professions and specialties, participation in assessment and certification of acquired professional competences. Expectations are to bring closer vocational training to the real needs of labor market with regard to professional competences – knowledge, skills and personal qualities needed for successful practice of an occupation.

- Developing strategic documents and implementation of the national policy of VET, namely
- **National strategy for continuous vocational education 2005 – 2010 and annual plans for action according to this strategy.** Expectations are related to improving conditions of access to VET, achieving more efficient interaction and coordination between institutions involved in vocational education, assuring higher quality of continuous vocational training.

- **National strategy for lifelong learning 2008 – 2013.** Reaching the goals of the strategy

requires active involvement of every citizen and institution – national and municipal, of employers, syndical organizations, NGOs and others.

- **Updated Bulgarian employment strategy 2008 – 2015.** Improving efficiency and quality of vocational education and training is considered a basis to improve employability, increase productivity and competitiveness, as well as to reduce unemployment and overcome social isolation.

- Developing new **List of professions** of VET, which is a basic document for planning in vocational education and training. It is a prerequisite for progress towards the needs of labor market and provides opportunity to introduce updates. The **List** is being implemented in the system of VET since 2004/2005 academic year. It is developed and updated with the active collaboration of the social partners.

- Developing the **State educational requirements (SER)** for acquiring qualification in professions. These are basic document, prerequisite for the quality assurance of training by determining the objectives and tasks of training, defining professional competencies to be acquired in the process of training and the outcomes of learning.

- Determining characteristic of **SER** is the direct involvement of employers in the process of their developing. This way expectation is to reduce the gap between demand and supply of professional competence and to improve the quality of vocational training.

- Developing and updating **training plans and programs** applied from 2004 academic year. These plans and programs, applied according to the didactic principles and approaches, are a determining prerequisite for VET quality. Ministry of Education and Science encourages the authors to involve employers in the development of the training plans and programs, in order to offer the students updated contents, which incorporate new technologies, new methods and approaches in the specific activities of the occupations.

- Developing and implementing of **National Exam Programs** to conduct state exams for acquiring professional qualification. They are based on technology principles and expert evaluation in determining programs according to the objective of the training – acquiring professional competencies – knowledge, skills and personal qualities necessary for the successful occupational development. **The contribution of the National Exam Programs to the quality of VET** is determined primarily by the learning results, regulated in the State Educational Requirements for the respective occupations. A system for benchmarking is developed which ensures objectivity and consistency in the assessment and certification of the professional competencies at national level. The criteria are measurable and verifiable in compliance with the requirements of the pedagogical diagnostics. Implementing the National Exam Programs for acquiring a degree of professional qualification establishes uniform criteria for assessment of the learning outcomes, no matter where it is held – in a school or training center, and in the end a nationally recognized certificate is issued. It was for the first time in 2004/2005 academic year when the implementation of uniform standards with uniform criteria for assessment started in the system of VET in Bulgaria through the National Exam Programs.

- Regulating in VET Act the participation of the social partners in state exams for acquiring a degree of professional qualification which ensures mutual trust in the equality of vocational education and training.

- Assessment and certification of VET outcomes are part of the whole organization of the process and reflect directly to VET quality by objectively assessing the final outcomes with regard to the expected goals of the training. In this sense, assessment is essential to the quality analysis of the process and to taking corrective action in each stage. To some extent assessment and certification are related to the motivation of the participants in this process and to their professional qualification.

Experience in the last years shows that assessment is increasingly seen as recognition for the

outcomes obtained by positive work and is a motive for continuing in the next stages of training, rather than a cardinal measure, which plays a role of criticism when the final results are not satisfying. The “vocational training” process in its “**assessment and certification**” part is regulated by regulations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, State educational requirements for acquiring professional qualification, National exam programs. At this moment the assessment system is determined by State educational requirement according to the National Education Act – Ordinance No 3 for the assessment system. It regulates the organization of the assessment in school education and the organization of exams for acquiring professional qualification in centers for vocational training. It regulates internal and external assessment. An essential point for the external assessment process is establishing assessment committees in the exams for acquiring professional qualification. The participation of branch syndical organizations in the preparation and conduction of the exams for acquiring professional qualification, as well as in the assessment, is regulated in the VET Act.

The external assessment is carried out by persons, who are external for the schools and are officially authorized. For the school system this assessment process is carried out by the Regional Educational Inspectorates. In schools’ programs, approved by the Minister of education and science, this monitoring process is scheduled by type of checks and themes. Reports analyze the results of the monitoring on the headmasters’ activities and the performance of the schools. According to the changes introduced in the VET Act at May 15th 2009 The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training monitors the activity of the licensed centers for vocational training and the centers for information and vocational guidance.

4. Please, provide brief overview of the existing profiles of teachers/trainers: What is the typology or classification in the profession, if any? Are there any official profiles (e.g. by degree of education, experience, etc.)?

To be able to be a teacher in a vocational school it is required to have completed the following education level – qualification degree of Bachelor or Master in the relevant professional field and acquired professional qualification of “Teacher”. The qualification “Teacher” may be acquired in the course of studying for Bachelor or Master in higher school or after graduation. Those who wish to work as teachers and who have no professional qualification may acquire one after the completion of their higher education by participating in a specialised university course. This specialised training forms part of the formal requirements for being a teacher and is regulated by one of the special decrees of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, in effect since 1997. This decree outlines the general state requirements for the acquisition of the professional qualification “Teacher”. The training is one year long and comprises of school subjects in the field of pedagogy, psychology, audio-visual information and communication technologies in education and methods of teaching of the subject related to the basic specialty of the teacher. Practical training is also integrated, as well as observations of class work at schools. Except for the teachers in foreign languages, the training in foreign languages is not a compulsory component of the training for the qualification “Teacher”.

The introduction of a new career development system for teachers has started at the end of 2009 and it is as a result of the introduction of changes in the way schools are funded and teachers’ remuneration formed. In their professional development, teachers may occupy five different positions – „*junior teacher*”, „*teacher*”, „*senior teacher*”, „*head teacher*”, „*specialist in education methodology*”.

The transition to a higher position could only happen after an assessment conducted by a special committee against specified criteria, such as achieved results during work with students, use of interactive methods and information and communication technologies in

training, work with students who have won competitions, work within school projects, support of students at risk of exclusion, work on methodology and assistance to newly appointed teachers, etc. The novelties, introduced in teachers' career development, aim at stimulating teachers to participate in lifelong learning and improve their qualification by applying modern approaches to teaching and updating their knowledge. Moreover, the idea is to praise teachers, who achieve good results in their work.

5. Please, provide assessment of transparency of teachers' qualifications – is there any (public) access to information on teachers' qualification, experience, skills, etc., particularly in the public schools?

The post-graduate qualification of teachers, as a part of the system of vocational education, is provided at university – in specially established units – Departments for Information and In-service Training of Teachers. They offer qualification programmes to teachers from vocational schools in compliance with Ordinance No 5 of the Ministry of Education from 1996, regulating five vocational qualification degrees:

- *Fifth* vocational qualification degree – obtained after successfully taken oral exam based on questionnaire;

- *Fourth* vocational qualification degree – obtained after successfully taken written exam based on questionnaire;

- *Third* vocational qualification degree – obtained after the successful completion of one year of vocational training - specialisation;

- *Second* vocational qualification degree – obtained after the successful argument of a written thesis, based on analysis of an attached by the candidates' diagnostic procedure;

- *First* vocational qualification degree – obtained after the successful argument of a written research or innovative thesis.

The Faculties of Pedagogy at the universities of Sofia, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad and Veliko Turnovo may also organise training for the acquisition of the above-mentioned vocational qualification degrees, based on the level of competency and the practical experience of teachers.

The training of teachers and trainers within the institutions for continuing vocational education is performed at university, under the same mechanism as the one valid for the training of teachers to meet the requirements of initial vocational training. The training of trainers is concentrated mainly in the Master's programmes. In some universities there are pedagogical faculties which offer programmes specifically oriented towards trainers. Within the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Sofia, for instance, there are two specialised Master programmes for training of teachers and trainers: 1/ Modern education technologies, where, the qualification "Teacher" may be acquired after while studying for the Bachelor degree, and 2/ Management of adults' training – for teachers and experts who would like to work as trainers of adults. The participation of the trainers in some forms of continuing education is voluntary and is not strictly regulated. Some professional organisations and associations and sector organisations offer short-term courses for the enhancement of the qualification of lecturers and trainers, such as, the Bulgarian Association for Management and Development of Human Resources and the Association of Psychologists in the Republic of Bulgaria, which develop and offer qualification programmes for trainers in the field of management and social abilities.

Workshops are also organised by non-governmental organisations for the enhancement of the qualification of trainers. These are funded under various European programmes.

According to the 1991 National Education Act a teacher can be every person who holds a teacher's certificate (Art.39 (1)). There is no requirement for Bulgarian nationality in order to become a

teacher, as long as he/she possesses a relevant specialty and professional qualification of “Teacher”, recognized in Bulgaria.

In 1994 The Ministry of Education and Science published Instructions No 2 for the Requirements for occupying a job position of a “teacher” or “tutor” in compliance with obtained certification, professional qualification or capacity. According to the Instructions to occupying the job position of a teacher requires completed **university education, college education or secondary pedagogical education** in a relevant specialty.

In 1997 the **Ordinance on Unified state requirements for the acquisition of the professional qualification of “Teacher”** is an attempt to standardize the initial pedagogical qualification offered by numerous Bulgarian universities with diverse profiles. In this case the State Educational Requirement is limited to precise quantifiable parameters that can be easily controlled. These are academic subjects and academic hours. The Ordinance determines as standards:

- Minimum number of obligatory and elective subjects.
- Minimum number of academic hour for each subject.
- The level of the academic staff.
- Requirements and types of practical training of students.
- Type of final exams for the completion of the education.

In Bulgaria there is no public access to the teachers’ profiles - qualification, experience, skills, etc. Every person who holds a teacher’s certificate and a relevant specialty can teach in public and private schools and centers for vocational training.

6. Please, describe the existing approaches for quality assurance of VET in your country: Instruments, measures, indicators, criteria for employment as VET, regular tests, others?

The National Employment Action Plan is being implemented as each training program determines the terms and conditions of implementation, the participants, the organization, the financing, monitoring and control.

The assessment of the implementation of the state plan for admission has more reporting than assessing role and is measured with indicators such as number of students included in VET, number of students who has completed VET, number of students dropped out of VET. It is the same situation with the implementation of the training programs included in the National Employment Action Plan. The number of persons included and the number of persons completed are reported. The lack of real assessment of the planned and implemented activities determines the lack of feedback on the achievements and the possibility of reconsidering objectives, correction of plans and procedures.

At state and municipal vocational schools the cycle of quality assurance is almost clearly defined, not so much in contents, but in stages of development- planning embodied in the state plan of admission, implementation of the approved plan of admission, assessment based on the reporting, revising of the achievements in order to correct the next plan, primarily in the aspect of assuring financial stability of schools. Regarding the contents, the issues of quality assurance of VET oftentimes meet insuperable obstacles in providing good facilities, qualification of teachers, practical training, etc. As for the Centers for vocational training the activities such as planning, implementing a plan, assessment and revising of the plan, can be found only in a few of them.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has established the Regional Inspectorate of Education (RIE), which is territorial authority of control and management of the education system. The RIE functions are to provide conditions for the functioning and development of the schools, kindergartens and other servicing units in the respective region. The Inspectorate provides methodological support and monitors the implementation of state educational

requirements. It also develops activities related to coordinating the relations between schools and state and municipal authorities, non-governmental organizations, social partners, international educational programs. The REI provides conditions for vocational education and training and controls the quality of the training process. It participates in the development of curricula and training plans for different types of schools. It organizes activities for improving the qualification of headmasters, assistant headmasters and teachers at school.

The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) also observes the implementation of licensing requirements and submission of annual information from centers for vocational training and centers for information and vocational guidance.

The control on the implementation of the requirements of VET Act and the activities of vocational training or vocational guidance in compliance with the license requirements is carried out by NAVET officials.

In compliance with VET Act NAVET maintains a public register of the centers for vocational training, the centers for information and vocational guidance and the licenses that have been issued or revoked. Along with this NAVET issues a bulletin with the criteria, procedures and documents for licensing of centers for vocational training and centers for information and vocational guidance, the list of VET professions, as well as a list of the institutions licensed by NAVET. Till 31th January of each year the centers for vocational training and the centers for information and vocational guidance are obliged to provide to NAVET information for their activity in the previous year. NAVET determines indicators for publishing the annual information.

7. What is the progress of the country in the transition from Common Quality Assurance Framework to European Quality Assurance Framework for VET?

On June 18th 2009 The European Parliament and the European Council adopted a Recommendation for establishing a European reference framework for quality assurance in VET. The Framework aims to help improve the quality of VET and to increase transparency and consistency in the development of VET policy among Member States by promoting mutual trust, mobility of workforce and learners and lifelong learning. The Framework provides a systematic approach to quality by focusing on monitoring and continuous process of quality improvement through combining internal and external assessment, review and improvement process, based on concrete data and qualitative analysis.

- With regard to the Recommendation in Bulgaria it was established an inter-institutional working group in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS), working on the measures and actions for quality assurance in vocational education and training.
- Based on the Terms of Reference, established by MEYS, an Analysis was performed on the system of quality assurance in VET in Bulgaria (February 2011). The analysis aims to explore and analyze the system of quality assurance in VET in Bulgaria in accordance with 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and European Council for establishing a European reference framework for quality assurance in VET, to identify the strengths and gaps in the system of quality assurance in VET, related to the key "building elements" of the quality system.
- Based on the results of the analysis the MEYS developed a draft system for quality assurance of VET in Bulgaria. The draft system was reviewed and discussed in tripartite workshops.

8. Please, identify the major mismatches, shortages and gaps in quality assurance for VET.

The laws and regulations on vocational education and training are numerous and include partially or by default provisions regarding the quality of VET. These provisions are not sufficient, precise and coherent to assure quality of VET. Key and fundamental elements of the system of quality assurance in VET are missing.

The analysis of the current situation allows us to derive some basic mismatches, gaps and omissions in the policy of quality assurance in vocational education and training.

- No clear vision of a definition of quality of vocational education and training in Bulgaria.
- No regulation in law of the responsibilities of the institutions referring to quality assurance.
- Inadequate selection of indicators to assess the quality of vocational education and training in Bulgaria.
- Lack of feedback mechanism in the process of implementing policies on quality assurance.
- Need to develop guidelines for quality assurance at the level of education / training institutions.
- Need to clearly defined responsibilities of the training institutions regarding the quality assurance.
- Lack of adequate information to the participants in VET and other involved parties for the development of the European policies.
- Lack of provision of reliable sources of information, research and analysis for assuring the VET quality management process.
- Lack of scientific provision of VET quality management process.
- Lack of defined criteria for VET quality at system level, as well as at the level of VET providers.
- Lack of a regulated system of indicators to assess the quality at system level and at the level of VET providers.
- Lack of unified national system for vocational and career guidance of young people and adults, providing the necessary support and assistance in the process of choice of profession and specialty, opportunities of education, training, employment, career planning and development.
- Insufficient promotion of VET opportunities.

The main conclusion derived from the analysis of the VET institutions at system level is the lack of regulation and clear positioning of the institutions in a system of quality assurance of VET, lack of definition of quality of VET, lack of definition of the tools for assessment of VET and its quality, lack of a system of indicators to assess the status, functioning, dynamics and efficiency of VET, lack of a regulating institution for external assessment of quality of VET.

9. Please, list issues to be taken into consideration when adapting the project products

- Providing more and more diverse VET for people with different employment status.
- Intensive actions regarding persons with low qualification, older workers, migrants.
- Adapting legislation, collective bargaining, funding and incentives.
- Flexible learning conditions and methods considering the learners' needs.
- Validating and recognition of previous learning and newly acquired skills, competences for managing changes in career development.
- Breaking the conservative approach to learning and work by combining different types of learning, e.g. formal, on the job, in daily life.

- Removing barriers between programs and levels of formal education and training.
- Providing possibilities for access, progress and qualification in different ways, including the recognition of previous learning.
- Complete and partial qualifications at the same or different levels.
- Modular programs providing possibility of combining different modules.
- Raising awareness of citizens and social partners on the benefits of investing in developing policies for human resources development.
- Creating working environment and organization, which stimulate learning.
- Evaluation based on competences.
- Training and support for teachers and trainers, staff providing guidance, social partners.
- Funding and/or incentives for employers, who directly encourage their employees to upgrade their qualification.
- Coordination and cooperation between VET providers and enterprises.
- Wider partnerships among VET providers, higher education providers, social partners which provide services in the field of vocational guidance and employment, public authorities.
- Complementarity of the efforts of national, regional and local authorities.
- Shared responsibility by government institutions, employers, citizens.
- Improving relations and coordination among education and training, employment, social and economic policies and instruments.

10. Lifelong learning practices among VET teachers/trainers – are there any legal (or guild) requirements for an “upgrade” of VET qualification?

In 2011 Ministry of Education, Youth and Science initiated the implementation of a project called Improvement of Quality and Implementation of European Instruments and Practices within the System of Vocational Education and Training, which is aimed to improve the quality of vocational education and training through the development and implementation of methodological and systematic prerequisites for the introduction of efficient European instruments, based on the results from the lifelong learning programme. The development of new framework programmes for the acquisition of professional qualifications and providing horizontal and vertical mobility within vocational education is also anticipated. The project is implemented with the financial support of the EU, under the European Social Fund.