SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN CENTRAL ASIA

A COMPENDIUM OF GOOD PRACTICE
PREFACE

The vocational education and training (VET) environment is complex, requires new skills and cooperative ways of working. Through its work, the ETF, a specialised agency of the European Union, aims to make VET a driver for lifelong learning, sustainable development, competitiveness, and social cohesion in its 29 partner countries.

The ETF is working with a multitude of stakeholders at international, regional and national levels, to develop VET skills and competencies, policy frameworks and facilitate knowledge sharing. Taking a holistic approach, and encouraging the ownership of VET development and reform among these stakeholders, is key to the ETF’s approach.

CENTRAL ASIA SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Vocational school directors, teachers and trainers are the frontline for delivering the skills for the labour market and society. VET performance is closely linked to the quality of these staff, their initial education, and continuous professional development. This is at the heart of the regional initiative concept.

From supporting students with different backgrounds and abilities, ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and quality in VET, staff are faced with increasing demands. They also need to manage and mediate people, technology, organisations and school processes.

To help meet the challenges, the ETF has been working with this frontline implementing the school development initiative in Central Asia since 2009. By working with these key players, and collaborating with social partners and national policy makers, the ETF is helping vocational schools to become centres of lifelong learning.

Key activities include:

- Knowledge sharing (policy design and implementation)
- Capacity building programme for vocational staff
- Communities of practice (national and regional)
- Regional policy dialogue
- Seven handbooks on school development

CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

Supporting the professional development of vocational staff from both sides, business and education, which in turn, helps to improve the quality of VET, is central to this programme. Helping school managers throughout the planning, implementing and monitoring cycle, is also key.

Teams of representatives from vocational schools, adult training centres and teacher training institutes in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been involved.

TRAINING HANDBOOKS

Together with VET staff, ETF experts developed and run a series of practical trainings, designed to help participants become the world-class VET trainers of tomorrow.

Between 2011 and 2013, seven handbooks were produced, covering:

- Strategic development and planning in vocational schools;
- Vocational school development in cooperation with partners;
- Monitoring as a tool for VET institutions;
- Train the Trainer;
Specific features of adult training
Education leadership and management;
Effective teaching and learning

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Social partnership, strategic planning, on-the-job training, vocational pedagogy and continuous professional development are among the topics the 15 CoPs are developing. Established in 2014, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the CoPs host regular meetings of VET school directors and employers.

KAZAKHSTAN

Four communities with participants from around the country (Dual training, Social partnership, Vocational pedagogy, Continual professional development of VET staff)

KYRGYZSTAN

Bishkek (Social partnership), Kyzyl-Kiya (Continual professional development), Djalal Abdad region (Continual professional development – strengthening material and technical base), Naryn (Social partnership), Talas (Professional orientation work).

TAJIKISTAN

Dushanbe region (Social partnership) Kulob region (Strategic planning of activities), Kurgantube (On-the-job training), Khorg (Social partnership), Dushanbe-Sughd region (Pastoral work), Rasht Valley (VET quality)

At a national level, the communities of practice provide continuous professional development courses for VET school directors, teachers and trainers.

By considering how VET practices can be improved, the communities are an important catalyst for quality development. Over time, the knowledge base grows, becoming a reference of expertise on improving ongoing processes.

CENTRAL ASIAN POLICY DIALOGUE

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are involved in the forum to share developments and trends in VET. The focus is on sharing national experiences in VET policy making from a systemic point of view. Results are a reference point for ongoing work in the region, and input to future EU activities.

The participatory process aims to inform, and in turn to be informed, about developments, in particular:

- Quality assurance from both levels (systemic and institutional)
- Content and methodology
- School management
- Professional development of VET staff

FIELD RESEARCH

Two surveys were conducted in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in 2009 and 2015. More than 1000 respondents in 2015 from vocational school level, took part, including principals, teachers (2009/2015) and students (2009). The focus was broad, covering topics of teaching and learning processes, VET school management, services, external communication, social partnership (2009) and continuous professional development of VET staff.

VET ACADEMY AWARDS

Fifteen outstanding initiatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been selected and are described in this publication. All nominees are an inspiration to VET policy makers, school directors, teachers and trainers, around the world.

The ETF thanks all of those who have contributed to this initiative for paving the way forward.
KAZAKHSTAN

In terms of area, the world’s largest landlocked country is equivalent to the size of Western Europe. While in land size it is vast, the population is only around 17 million people, of which more than a quarter are under 15-years-old.

The mineral, fossil fuel rich nation is the strongest economy in Central Asia, recording constant economic growth since 2000. However, recent decreasing oil, gas and metal prices means growth forecasts are set to slow for 2014-17, according to the World Bank.

The strong economy has helped put overall unemployment levels into decline. And youth unemployment rates are the lowest of any group, a truly exceptional situation on the world-stage.

EDUCATION SPENDING

Despite the economic situation, public spending on education is below the international OECD average. It represents around 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the primary indicator to gauge the health of a country’s economy. The share of this pie dedicated to vocational education and training is around 7% – a figure that has stagnated.

ADVANCING THE VET AGENDA WITH EMPLOYERS

While public spending on VET has not increased, Kazakhstan has formulated comprehensive VET policies that aim to modernise the system and align it with international standards and expectations. The implementation of these ambitious policies has been advancing at a speedy pace. An important success factor is the close link between education related policies and economic and regional development programmes.

A strong emphasis is placed on evidence-based policy making, with the country regularly taking part in international surveys, such as PISA, to benchmark itself globally and to better understand bottlenecks and issues. Involving employers, and matching labour market requirements, have also been pivotal to vocational training reform.

Enterprise has been involved in the development of training, occupational standards, and the recent implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, an international system for describing qualifications.

The recent establishment of the Chamber of Entrepreneurs has also played a role in engaging employers, and helping to reach small and medium enterprise (SMEs).

PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

1. To increase the quality of vocational training and education, and the attractiveness of the pathway.
2. Continue strengthening education-business cooperation and work-based learning.
3. To provide high quality staff development opportunities for vocational teachers, trainers and practitioners.
Karaganda State Technical University is aiming to improve the quality of its student teachers who go on to teach in technical schools by providing them with both the pedagogical and the practical skills they will need in their future jobs.

THE ISSUE
Kazakhstan is undergoing profound social, economic and technological change. Today’s manufacturing industry which is developing on the basis of advanced technology and sophisticated equipment requires highly skilled and highly competent workers. This means in turn that vocational teachers have to be able to teach technical and specialised subjects both practically and theoretically. Trainee vocational teachers need to have a very high technical and technological level of knowledge of the modern manufacturing industry, particularly in terms of hands-on practical training.

THE SUPPORT
I am the Head of Centre of Engineering Pedagogics, Karaganda State Technical University, and have participated in the ETF’s School Development Initiative since it started in 2009. I used what I learnt from my participation in the project to encourage other staff of the university to develop the skills and
knowledge of students to establish a link between the needs of entreprises and the content of the teacher training course.

THE INITIATIVE
Along with my colleague, Svetlana Udartseva, Head of the Vocational Training Department at the University, we introduced a supplementary vocational qualification into the curricula of the Bachelor of Vocational Training course. The following specific elements now form the content of the course:

- Hands-on training in materials processing technology;
- Practical technological training at the Centre of Vocational Professions specialising in mechanical engineering;
- Industrial practical training inside enterprises.

Furthermore, a teacher training pilot programme on apprenticeship training for operators of multiple types of equipment has been introduced.

THE OUTCOME
Students are now taking two types of exam, both theoretical and practical. The theoretical part involves assessing the students’ theoretical knowledge, while in the practical part, students have to demonstrate their ability to use different types of equipment and produce items of varying complexity. The inclusion of these two strands in the vocational teacher training process has led to some interesting and rather satisfying results: academic performance has gone up by 0.7%; final examination scores are up by 0.81%; and the graduate employment rate is 100%. This demonstrates the advantages of this type of course that includes elements of the dual education system as it eliminates the main flaw of traditional forms and methods of education, which is the gap between theory and practice.

THE BENEFIT
Working closely with the enterprises, future teachers are able to understand what their students are going to need. These students can then be involved in the industrial process as soon as they graduate. Companies gain a lot from this too as they get the fully prepared specialists they need and the need for mentors and professional adaptation is significantly reduced. Everyone gains when vocational training institutions can employ young and modern qualified educators. The key message is “You should not sit back and wait for help, be pro-active and work in a team!”
INVOLVING STUDENTS IN WORK-BASED LEARNING

School: College of travel and hospitality (CTHI), Kazakhstan
Target group: Managers, teachers, trainers, students
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THE ISSUE
Before the transition to the market economy, the continuing professional development of teachers and trainers was not a priority. The college management limited their efforts to providing general guidance and enrolling teachers and trainers in refresher courses in relevant institutes. Teaching was based predominantly on textbooks that became quickly out of date. Partnership with enterprises was limited and there were few opportunities for students to gain practical skills in the workplace.

THE SUPPORT
As Director of the college, I participated in the ETF School Development Project. I held meetings with the heads of college departments and sections to share with them what I had learned in the project workshops and present to them the materials developed within the project. These have helped significantly improve our work in planning, cooperating with stakeholders, teaching and training methods, continuing professional development of staff and development of support services for students and others.

THE GOAL
We carried out a self-assessment of our performance at three levels: management, teaching staff and students. On the basis of the self-assessment, a new approach to guidance and professional development was introduced. A support centre was set up where highly qualified teachers and trainers could provide support on teaching and training methods to their less experienced colleagues.

Another goal was introducing the teaching of core and soft skills (entrepreneurship, job seeking, problem solving, decision making, communication, interpersonal skills) alongside professional skills. After training by experts from Education for All in Kazakhstan, all teachers are putting the methods into practice in the school.

Having better trained teaching staff made it possible to launch pilot projects to enhance the quality of the education and training provided. In close cooperation with social partners, we experimented with implementing competency-based and modular approaches. In 2013, the college was granted the status of pilot school by the Regional Technical and Vocational Training Department allowing it to introduce work-based learning in a learner-focused, modular and competency-based approach.

THE BENEFIT
The pilot projects have helped the college better meet the requirements of the labour market. Teachers and trainers are stimulated to continuously improve their skills and students show increased motivation to learn because they acquire labour market relevant skills alongside core and soft skills. The National Institute of Advanced Training in Education (RIPSCO) uses our college for practical training in new approaches to teacher and trainer training, implementation of modular curricula, organisation of work-based learning for students, etc. So the college has become a model for other institutions.

The bottom line is that 95%-95% of college graduates find work in their specialist area at their level of qualification and are sought after by employers.
ORGANISING ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING

School: Chamber of Commerce, Karaganda Oblast, Kazakhstan
Target group: Companies, vocational schools, students, college teachers and trainers
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THE ISSUE
Entrepreneurs are key drivers of economic development. Highly qualified staff are key to sustainable development of enterprises. Staff competences are important resources of to be nurtured by business, not outputs of training schools. Enterprises were not sufficiently aware of their role in developing qualified staff.

THE SUPPORT
I was actively involved in the ETF School Development Project. I was particularly interested in Module 2 about partnership in VET school development. What I had learned helped me in my work at the Karaganda Chamber of Entrepreneurs in initiating and coordinating interaction partnerships between VET schools and enterprises in the Karaganda Oblast.

THE GOAL
We initiated cooperation between business and education institutions with two objectives: developing work-based learning in technical and vocational schools, and promoting entrepreneurial learning in colleges in the Karaganda Oblast.

The first involved identifying the demand for skills by sector, region and business; matching colleges with sectoral organisations for joint training of staff, signing work-based learning agreements for 1059 students in 39 professions involving 26 colleges, developing syllabuses, curriculums, and practical training programmes; training teachers, trainers and workplace mentors; and setting up a vocational guidance system. The existing legal framework was a major obstacle to the introduction of work-based learning so we had to ask for 18 amendments to the current legislation.

To develop the entrepreneurial skills of students we implemented training courses for college directors and economics and business studies teachers and set up business schools and entrepreneurship centres in colleges.

THE BENEFIT
A win-win situation has been created were enterprises are more involved in providing work-based learning for vocational students providing better-trained staff for enterprises and labour-market relevant skills for students. Students were trained for the 2015 International World Skills Competition in Sao Paolo.

They are learning the fundamentals of starting a business and the enterprise centres in colleges are involving young people in business activity and contributing to the development of SMEs. Six training centres were set up for continuing professional development of enterprise staff.
LEARNING IN THE WORK PLACE

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Target group: Trainers and college students
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THE ISSUE
In implementing the dual training system, we experienced difficulties in concluding agreements with social partners and providing paid industrial placements for students. Complying with state educational standards was also problematic as we had to provide a 40-60 ratio of theoretical to practical training. We also experienced difficulties in providing specific continuing professional development on the dual system to teachers and trainers.

THE SUPPORT
In 2014 the college joined the Community of Practice on Dual Training set up under the ETF School Development Project. The active participation of college heads in this project led to a mutually beneficial exchange of good practice in the area of dual training. We could learn from other members of the network and work together on developing instruments, such as draft documents and regulations for the further development of dual training in my college.

THE GOAL
The objective was to introduce, in cooperation with social partners, dual training in three specialisms: motor vehicle maintenance, building construction and maintenance and gas systems installation and maintenance. Following the conclusion of an agreement between the college, sectoral organisations and the regional education authorities, we developed modular curricula, electronic textbooks, methodological guidelines and other elements of dual training for the three specialisms.

THE BENEFIT
The introduction of dual training is of paramount importance for the economy of Kazakhstan. As a result of the project, students changed their attitude to work, study and to themselves, becoming more motivated, quality oriented and self confident. Graduates were better prepared for the requirements of the modern workplace. Graduates improved their prospects of employment or re-employment.
DEVELOPING MONOTOWNS IN THE KARAGANDA REGION

School: Karaganda Regional Agricultural College, Kazakhstan
Target group: College students, young people from six monotowns in the Karaganda region
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THE ISSUE
The 2015 Business Ideas Contest was an opportunity for young people to develop their entrepreneurial capacity, develop relations with businesses and further develop their business ideas, while at the same time acquiring new professional knowledge and skills.

THE SUPPORT
Karlygash Ospanova of the Chamber of Entrepreneurs participated in the ETF School Development Project in Kazakhstan for several years, and shared new experiences and materials from the project workshops with the teachers of the Agricultural college. The success stories from other colleges persuaded the college teachers of the importance of developing creative skills of students and motivating them to participate in creative competitions of which the 2015 Business Ideas Contest was one.

THE GOAL
During the two weeks of the competition, consultants and mentors shared their professional knowledge and experience with young people, giving students the opportunity to think critically about their business ideas and further develop them. After two weeks of team work and the subsequent evaluation of the business models developed, a final round was held with six teams. Karaganda Agrotechnical College participated in the final round with four business ideas:

1. The “Biogas Plant” project for the Shakhtinsk monotown took first place and won a cash prize
2. The “Silt Extraction” project for the Saran monotown took second place and won a cash prize
3. The “Solar Window” project for the Abay monotown took second place and won a cash prize
4. The “Velomobile” project for the Temirtau monotown reached the final round of the competition, finishing in third place

THE BENEFIT
The competition recognised and validated the efforts of the Agricultural College over the past few years in fostering an entrepreneurial culture and developing the entrepreneurial skills of young people studying at there. The College has also created a platform for students to develop professional relations with other organisations, share experience and acquire new knowledge and skills.

The successful participation of college students in the Business Ideas Contest 2015 was rewarded with cash prizes which provided an opportunity for the further development and practical application of students’ business ideas and projects. The participants learned how to properly develop/refine their business ideas and develop professional business plans. The contest received a wide coverage in the media of the Karaganda region and Kazakhstan and was an incentive for further entrepreneurial activity of college students.
KYRGYZSTAN

This mountainous country has a rich culture and history spanning more than 2,000 years. Officially called the Kyrgyz Republic, the landlocked country has a population of 5.7 million people.

While the country is ancient, its population is young. People under the age of 30 make up more than 60% of the population, the majority of whom are under 19 years-old. This demographic puts great pressure on education and the labour market. Reflecting this, overall public spending on education is consistently high and above the international OECD average. However, due to the large school-age population, the budget per student is very limited.

While education and training are at the forefront of politics and society, like all public sectors, these areas have also been affected by austerity measures in place since 2013.

ECONOMY AND LABOUR

Economic growth has been erratic since 2010, largely due to political instability. In 2013, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the primary indicator used to gauge the health of a country’s economy, grew by more than 10%, according to the World Bank. Growth has since slowed, with forecasts at 2 to 3% for 2014-15.

The economy is dominated by services and agriculture, namely cotton, tobacco, wool and meat. The service sector accounts for 55% of GDP, and half the workforce (2012). Agriculture represents 20% of GDP and one third of the workforce.

The labour market is characterised by high under-employment, rural poverty, limited labour demands, and informal employment. In this context, vocational skills appear to have a significant influence on employment chances, with unemployment rates consistently lower for young people with vocational skills, compared to those without. VET is becoming a preferred pathway into higher education. The share of the education budget dedicated to VET is also on the rise, accounting for close to 10% of the education budget (2011).

SECTOR WIDE APPROACH TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In 2012, a new strategy covering the entire education sector, including VET, was finalised following extensive consultation. Moving towards a sector-wide approach for education, the Education Development Strategy (EDS 2020), emphasises quality and access for all. For VET, this is conceptualised in terms of labour market relevance, graduate employability and enhanced workforce interaction. While much remains to be done, significant progress is being made.

- Moves to better understand labour market needs;
- Ministry of Labour looking at VET staffing requirements by sector and region (2014-17);
- VET Agency undertaking sector analysis studies and new methodologies;
- Working with employers to developing occupational standards and competence-based learning content;
- National Accreditation Council set up in September 2014;
- Independent accreditation of education providers becomes mandatory in 2016;
- Working with employers, independent certification is another development area;
- Looking at ways to combine employer-led certification with VET course exam requirements.

PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

1. Develop greater understanding of economic and labour market demands, and VET’s interconnected role. Generate appropriate tools and methods to gather information and evidence, and ways of analysis to help inform VET policy development and monitoring.
2. Operationalise social partnerships at all levels, from provider-enterprise to education-sector-economic sector level, to improve the relevance of VET.
3. Ensure adequate and large-scale staff development opportunities for VET professionals.
Our vocational school and Professional Lyceum No. 14 in the Issyk-Kul region face similar problems in training automechanics to modern standards. For this reason we set up a community of practice to work together to share solutions to common issues.

THE ISSUE

Automechanics is a very popular profession among young people in Tajikistan. Nevertheless, graduates from our automechanics courses rarely meet employers’ requirements. Generally, the materials and the content of vocational courses in this field are completely outdated when it comes to working with modern vehicles, which have computers to control fuel injection, electronic brakes and automatic transmissions. Therefore, the biggest barriers to quality education in our lyceum and in the vocational education system of Tajikistan in general, are the obsolete facilities, resources and infrastructure, obsolete curricula (unsuitable for the needs of the population and the labour market), inadequate human resources and inefficient training process management.

THE SUPPORT

The ETF’s project to develop vocational schools in Central Asia was a great inspiration and help in getting schools, and in some cases also employers,
to work together to learn from each other. These so-called communities of practice began in the second half of 2013 and support the on-going development of the skills of their members.

**THE INITIATIVE**

Working together, we soon came to the conclusion that without involving employers, the problems highlighted above could not be solved.

We analysed our local labour market and identified a potential partner: the Naryn Automotive Service Association. In 2014, coordinator Kochkorbaeva Tursun and the Naryn Automotive Service Association held three meetings. Another meeting was organised between entrepreneurs in the field of automotive services and the staff of our vocational school. At these meetings, the whole training concept and its implemention were discussed.

The entrepreneurs also expressed their interest in contributing to the training of students. They send their trainers to teach practice oriented topics and participate in the development of curricula. When meeting our new partners, we made use of all the skills obtained during the ETF school development initiative.

It is often the case that employers are unaware of the vocational education system and they frequently take workforce from the ‘street’. Or they already have an established negative view on the initial vocational training system.

Removing this barrier and convincing employers to cooperate in the development of education is a major challenge. Additionally they raised questions about the lack of qualified personnel for the maintenance and repair of modern cars, but they are not yet ready to invest in the education system. Removing this barrier and convincing employers to increase cooperation in vocational training development is a major challenge.

**THE OUTCOME**

By meeting employers, demonstrating our portfolio of achievements, organising tours of the lyceum and visiting enterprises, a number of joint activities have started to emerge:

- Employers are involved in the development of training plans and programmes;
- Automobile technicians from maintenance and repair shops conduct master-class workshops for vocational teaching staff;
- Tripartite agreements have been signed between schools, enterprises and students on joint work;
- Enterprises are offering jobs to graduates;
- Enterprises are helping schools to get modern spare parts for practical training.

We are sharing our experience of cooperating with our colleagues from other schools.

**THE BENEFIT**

By participating in the ETF’s School Development Initiative we have improved our links with employers. Our main achievement is the creation of a new community of practice to exchange experience, develop links with employers and improve school management practices. We are now able to find potential partners, identify their needs, and show them how we all benefit from mutual cooperation. Vocational schools can only be developed in cooperation with partners.
IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM FOR BETTER TEACHING

School: Vocational school No. 90, Talas, Kyrgyzstan
Target group: VET directors, teachers, instructors
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THE ISSUE
Vocational school No. 90 in downtown Talas city is a typical vocational education and training school, providing young people and adults with skills for the workforce. While it has students and teachers, what was lacking was information about the labour market, other VET providers and social partners. The issue of monitoring was not on the agenda, nor was capitalising on the experience of teachers and trainers in the training process.

THE SUPPORT
It was all hands on deck, as leadership, teachers and trainers joined together to take part in the ETF initiative. Three key areas were covered in the training: strategic planning, development in cooperation with partners and monitoring.

THE GOAL
The project gave us many new ideas and approaches to develop activities at our school. We set up a working group to conduct an internal evaluation of the school, with a focus on the topic of self-esteem. This was the first time self-esteem was identified as a development tool for our school. Another goal was establishing an internal monitoring database of social partners. We developed events with stakeholders, and carried out teacher training sessions. We also conducted a labour market analysis to identify job openings and skills demand.

THE BENEFIT
The ETF initiative has delivered many positive results. The results of the self-esteem evaluation have changed the work plan of our school. Communication with social partners has been improved and a strategic plan has been developed up to 2017. We also have new approaches to monitoring. For example, we have created a community of practice to exchange experience, develop social partnerships and management skills. We believe that this knowledge and these skills will contribute to the successful development of VET schools of Kyrgyzstan.
MAKING VOCATIONAL TRAINING A FIRST CHOICE

School: Agency for Vocational Education and Training under the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth, Kyrgyzstan
Target group: VET directors, teachers, instructors, students and employers
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THE ISSUE

“Come to study at our school. Training is free, hostels are free, and we serve hot meals!” This was a typical career guidance slogan communicated to school-leavers. Once enrolled, students were trained in the same professions, an old approach that failed to consider labour market needs. There was no conceptual approach to career-oriented work for young people.

THE SUPPORT

In 2011 things began to change. Using new career guidance tools learnt through the ETF’s school development project, the agency worked to help young people make career choices based on abilities, aptitudes and labour market needs. Raising the status of vocational professions was also on the agenda.

THE GOAL

Young people would typically choose a profession on the advice of their parents, opting towards higher education institutions because vocational careers are not considered prestigious professions.

To combat this the agency, joined forces with the Ministry of Education and Science, Healthcare and Employment Centres of the Ministry of Labour and representatives of VET schools to host infotours.

By providing information to unemployed youth, students, and parents directly where they are: the streets, in squares, the beach, the market, in an interactive format, the idea was to make vocational training a more attractive option. Furthermore, in a bid to curb the perception that some professions are only female or male, the agency also hosted a Girls’ Day.

THE BENEFIT

The infotour saw a 2% increase in vocational school applications. The number of girls enrolling in traditionally male occupations, such as construction, and car mechanics, also jumped by 1%.

The agency has been busy on other fronts too, organising career guidance days, press tours to vocational schools, a festival of professions in “hip-hop” style and competitions.

In 2014, a new system based on the professional orientation of young people into vocational education emerged. Plans to improve the quality of vocational guidance are drawn up annually, and most importantly vocational guidance is now carried out throughout the year, not just for three months as it was previously.

The target group has also expanded. A task force has begun giving career guidance to students from kindergarten up, in orphanages, boarding schools and among students with disabilities.

As a result of these initiatives the public is hearing about VET and labour market needs, and a positive image is being formed. School leavers are better informed to make better career choices and vocational schools can expand their student services.

More broadly, this is having a positive impact on the economic situation of the country. Social partnerships and professional development of teachers and staff are also gaining traction.

Thanks to the initiative of the ETF, vocational schools and their partners have been able develop their abilities to improve the system themselves.
LEARNING TO LEAD CHANGE

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THE ISSUE
The only thing constant is change, and change these days is rapid. Pedagogical technology, curriculum and materials are being constantly updated, often leaving teachers behind. They have little or no knowledge of new programmes and lack the skills to work with the new materials. There is an urgent need to bring teacher training up-to-date with the changes.

THE SUPPORT
In a remote region of Kyrgyzstan, we have found a solution. The issue of continuous professional development of teachers is being addressed through social partnerships with other institutions in the region. Cooperating with the ETF in the school development project shaped our initiative. And the idea is very simple - share experience and solve problems together.

THE GOAL
The main project result was the creation of the community of practice including three VET schools: No’s 8, 33, 70 and the mining college. Despite belonging to other Ministries, the college provided a platform to develop digital competences for vocational education teachers. Having a good experience of using interactive methods for training, teachers of school No. 8 shared experiences with colleagues from the mining college. Thanks to our community, every school has had the possibility for mutual development through exchanging good practices in methods and approaches to teaching and learning.

THE BENEFIT
This story shows how schools can work together on their own development. There is no need to wait for courses to be organised for teachers or when instructions will be given on how to proceed and what to do. We have learned to share our experience with other educational institutions through retreats and by organizing communities of practice with the same interests. These include, for example, improving the IT competences of teachers and trainers, the use of interactive whiteboards, other interactive methods of teaching, dual education. Schools are organising travel seminars on selected topics, defined by the teachers themselves. The community of practice members taking part transfer the new knowledge back to their home schools, to those who could not make it.

The experience gained has become the new basis for ongoing school development activities.
PARTNERING WITH EMPLOYERS

School: Sectoral council of Agriculture, Kyrgyzstan
Target group: VET directors, teachers, instructors, employers and sectoral councils
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THE ISSUE
It’s a catch-22. Employers are not satisfied with the quality of VET graduates, and graduates in turn cannot find jobs with their existing skills. In the current system, young people are not receiving the training they need to satisfy the labour market.

The work of Sectoral Councils, industry-led partnership organisations that address skills development issues, has been weak, participants had their own interests and views on vocational education.

THE SUPPORT
The ETF school development initiative helped generate constructive dialogue between the Sectoral Councils, build positive relationships and bring about positive change. The initiative has influenced a cooperative approach to the development of vocational education.

THE GOAL
In a market economy, social partnerships are key to vocational school development. Close contacts with employers provides an effective basis for the provision of a suitably-skilled work force.

THE BENEFIT
Since 2010, seven sectoral councils in priority sectors for the country’s economy have been organised, including one focused on Agriculture. Made up of employers, VET institutions, and state authorities. The Council has conducted research in the skills needs of the agricultural sector and developed competence standards for 10 agricultural qualification profiles, which have become the basis for new curricula and programs. These materials have been successfully implemented in the VET system for agriculture.

Such an association of stakeholders has allowed a new level of social partnership to develop. Now cooperation is provided at the system level which permits a common approach to the quality of initial vocational training across the entire country.

Sectoral Councils take part in the organization of training and retraining of teachers of VET schools. We have identified mechanisms to engage employers in the process of research and sector needs, forecasting demand for the labour force, and in building curricula with the appropriate training program content.

Such joint actions have allowed us to improve the quality of training for the industry which so interests both employers and educational institutions.
Mountains cover more than 90% of this landlocked country, the smallest in Central Asia with a population of around eight million people.

It is both the poorest republic in Central Asia and the youngest by demographic, with one third of the population under 14-years-old.

This ‘youth bulge’ places a lot of pressure on education and employment opportunities.

**ECONOMY AND LABOUR**

Tajikistan faces major economic challenges. Almost half of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the primary indicator used to gauge the health of a country’s economy, is based on nationals working abroad, particularly in Russia. Many of those leaving for work are young people. Furthermore, immigrant remittances have fallen recently, whilst returnees seeking work is on the rise.

The rest of the economy depends on aluminium and cotton production and exports. Unsurprisingly, job prospects, particularly amongst young people are poor, unemployment is high and continues to rise.

**THE CRITICAL ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, fundamental changes took place, but the education and training system was not flexible enough to adapt to emerging labour market needs.

Limited territorial mobility and restricted access to higher professional education, particularly amongst the poorest, places an increased significance on the role of vocational education and training.

The situation requires substantial reform to strengthen both the social and economic contributions of the VET system.

**PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD**

While much work is needed, Tajikistan is taking steps in the right direction. New laws on training specialists, based on market needs came into force in 2012. While still at an early implementation phase, this development is timely. Draft laws aimed at strengthening adult education have also been developed. Currently, around 30 adult training institutes are providing short courses mainly for unemployed and potential migrants.

An analysis of labour market trends is also underway by the Institute of Labour Migration and Employment. The main priorities areas for the future are:

1. Social partnerships to bring education and enterprise together to oversee the provision of VET.
2. Developing indicators and mechanisms to monitor and assess the quality of vocational education and training.
3. To provide professional development opportunities for vocational teachers and trainers.
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

School: Vocational lyceum for agriculture, Kulob, Tajikistan
Target group: school students
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Our vocational lyceum is a public education institution. It was set up in the Soviet era in the village of Dahana, Kulob District, Khatlon Region, to train agricultural workers.

THE ISSUE

Even at the beginning of the new century, the biggest barriers to quality education in our lyceum and in the vocational education system of Tajikistan in general, were obsolete facilities, resources and infrastructure, obsolete curricula (unsuitable for the needs of the population and the labour market), inadequate human resources and inefficient training process management.

THE SUPPORT

In 2009, the ETF launched a project to develop vocational schools in Central Asia. As the lyceum’s deputy director, I was included in the key project implementation group. During the project, I took training courses in social partnership development; school management; strategic activity planning; management, provision and quality of vocational training; training of trainers, etc. Now I am a coordinator of the vocational training community of practice in Kulob and I use my knowledge and skills in my practical work.
THE INITIATIVE

I developed a strategic and current planning module for vocational schools in the Tajik language based on the context of my own lyceum, which I presented at the first meeting of the Kulob community of practice. The discussions and recommendations helped me to improve the plan and I was then able to give several training sessions to my colleagues. The young and encouraging school director, Amirkhon Nazriev, supported me throughout and now the strategic and current plans for improving education quality in our lyceum have been revised and approved by the teachers’ council.

Our plan for education quality improvement builds on a strategic partnership with employers. The focus is on rural electrician skills and so we set up a partnership with the rural department of the town electricity grid company.

There are four major units in our plan.

1. Making education content as relevant as possible to the labour market. To this end we set up a taskforce involving the electricity company to develop qualification standards. We then developed new syllabi and work programmes for each vocational subject for this qualification.

2. Developing staff capacity. Using the company’s facilities and with the support of its chief power engineer we held a three-day training course for the teachers.

3. Improving the facilities and resources for training. With the support of our partner, we revamped the laboratory and installed relevant electrical network control panels. We also identified major sites and facilities for on-the-job training.

4. Monitoring and evaluating progress.

THE OUTCOME

We successfully reached our objective of improving the quality of education in one qualification area. Furthermore, our vocational students along with school foremen and staff from the electricity company now participate in emergency operations in our village.

THE BENEFIT

We have put into practice the knowledge and skills acquired during the training courses and achieved concrete results. Our success builds on our strategic and current plans which outline concrete activities and local partnerships. The key message is “You should not sit back and wait for help, be proactive and work in a team!”
LEARNING TO TEACH ADULTS

School: Tajikistan Adult Training Centre
Target group: school students
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THE ISSUE
As the Tajik population expands, there are insufficient places available at vocational schools in the country. This means that large numbers of young people are entering the labour market with no skills at all, which makes it difficult for them to find jobs or have any kind of social protection. In 2008, the government established the Tajikistan Adult Training Centre with four regional branches to tackle this issue.

THE SUPPORT
I was able to participate in the ETF’s school development project in my capacity as the director of the Tajikistan Adult Training Centre. We faced numerous issues and challenges including the need to develop the capacity of teaching staff to work with adult education. From my participation in the project, I learnt about school management, providing education, education management and education quality evaluation. I tried out most of what I learnt in my day to day work.

THE GOAL
Adult training is student-centred and students are active and central to the learning process. Our challenge was to develop our teaching staff to suit the needs of adult training. It was not possible for us to wait for a formal introduction of such methods to be included in the education curricula of institutions preparing teachers for adult education so we had to act on our own initiative. The ETF’s module on ‘common approaches to developing the vocational skills of adults and the unemployed’ was the starting point. I went to the Tajikistan Association of Adult Education to look for practicing professionals in adult education and set up a task force to develop a training module on the topic. This was done in parallel with another initiative supported by dvv international to develop adult education in the country.

THE BENEFIT
We developed a training module in Tajik and held courses in the summer of 2014 for teachers and trainers on adult vocational training. Our experience has demonstrated that a student-centred approach to vocational training for adults (where the student is an active and central participant in the learning process, and the teacher is a consultant and mentor) is possible for vocational training graduates from 11-year secondary schools.

This was the first time in Tajikistan that people have been trained in adult vocational training. The results have had a considerable impact on the quality of adult training in the country. Building on our experience, we are planning to develop a guidance manual in Tajik for teachers and trainers on teaching methods for adult vocational training.

The success factors of our project included the knowledge and skills that we gained thanks to the ETF’s support as well as the successful cooperation between the public and non-public sectors.
IMPROVING TRAINING OUTCOMES

School: Vocational technical lyceum of Faizobad District
Target group: vocational school
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THE ISSUE
The Vocational Technical Lyceum of the Faizobod district in Tajikistan has been training people for agricultural jobs since 1956. Over 14,000 students have been trained for professions such as machine operators, drivers, apiculturists, electric welders and car mechanics. However, our facilities, resources and infrastructure are becoming increasingly out of date. Almost all of our fleet of agricultural machinery, trucks, cars and tractors is obsolete and most of it can only be observed but not worked on. This means that the so-called practical training is little more than an extension of the theoretical classes.

THE SUPPORT
The school’s managers have been able to participate in many of the workshops, meetings and other events organized by the ETF as part of the School Development Initiative in the region. As a result of the implementation of some of the suggestions that resulted from participation in this initiative, we have managed to increase the employment possibilities for our students. The modules on lifelong learning and strategic planning for vocational education institutions were particularly useful in this respect. Participation in regional communities of practice has also been very beneficial.

THE GOAL
Through the communities of practice and in cooperation with other schools in the region, we have increased our cooperation with local businesses. These potential employers of our students are now actively engaged in the educational process and are involved in planning the curriculum and work placements.

THE BENEFIT
Our school now benefits from a strategic plan which allows us to focus on key activities to achieve our main goals. We have much better cooperation with local businesses and this has helped us to considerably improve the employment prospects of our graduates and our participation in the communities of practice allows us to share experiences and learn from others working in similar circumstances.
THE ISSUE
Low wages for vocational teachers in Tajikistan is a major drawback when it comes to improving the quality of vocational training in our country. Public budgets could not be increased in order to raise the pay of our teachers so we came to the conclusion that we would have to earn revenue ourselves by providing new services that would have to be paid for. At the same time, our basic facilities were outdated and inadequate for the needs of the labour market.

THE SUPPORT
As the Director of a public education institution, I have participated in the ETF’s School Development Initiative for the last three years and I have acquired substantial knowledge and skills that help in the further development of my school. The modules on developing social partnership, managing education institutions, motivating staff, vocational training management as well as quality evaluation were all very useful. I am able to use the skills I’ve learnt in the day to day management of the school.

THE GOAL
In order to raise the pay of our teaching staff, and in a context of scarce public resources, we had to find a way earn additional funding. We therefore decided to implement short-term vocational courses for young people on a commercial basis and use private sector facilities for training. We set up two task forces – one for establishing cooperation with the private sector and the other for encouraging student enrollment in the short courses. Using the skills gained through the school development initiative, I established cooperation agreements with a number of private businesses. They assigned special premises for hosting classes and students started to participate in production processes. Training was carried out under the supervision of staff from the school and the enterprise.

THE BENEFIT
The school earned additional revenue as a result of our work which we have used for our teaching staff and for purchasing materials for the school’s workshop. Students were also paid for their work and the businesses benefitted from the increased productivity. By participating in real production processes, the students developed confidence in their skills and the outcome of the training was successful beyond expectations. Furthermore, the businesses that participated became interested in expanding production and employing some of the graduates.

MOTIVATING VOCATIONAL TEACHERS

School: Vocational Lyceum, Qurghonteppa, Tajikistan
Target group: school students
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GETTING BETTER JOBS

School: School for continuing and professional development, University of Central Asia, Khorugh, Tajikistan

Target group: school students and school graduates

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THE ISSUE

Our school for continuing and professional development is in Khorugh, a small town in the mountains in the south west of Tajikistan. The school is part of the University of Central Asia established by the Aga Khan Foundation. It provides flexible and accelerated vocational training for young people and adults and issues certificates of proficiency in vocational and technical subjects.

In Tajikistan, training provision is often detached from the needs of the labour market. While many graduates experience difficulties in finding work, businesses remain understaffed due to a lack of qualified candidates. This situation is exacerbated in Khorugh due to its remoteness and poor accessibility.

THE SUPPORT

Thanks to the ETF’s School Development Initiative, we decided to set up a Community of Practice in Khorugh involving local education institutions and businesses. The group actively discusses the state and future development of vocational training in the region. Although there are as many visions of vocational training as there are stakeholders in the group, there is complete agreement on the fact that students need real job placement experience, on-the-job training at real construction sites to be able to practice and hone their skills, and become competitive and self-confident about their own futures.

THE GOAL

The school for continuing and professional development at the University of Central Asia provides training and qualifications for the construction trade, including carpentry, plumbing, car mechanics, plastering and brick-laying. Although the school is well-equipped and the teaching staff well-trained, practical training in real work situations was still lacking. For this reason the school signed a cooperation agreement with the Pamir Energy Company, a successful local civil engineering company with a lot of experience in electrical engineering and plumbing and irrigation systems. Vocational training students now spend part of their training working on a construction site. Trainee carpenters and plumbers are constructing a water pump station and are involved in the entire construction process. They are able to learn about civil engineering work and they acquire new skills, improve existing ones and work as a team of workers with various skills.

THE BENEFIT

This is a successful example of cooperation between education and business in Tajikistan and is the direct result of the fruitful work achieved through the Community of Practice in our region. This cooperation not only leads to better employment opportunities, it also contributes to improving the quality of vocational training. Thanks to the close collaboration between private companies and education institutions, vocational training will be a key element in preparing a powerful and skilled workforce that will help to increase Tajikistan’s competitiveness globally.
Further information on all ETF activities can be found on the website:
www.etf.europa.eu

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