

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN NORTH MACEDONIA



Work-based learning in the Macedonian VET system

Work-based learning takes place mainly during formal upper secondary VET. Secondary vocational education and training (VET) programmes are provided by municipal secondary schools.

Four-year programmes account for approximately 93% of all VET students and three-year programmes for 7%. Two-year programmes are offered, but there is a lack of interest among students. Most of the three-year programmes have recently been revised or newly developed under IPA funds. These programmes are based on occupational standards and learning outcomes, and the share of practical training is 40%. It is expected that more than a third of the practical training will be conducted in the workplace.

Four-year programmes were reformed under a World Bank project and started in the academic year 2019/20. All four-year programmes now include a compulsory work-based learning component in Year 3 (four hours/week) and Year 4 (six hours/week). Individual agreements relating to dual programmes with more work-based learning have been reached by seven schools and ten companies. A compulsory summer practice component (5–20 days, depending on the profile) is an integral part of both three- and four-year programmes.

The Law on Vocational Education and Training regulates work-based learning for VET students in companies. Companies are permitted to conduct practical training if they meet specific requirements with regard to training space, equipment and staff. The requirements are established by the VET Centre and approved by the respective chambers.

There is no formal apprenticeship in place in North Macedonia.

The role of the social partners

Representatives of the chambers and the Independent Trade Union for Education, Science and Culture are members of the National Board for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Among other tasks, the National Board discusses evaluations of policies on education, sustainable employment and regional development, and recommends actions to better link the education system with labour market needs.

The chambers maintain a registry of companies that are authorised to provide practical training for VET students. According to the law, the employer is required to achieve the objectives for practical training as specified in the curricula, including a prescribed number of lessons.

The Macedonian Chamber of Commerce is actively involved in the design and provision of training for in-company trainers and mentors, under the guidance of and in close cooperation with the VET Centre.

This training is mandatory for companies that want to offer practical training to learners. However, no regular funds have been earmarked for training-the-trainer activities. Training techniques are also an element of the Master Craftsman programme of the Chamber of Crafts and only Master Craftsmen are allowed to accept VET students for practical training.

How does cooperation between learning venues work?

The organisation and realisation of practical training for students in companies is relatively limited in the country. It is usually based on agreements for collaboration concluded between VET schools and individual companies that result from personal contacts and ties between stakeholders.

For the training period, a training agreement is concluded between the school, the employer and the student, with parents signing for a minor student.

KEY FIGURES

In the academic year 2019/20 there were 42 641 students enrolled in upper secondary VET programmes. Of these, 19 177 (45%) were female.

- **93% of VET students followed four-year vocational education. Some 52 qualifications were offered. 43% of these students were women.**
- **7% (3 131) of VET students followed three-year vocational education. Some 42 qualifications were offered. 25% (778) of these students were women.**
- **VET students represented nearly 61% of total enrolment in upper secondary education.**
- **VET programmes were offered in 75 schools.**

Source: State Statistical Office, Call for enrolment

NORTH MACEDONIA

The main challenges

In recent years the Chambers of Commerce and business associations have been more actively involved in facilitating cooperation between schools and companies. It will be crucial to sustain such support services and make them more widely available.

At the micro level, cooperation between VET schools and individual employers still depends largely on individual initiatives. To enhance sustainability and broader implementation of work-based learning, clear guidelines for schools and companies are needed.

The latest developments

In 2019 the VET Centre drafted a concept paper for work-based learning, with the support of the Swiss-funded Education for Employment in North Macedonia (E4E@MK) project and the European Training Foundation (ETF). The paper was adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science as a strategic document in April 2020. Based on the document, national institutions will start developing work-based learning guidelines for schools and companies.

The E4E project and the ETF continue to support the national working group on work-based learning. In 2020 the emphasis will be on reforming the financing of VET, including work-based learning.

In 2019 the E4E project supported the piloting of summer practice as a form of work-based learning. The guidelines that were developed through the project were officially adopted and have nationwide validity as of 2020.

MODERNISATION OF FOUR-YEAR VET

With support from a World Bank project, four-year VET has undergone an in-depth reform. National expert teams were established, with three to six members representing employers and educational institutions. These teams were facilitated by the VET Centre and the Bureau for the Development of Education, and contributed to the development of a methodology for:

- the development of standards for sectoral analysis, with 14 sectoral analyses developed;
- the development of occupational standards, with 152 occupational standards developed;
- the development of qualification standards, with 52 qualification standards developed;
- the development of syllabi, with 52 syllabi developed;
- the modularisation of curricula.

Reformed four-year VET is based on 45% general education and 55% vocational theory and practical training. All curricula are based on learning outcomes. Work-based learning is included in the syllabi.

Implementation of three priority qualifications (in three different sectors) started in the school year 2017/18 in six vocational schools in the country: electrical technician for computer technology and automatics; construction technician; hospitality-tourism technician. Implementation of modernised four-year VET commenced in the school year 2019/20 for students in Grade 1.

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2020 update

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