

VET Reform Programme – Final Conference - Conclusions Belgrade, 18th April 2008

Curriculum development, implementation, monitoring

The group has made the following conclusions:

- To review pilots and introduce “real modularisation” (new 8, all the previous pilots developed in the first phase and those introduced before CARDS). The modules should be clearly identified.
- It has been recommended that there should be a good teacher training in implementing curricula organised in those schools offering pilots. The training should be based on three subjects: *how to plan the teaching process in accordance with an outcome-based curriculum, how to create teaching materials, how to assess*. All the school staff should go through this training course. There are two possibilities to do such thing: systemic (i.e. to propose and accredit the training courses within the Centre for Teacher Training, Institute for the Improvement of Education) and non systemic (internal training organised by the staff of the Institute, VET Reform Programme and other experts). The Assistant Minister said that all the training courses which had been delivered in CARDS 1, CARDS 2 and GTZ would be accredited and this would be published in “Prosvetni glasnik”.
- In view with the fact that there are no textbooks for the pilot profiles but only recommended literature, it has been suggested that the production of teaching materials should be raised to a higher level through the cooperation with the Centre for the Development of Teaching Materials – a systemic solution.
- As for evaluating the implementation of VET Reform itself, there has been a suggestion to continue with the pedagogical advisors training and to organise it in other regional school departments as well (not only in those covering 22 pilot schools).
- The law should acknowledge the term “module” to avoid the situation we had last year when 4 pilot profiles were acknowledged as modules while the other 4 did not and had to be termed as vocational subjects. This may create confusion.
- It has been stated that the aim of the pilot is to become a part of the system. As for this matter, the attention is to be paid to finances because the number of students in the new profiles should not be more than 24. All the teachers in a school should be prepared to teach in accordance with the outcome-based curricula. The schools should have all the necessary equipment in order to offer a pilot. If not, a close connection should be established with local companies where the students could take practice.
- Curriculum should be flexible so that new contents could be introduced. It should be constantly reviewed to meet the labour market needs because several years is a long period for it to be changed if we want to keep up with technological, economic and other changes.

HR development

The aim of the workshop has been to provide recommendations based on the experience gained while working with the teachers and principals:

- All the participants are aware of the fact that HR development is very important, especially when it comes to teachers (directly involved in all the changes) and principals (since we tend to become a decentralised society in which a school will play a special role). A lot of things have to be done as far as teacher training is concerned. The whole system of professional development should be improved and the shortcomings identified should be eliminated.
- The teachers of vocational subjects are mostly those who graduated from technical faculties and have no knowledge of teaching methodology or pedagogy. Therefore, a training system for prospective teachers should be established but also for those teachers already employed.
- In order to improve teacher training, new forms of learning should be introduced such as distance learning, learning via the internet etc. Apart from that, flexibility should be the main characteristic of teacher training in any sense – i.e. training course duration, target groups etc. A good-quality teacher training needs other training institutions to be consulted but also companies because they might be a good place to improve the needed teaching skills.
- The subjects for a discussion have been also the accreditation of training programmes and a dilemma whether the aim of professional development is to provide more teaching hours or good-quality training. The conclusion is that these two things should be balanced but the training courses should be accredited and certificates provided in any case. There is a problem concerning

internationally acknowledged training courses which are neither taken into account here nor accredited.

- In order to improve the system of professional development it is necessary to identify what the teachers need. Internal and external CATs could play a significant role in this process since they have been trained to do this work. They know how to get the data and then the system of teacher training could be developed.
- This Catalogue for 2008 does not include specific vocational training courses. One of the solutions could be for the schools to be encouraged to offer such training because they have the capacity to do so. Also, these training courses could receive accreditations by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and offer the training to their colleagues together with the communities of vocational schools.
- Lifelong learning should be fully integrated within the system of vocational education. The teachers should be encouraged to develop professionally. This could be done by applying certain systems of encouragement.
- The cooperation among the MoE, other institutions and schools' principals has also been discussed. The MoE should support much better the principals and teachers. One of the ways to do so is to make a positive change to the status of internal and external CATs so that they could play their role as they should. Also, there should be a better way to let the schools take initiative and give suggestions based on the experience gained through this project as well as provide the examples of good practice to the MoE, Institute for the Improvement of Education and VET Centre.
- One of the obstacles mentioned is the problem of financing – the procedure to pay the money which has been spent on teacher training to a school is a long one. This fact has more to do with the relationship between the school and the local community. As an answer to the question what a school can do if it is not to get a help within the system, the schools say that they have enough capacity to resort to internal training, training on a local level, to share experience with other schools (in the same sector or to share general, pedagogical and methodological knowledge) and only then to take one step further and ask for accreditation. The conclusion is that the schools have enough capacity for self-development.

Strategic issues in VET reform

It has been a hard, complicated and long discussion. The most important issues of the whole educational system and secondary vocational education reform have been raised. The conclusions have been classified as *strategic issues, measures to be taken, recommendations and the issues which have been insisted on*.

- Both groups unanimously agree and confirm that the strategic concept of vocational education development has been adopted, defined and marks the future. All the participants agree that the reform is ongoing, a bit slowed down at the moment, has many obstacles, has gone through many difficulties and that many schools are on the verge of existence. However, there are a lot of good things and the representatives and principals of many schools say that they are happy with the results made.
- The results are based on the employment rate of the pilot profile students, students' decisions made to continue education and the general quality of teaching. If 75% of pilot profile students get employed then the question is: "What kind of a pilot is that with 75% of students who get employed and is it than a pilot at all?" It becomes obvious that the pilot should become a part of the system. It includes evaluation, validation and all those necessary mechanisms for a pilot to become a part of the system. Nevertheless, the majority finds that it is time for the pilot to become a part of the system.
- Although there are a lot of examples of good-practice which should be promoted, the attention has to be paid to fatigue in the pilot schools, lack of enthusiasm and motivation, which is, among other things, the effect of an unsolved status of CATs, financial problems, lack of regulations. Therefore, it is necessary to send a clear message to the MoE that the status of CATs must be solved. It should be defined what the CATs should do, what is their status, how schools react and in which way the MoE regulates that.
- Most of the participants say that they need more support, someone to take care about them and help them. They all have some objections to the work of the MoE and think its role should be different. The schools expect other kind of interaction, cooperation, different attitude towards the pilots – i.e. norms, pilots' status, way of work and all those aspects which make a system. The MoE should change its role, the way of communicating and the general attitude towards the pilots.

- Assistant Minister says that the action plans are about to be adopted but in the discussion he mentions once more that they have to be adopted as soon as possible. Because they support and help the already adopted strategies to be implemented.
- It is suggested that Vet Council and VET Agency should be established as soon as possible.
- It is also suggested that the MoE should consider the change of regulations concerning the status and functioning of pilot schools, especially when it comes to financing salaries and other.
- Although it is not urgent, one concrete measure has been suggested as a kind of a strategic objective also identified by the strategy – the reform of the whole educational system. Above all, there have been some words on primary education reform as a necessary step to the reform of secondary education.
- Decentralisation is mentioned as a strategic priority in regional development, career guidance and counselling in the system as a whole. The conclusion is that the career guidance is the connection among employers, social partnership and education.
- Social partnership is also pointed out as a very important strategic field.
- Several urgent sectors in which the action plan's measures should be supported are the rationalisation of school network and enrolment policy. As for the enrolment policy, there have been some very strict attitudes shown as well as the requests to solve that problem as soon as possible. Namely, the enrolment policy is not appropriate and has to be changed immediately. Redistribution of educational profiles is a similar question. Introducing new profiles along with redistribution and widening of profiles need to be regulated and changed.
- On the one hand, an NQF in professional teacher development and on the other the system of quality, methodology of measuring quality and modernisation of curricula have been also discussed. Modernisation of curricula means sticking to the form of modular pilot curricula, new teaching methodology, pedagogues involved in the process, active role of schools and cooperation with line ministries (not only the MoE but also the MoA, the MoLESP etc.). But also internal and external CATs and their status changed.

Adult education and RTCs

- The improvement of management and organisation of the centres has to be done. A centre needs the staff and needs to be organised. The staff has to do the labour market analysis, develop modules and training programmes, organise and support the implementation of training courses, monitor and prepare the trainees (before, during and at the end of a training course)... evaluate the whole process.
- Apart from internal organisational changes it is necessary to improve the relationship with the MoE and the MoERD.
- It is also necessary to be client-oriented and improve social partnership and prepare and monitor the trainees during the training and after the training has been over.
- It is necessary to have a legal framework regulating some problematic, above all logistic and financial issues in terms of accreditation and certification as well as the institutional status of the pilot i.e. changing the pilot status.
- It is also needed to make the centres look professional and support their distinctive qualities – they have to have their own staff, their own premises and to create their own image. The RTCs have to be recognisable so that the adults do not feel like going into a regular school but a training centre...
- A question of what percentage of Serbia is covered by adult training and what the possibilities are to offer adult training has also been raised. There have been some words about the need for cooperation between the Centres and social partners but also the cooperation of the centres and vocational schools. The cooperation with vocational schools has to be more intensive because centres can do their work (labour market analysis, modules' development, monitoring, implementation, organisation, logistics etc.) while vocational schools can offer training which the centres cannot offer. In this manner the coverage would be better. In this sense, two things have been pointed out: further partnerships establishment and more intensive cooperation and partnership of the centres with the NES, local councils, Transition Centres and the Chamber of Commerce. In order to make this easier, it is necessary to promote these activities. The NES could play the role in this process and send the prospective trainees to the RTCs. This could be also done by regional school departments which can inform people about the RTCs, their function and role. There have been some words that the Ministry of Economy will support financially promotional activities because the promotion of RTCs in newspapers costs a lot.

Assistant Minister - conclusions:

Several important conclusions have been made:

- The pilot has to be seriously reviewed and a “real modularisation introduced”. It is one of the problems that the MoE has encountered with (someone has already mentioned that from the total number of 8 pilot profiles, 4 have gone into schools as modules while other 4 have been changed for vocational subjects depending on who has read curricula in the Secretariat – it happens). One of the conclusions is very important – all school’s staff has to go through the training courses – because if we plan to go further this way we cannot do that with a relatively small number of teachers. All the teachers have to be familiar with the new tendencies, methodology and new learning approaches i.e. teaching approaches.
 - Schools and teachers desperately need help with creating teaching materials. The problem of the MoE is that the publishers are not very interested in vocational education textbooks – circulation is limited, these materials are not profitable.
 - Educational advisors from the MoE in all regional school departments should get familiar with all the reform activities because they are to evaluate these programmes and certainly have to know what is going on or even to have advanced knowledge of this matter.
 - The same conclusion has been made by all four groups: **“The pilot should become a part of the system”**. It is natural to evaluate and assess your work but when you have found that the results are good, which is certainly the case with the pilots in many aspects, than they should become a part of the regular educational system. The procedure is, however, well known to those in charge of it in the MoE. Therefore, there is a fear of it. However, in the next school year we shall ask the National Educational Council to introduce some of the pilots into a regular system. The proposals will be submitted to the NEC for discussion because it is our right to ask for something that we find good and useful to become a part of the regular system.
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- All the people working in education know that they need to develop professionally. These are not only teachers but experts, principals and all other involved in education. The improved system of vocational education has been another question raised. There is a lack of good training programmes offered by the Catalogue of accredited training programmes. This is the reason for not having enough of these training courses. However, a part of the training courses done in the first and the second phase of VET Reform in Serbia will be a good step forward.
 - One more conclusion is very important – the schools themselves i.e. schools’ community should give more contribution to professional development or training. It is strange that the schools themselves have not been organised and delivered some training at least in some sectors. It is important to know that in case there were no help there is internal capacity to cope with the problems of professional development and continue to offer these profiles. It is very good to know that the schools can slowly take over the responsibility and a part of the burden upon themselves.
 - As for the different role the MoE should have, all agree that the role should be changed but the Law on the Basis of Educational System actually takes away the part of the responsibility or a great part of responsibility from the MoE when it comes to educational development. VET sector has no authority over the development of vocational education in Serbia. This is the authority of other sector which cannot deal only with the development of education because it has other things to do. The suggestion is to bring back this authority to the sectors of secondary and primary education because it has been transferred to the Institute for the Improvement of Education by this Law, to the Institute for Validation of Education and the National Educational Council. These are the three institutions which are more involved in the development of education than the MoE. The Law actually outlaws the MoE in this sense.
 - When it comes to the school network and the enrolment policy, it has always been somewhere between reality and policy. The sector is involved in the school network in the sense that it solves the same problems every year and in the same manner as well – i.e. it provides the most logical transposition of all educational profiles in Serbia which is changed each time when the policy prevails.
 - The NQF is a very important issue. It is not only the issue of the MoE. The process has been started but some people, even those from the MoE are slow to join. However, we will find the partners elsewhere very soon –in the MoERD, NES, Chamber of Commerce and some NGOs. Therefore, we find that the NQF activities would not be as problematic as some others.

- The system of quality is the basis of any educational system.
- It is necessary to modernise the profiles. They should be modernised in the same way the existing pilot profiles have been modernised i.e. those good ones. The pilot profiles are not all perfect – some of them are going through changes, which is normal. However, the fact remains that without such an approach we would not be able to advance.
- Our colleagues from the RTCs know very well how hard it has been to establish the system of RTCs. In spite of the difficulties which still exist, like legislation framework, paying salaries etc. a giant step has been made – figures speak for themselves. Our colleagues from Belgrade, Niš, Zrenjanin, Kragujevac and Bor know very well how much has been done to reduce unemployment in Serbia, which is the aim. The aim is also to get to those people with no education or those that have to change their qualifications.
- The idea to establish the three new RTCs has to be seriously considered. It is certainly necessary to establish more intensive cooperation between the RTCs and secondary vocational schools as well. It is also necessary to recognise the RTCs as the institutions with the identified scope of activities i.e. to identify that the RTCs are dealing with a special part of education.

The materials and conclusions of the conference shall be available at the web site of the PIU and the MoE. All that has been discussed in the working groups shall be considered requests (for this or some other set of employees of the MoE). Our intention is to build these into the system of education in the next school year.

“I want to thank all those who have made this conference and the whole project successful... I am convinced that the project has been a success because we managed to activate a large number of people who will not stop until the work has been done.”