

SUMMARY

During the period from December 1, 2014 until November 30, 2016, The Ministry of Education and Science (in brief, MES) in collaboration with the Employers' Confederation of Latvia and Estonian and Lithuanian cooperation partners are implementing the Erasmus+ programme project „*National Authorities for Apprenticeships: Implementing Work Based Learning in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia*” (WBL-Balt), Nr.557236-EPP-1-LV-EPKA3-APPREN. Its goal is to promote the national vocational education reforms in the Baltic States promoting the development of work based learning (hereinafter WBL). Within the project the Baltic States Alliance for Vocational Education is being launched as a common framework for joint cooperation between the three Baltic States mutually exchanging information and experience in course of the implementation of reforms of vocational education, in particular with regard to the implementation of WBL and apprenticeship, as well as jointly promoting good practice examples. This study is one of the project activities in Latvia and its aim was to perform the data and information summarization about the implementation opportunities of work based learning in the context of the Latvian vocational education development. Within the framework of the study the following activities were carried out: a survey with educational institutions that implement WBL or plan to do it in the coming academic years; a survey with companies that are or could be involved in the implementation of WBL; individual in-depth interviews with representatives of educational institutions that are involved in the implementation of WBL; an analysis of the conformity of the current education and employment regulatory framework for the implementation of WBL.

Survey results with educational institutions

During the 2013/ 2014 academic year, WBL has been implemented by the total of six educational institutions, but in the 2014/ 2015 academic year - 23.

It's interesting and worthy of notice that the majority (75%) of the educational institutions, which have asserted that they are or have been involved in the implementation of WBL, declare to have encountered particular difficulties in this process. The particular problems most often indicated by the educational institutions are as follows - confusing legal regulations, uncertainties about wage issues, specific conditions for the implementation of WBL for companies and educational institutions. It reaffirms the need for more extensive interpretative work on the nature of WBL and also its specific aspects and conditions.

Although the absolute majority assesses that they have encountered problems in the implementation of WBL, however the same absolute majority (94%) evaluates their experience in this process as successful. The reasoning why the experience is assessed positively most commonly refers to possibilities of young people to learn their future profession in a real work environment. Another frequently mentioned essential consideration is the fact that WBL increases students' motivation in terms of both educational and practical action - taking into account that studies on the development of vocational education repeatedly indicate the fact that young people are often not motivated in learning their chosen profession, this can be identified as one of the very substantial benefits of WBL throughout the vocational education system in general.

All of those educational institutions asserting in the survey that they have implemented WBL in the 2013/ 2014 and/ or 2014/ 2015 academic year, claim that they will do it again in the 2015/ 2016 academic year. It is essential that all of these educational institutions are looking to expand the implementation of WBL instead of maintaining it on the current level. Most often the educational institutions have expressed their willingness to implement WBL also in other qualifications, consequently involving more students and collaboration enterprises. The total number of trainees that the educational institutions would like to involve in WBL exceeds 500, but the number of collaboration companies is around 70.

It's interesting, that the absolute majority (85%) of the schools, which so far have not been involved in the implementation of WBL, are interested in carrying out it in the 2015/ 2016 academic year. The total number of students of these educational institutions, which they would like to involve in WBL, is about 490, but the total number of collaboration enterprises is 105. Consequently, along with the plans of the educational institutions (see the previous paragraph) that are already participating in the implementation of WBL the total number of potential students involved in WBL could reach 1000 but the number of involved collaboration enterprises could exceed 200.

Survey results with enterprises

Only 28% of surveyed employers have stated that they are well or very well informed about opportunities to get involved in the implementation of WBL in Latvia, while 23% assess that they are not at all informed, but 49% - ill-informed.

In contrast to the assessment made by education representatives, the absolute majority – 87% – of the employers claim that they haven't faced any specific problems in the implementation process of WBL, only 13% have come across it. Problems mentioned by the entrepreneurs are very individual - some point at the students' low theoretical background, some complain on a lack of motivation, legislative failures and other aspects.

At the same time, all employers who have been or are involved in the implementation of WBL (27% of those polled), consider their experience successful, 20% of them - very successful. The main reasoning for such assessment mentioned in almost all cases is the fact that within WBL an enterprise can attract new, potential employees, and this learning process serves as a kind of mechanism to recruit employees.

Although the majority of the enterprises involved in the implementation of WBL have never faced any problems and evaluate their experience as successful, nevertheless, in total, 13% of the target group are no longer interested to get involved in the implementation of WBL during the next academic year by indicating a lack of human resources as the main reason for the implementation of such training. The total number of students that employers would be willing to engage in WBL is relatively small – 159 individuals. However, this number is significantly higher than the annual average number of students reported during the previous three years (approx. 60-90), which leads to the conclusion that, in general, entrepreneurs are interested in the development of WBL.

The awareness of entrepreneurs on the process of WBL can be evaluated as ambiguous - 42% are of the opinion that conditions for the implementation of WBL are clear, while 58% believe they are unclear. Most of those who have rated their awareness as insufficient indicate that they fail to understand the nature of the WBL process as a whole; and they also often mention that uncertainties are related to financial arrangements and terms of the training. Exactly the financial aspect has been most often pointed out by entrepreneurs. When asked what improvements should be made in the implementation system of WBL in order to motivate employers to participate in it, the entrepreneurs indicate both the need to provide tax allowances to companies engaged in the learning process and also the need to allocate a separate funding for the implementation and organisation of the learning process in enterprises along with other aspects.