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Quality and transparency in VET: new challenges for public administrations in Latvia

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Abstract

The main problem discussed in the paper is the new challenges for public administration of vocational education and training (VET) due to innovations and globalization. Most of the attention in the paper is paid to the readiness of entrepreneurs jointly with municipalities to participate in the preparation of future qualified specialists. Co-operation among various educational establishments, the local government and the employers is crucial. A much neglected aspect still is the co-operation between VET and higher education (HE) institutions – which the authors see as a real driving force for the success of local partnerships to promote regional economic development with respective training of modern labour force at all levels. For the empirical research focus group discussions with public administration representatives, educators and entrepreneurs, as well as survey of entrepreneurs was used. The aim of the empirical study was to investigate the employers' opinions and readiness at regional level to support the learners – the future labour force. The discussion on 'common language' was initiated at the focus group discussion. This requires further investigation for application at regional level with the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

Globalization and fast changes of technologies creates demand to increase flexibility and links with the research and innovation of all system of education (Cenci, 2012). Training of the appropriate specialists, creation of the

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„human capital” becomes an important, crucial task for sustainable development. Globalization requires to include vocational education and training (VET) in the integrated system of education, which must serve for the quickly changing industry and services. Different aspects of those issues are researched widely also in academic research and results published in recognised and respected international peer – reviewed scientific journals worldwide as the links of education establishments, municipality and entrepreneurs and reasonable co-operation are important for education development (Volos, Estenvinha, 2013), for preparation of competitive labour force (Chenic, Angelescu, Gheroghita, 2012) as well as for municipality and state development (Nugin, 2014). The aim of the paper is to investigate and to support the new directions for the development of VET jointly with municipalities, the employers and possibly also with higher education (HE) – in order to develop a ‘common language’ which implies also understanding of the use of common EU instruments and tools, described further on. As indicated by the focus group discussions - the direct links between all stakeholders and transparency of all processes are necessary, therefore interpretation of such key concept as quality must be harmonized in the integrated system of VET and HE and used jointly by all involved partners. All involved parties must use the same language during the efforts to solve the problems of the implementation of the new technologies. European Qualification Framework (EQF), European Credits for VET (ECVET), European Quality Assurance for VET (EQAVET) are appropriate instruments, a common language to create mutual trust and cooperation between VET, authorities and employers. It is important to use these instruments by both the systems - in order to receive and to use new information from all sources inside and outside the country. This will promote a joint approach also for human resource development. The ways to develop and to spread the language, common for all partners, all stakeholders of VET and HE, should be analysed and solutions proposed. Examples of the implementation of the common language for VET, HE and other involved parties will be investigated in the paper. Common language allows to carry out open discussions, to create transparency of the education system. Transparency allows to reach high quality, leads to the achievement of the goals for education set by the society. As the aims and goals of the society are changing, and motivation and attitudes become more important for education (Dzelme, 2002). The contradictory demands should be investigated to accept the right strategy for the development of economics, culture and education (Kahneman, 2009). Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman has researched different aspects of the analysed issues (Kahneman, 2010). The tasks of the paper include analysis of different proposals for the development of the new ways of the training of the specialists necessary for the industry and services.

2. Method

Scientific literature studies, existing situation evaluation were applied in current research. For the empirical research focus group discussions with public administration representatives, educators and entrepreneurs, as well as survey of entrepreneurs was used. The investigation of the possibilities and willingness of the employers to cooperate with education institutions and community was carried out by the authors in the year 2013. The opinions of employers from the SME active in the territory of local community of Iecava (a typical community for Latvia regarding the size and resources) were gathered about different possibilities of the cooperation for improved training of the labour force in the context of local economic and social developments. In the survey for most of questions where employers had to give their attitude the evaluation scale was 1 – 10, where 1 – not important; 10 – very important – in order to get detailed attitudes of entrepreneurs. Indicators of central tendency or location and indicators of variability were used to analyse the results of the survey.

3. Results

Vocational education and training in the regional context should be develop jointly with HE, using similar approaches, the same international language (The Bruges Communiqué on Enhanced European Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training for the Period 2011-2020.). All stakeholders should be involved in the discussions about aims and goals of VET and HE including new and innovative approaches to education organisation and realisation (Koudahl, 2010) including realisation of dual education system (where part of week students spend with employers in job place and other part of week in education establishment) which have already good results shown in many countries – Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and other. Special attention must be paid

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