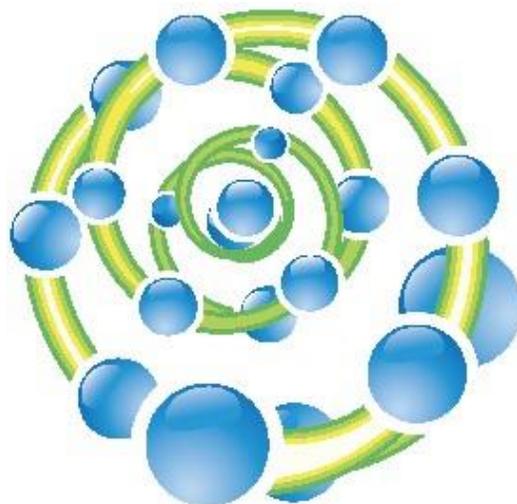


Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes

Slovenia



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Contents

A.	Basic information	2
A.1.	Main purposes and objectives of work-based learning in VET	4
A.2.	Types of work-based learning contracts	5
A.3.	Entry conditions, termination and proportion of students enrolled	5
A.4.	Verification of training workplaces	7
A.5.	Intercompany training centres	7
B.	Specific features	8
B.1.	Financing.....	8
B.2.	Promotion and career orientation.....	9
B.3.	National governance and social partnership	10
B.4.	Quality assurance in VET	12
C.	Main strengths, weaknesses and development initiatives	13
Annex 1.	Bibliography	15

A. Basic information

In Slovenia there is a type of alternation in all VET programs, representing an important connection between the economy and school field. Upper secondary education level consists of general educational programs, technical and vocational programs. For the purpose of this article we describe programs of vocational upper secondary education (3 years, ISCED 3C) and higher vocational education (2 years, ISCED 5B), in which an important part of the educational programs takes place in the companies as work-based learning. It is called *praktično usposabljanje z delom (PUD)* in vocational upper secondary programs and *praktično izobraževanje (PRI)* in higher vocational schools. According to the definition provided by Cedefop for the purposes of this article, the main characteristics of this form of alternation are the following:

- It is a compulsory part of educational programs leading to formal vocational education.
- It represents the part of the practical training that takes place in companies, in a real work process.
- The basis for the implementation of work-based learning is a formal contract.
- The design of occupational standards involves the social partners. Occupational standards are the basis for educational program.

In their current form vocational upper secondary programs were conceptually introduced by the Guidelines for preparation of VET programs at upper secondary level in 2001, but in fact they were implemented by renewed IVET programs and Vocational Education Act in 2006. Work-based learning was set as the maintenance of good characteristic and correction of earlier legislation, in which there were two parallel paths to vocational education ⁽¹⁾: school path and apprenticeship, that had some elements of employment, but it did not succeed in practice.

⁽¹⁾ Two parallel, equivalent ways of VET were introduced by law in 1996. They differed in implementation and jurisdictions of practical training: in the dual form the provider of VET programme is company which, together with the school provides an educational program. Enrolled person had the status of apprentice, that had some features of the employment (eg, 50% of the time for practical training is included in length of service). The skill test for the apprentice is provided by the commission of experts of corresponding chamber. The skill test for pupils is provided by schools.

Apprenticeship was on our grounds introduced in 1946, in Yugoslavia, by Law on apprentices. However, the role of the state in this area gradually strengthen due to central management of human resource development and central direction of the needs of sectors. Consequently, the role of craftsmen, businesses and trade associations was decreasing. With education reform in the

In accordance with the Vocational Education Act (2006) providers of IVET programs are schools together with companies. It should be emphasized that work-based learning is an obligatory part of educational programs in all types of VET programs ⁽²⁾ (Appendix 1). This means that work-based learning in companies is obligatory for all participants enrolled in VET programs. Practical training in IVET programs consist of practical lessons in school and of work-based learning in companies. Work-based learning takes place as a real work process and is carried out in companies or partially in Intercompany Training Centres. In the area of agriculture work-based learning may also be carried out entirely on the schools' estates.

The overall length of practical training (practical lessons in schools and work-based learning) is defined by an educational program and varies according to the type of educational program:

- short vocational upper secondary education (2 years): 35-40% of educational program is intended for practical training, of which 4 weeks (152 hours) for work-based learning in companies;
- vocational upper secondary education (3 years): 40% of educational program is intended for practical training, of which at least 24 weeks ⁽³⁾ (912 hours) and not more than 53 weeks for work-based learning in companies. All programs have a prescribed minimum length, (24 weeks) of practical training in companies. A student may have an individual agreement with a company that the minimum length of practical training be extended but it must not exceed the limit (53 weeks);
- technical upper secondary education (4 years): 15% of the educational program is intended for practical training, of which 4-8 weeks (152-304 hours) for work-based learning in companies;
- vocational technical education (2 years, after vocational upper secondary program): 10% of the educational program is intended for practical training, of which 2 weeks (76 hours) for work-based learning in companies;

early '80s, the responsibility for vocational education was entirely transferred to the schools (even if it is implemented in a working organization) and the status of the pupil was entirely regulated by the school legislation (Tome, 1999).

⁽²⁾ As indicated above, we describe work-based learning in vocational upper secondary programs and higher vocational programs, in which work-based learning is most extensive.

⁽³⁾ The extent of work-based learning varies in some programmes (eg. in the program gastronom-hotelier there are 29 weeks of WBL instead of 24 to begin with (1102 hours).

- In higher vocational schools (2 years) 40 % of educational program is intended for work-based learning in companies (20 weeks).

VET programs have a modular structure. Each individual module (i.e. professional program unit) or several modules together enable acquiring of a vocational standard. The modules are competency-based and include both the theory and practical training. In vocational upper secondary education, practical training in companies is placed by the modules and not as their integral part.

In higher vocational education the *Guidelines for the preparation of higher vocational education programs* stipulate, that work-based learning shall be related to practical theory of each module. For this purpose within each module, lecturers of professional theory include students into planning practical tasks or projects to be carried out during the work-based learning. The modules are also optional, allowing faster response to labour market needs, for adults acquiring new skills and for individuals with no formal education gaining vocational qualifications.

A.1. Main purposes and objectives of work-based learning in VET

Purposes and objectives to be achieved through work-based learning are the following (Korunovski, 2012; Justinek, 2011, Evaluation ..., 2013):

- connecting vocational education and labour market;
- getting to know work process in working environment;
- gaining practical experience and integration of in school acquired theory and skills in real work situations;
- obtaining specific professional experiences, acquiring teamwork skills and communication skills within the team and to customers;
- networking with potential future employers/colleagues;
- getting to know novelties in working process, equipment, devices, resources, materials, etc.;
- developing professional socialization and professional identity;
- developing responsibility and attitude towards profession and future work.

A.2. Types of work-based learning contracts

For the implementation of work-based learning a contract has to be signed. In higher vocational programs there is one type of learning contract, signed by the school, company and student. In vocational upper secondary programs there are two types of learning contract:

- individual learning contract, between the employer and student (or parents/his legal guardian);
- collective learning contract, which is more common, between the employer, school and student (or his parents).

Individual learning contract allows for increasing the amount of work-based learning in the company, thereby decreasing the amount of practical training in the school. If the individual learning contract is signed, in the second year pupil will have to pass a midterm test of practical skills.

A learning contract contains the responsibilities and obligations of parties, duration and program of work-based learning. The latter defines competences the student shall develop and acquire in each year and this is prepared by school. If the company can implement only a part of the program due to the narrow area of expertise, the rest shall be carried out in some other company or in the intercompany training centre. It should be pointed out that learning contract are not contracts of employment.

A.3. Entry conditions, termination and proportion of students enrolled

Anyone who has successfully completed primary school or lower vocational education program and fulfils specific conditions if required⁴ may enrol in vocational upper secondary programs. After the completion of these programs, they can enrol into vocational technical education programs. Proportion of youth enrolled in vocational upper secondary programs has been declining in the last decade. In the last three years this proportion remains about the same⁵, but there is a slight reduction in number of enrolled due to the smaller generations. 21,7% of pupils finishing primary school enrolled in these programs in the school year 2013/14 (4,379 out of 20,201). There are many activities to promote vocational education and professions, but in the

⁽⁴⁾ There is a special condition for entry into vocational upper secondary program geo-engineer Miner, ie. psychophysical ability (Call for application for enrollment in upper secondary programs in 2014/15).

⁽⁵⁾ In last few years there is decreased enrollment in general upper secondary education, while the enrollment in technical upper secondary education is slightly increased.

future young people shall be even more encouraged to enrol in vocational education and training, especially for occupations in shortage ⁽⁶⁾ (see B.2).

Entering condition for higher vocational education programs is Matura exam (general or vocational) or master craftsman, foreman or shop manager exam and three years of professional experience and a passed mother tongue exam and mathematics exam or a foreign language exam to the extent of vocational Matura. Number of students enrolled in higher vocational schools has been decreasing for the last 3 years. In the year 2013/14 13,202 students have enrolled. It is possible to study full-time or part-time, in the second case, the student pays tuition and in the first case, the tuition is covered by public funds.

Vocational upper secondary programs are completed with a final exam. At the exam candidates have to demonstrate acquired theoretical and practical knowledge thus proving they are competent for the profession. The final exam board can have one additional member from companies as an observer. The list of additional members is published by National Commission following the proposal of representative Chambers and trade unions. The final exam is comprised of mother tongue exam and practical exam with defence. After passing the final exam, candidates can be employed without further formal education or training (traineeships) or continue education.

Information about the transition of students into the labour market or to further education for the entire population are not yet available. Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) ⁽⁷⁾ aims to establish a systematic monitoring of young people's employability after completion of upper secondary vocational and technical schools. For this purposes a pilot project called 'Monitoring employability of students after completion of programs of secondary vocational education and training' was carried out in 2011/12. In some schools the project was implemented in 2012/13 as well. ⁽⁸⁾Higher vocational programs are finished with a

⁽⁶⁾ There is no interest among young people for some vocational programs, even if they are for shortage occupations. (eg. for the school year 2014/15 in the program Glazier has (so far) not enrolled even one student).

⁽⁷⁾ CPI was founded in 1995 by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia. It is a central national institution in the field of vocational education and training. Its major tasks are the connections between social partners and providing support in development, research and implementing level of the educational and system processes to raise quality and attractiveness of vocational and professional education.

⁽⁸⁾ Reports of projects are available on <http://www.cpi.si/razvojno-in-raziskovalno-delo/evalvacije-in-spremljanje/evalvacijska-porocila.aspx>.

diploma exam and give the formal title engineer. Diploma exam consists of practically oriented diploma thesis and thesis defence. As a part of the thesis student can also do project work or service with the theoretical defence.

A.4. Verification of training workplaces

The terms and conditions for companies to be able to sign a learning contract are defined in Vocational Education Act. Verification of a training workplace is provided by the Chambers. After the company submits an application, it is visited by a three-member commission that checks personnel and material conditions. Commissions for every occupation are named by the appropriate Chamber. By personnel conditions we refer to the trainers for who appropriate education, appropriate work experience and pedagogical-andragogical training is a requirement. By material conditions we refer to the material used on the workplace itself as well as equipment, depending on the occupation. If the conditions are satisfied, competent Chamber shall issue a certificate and the company shall be entered in the register of training workplaces.

Six months before the start of the school year Chambers publish offer or announcement of training workplaces for the next year for vocational upper secondary programs. Announcement of training workplaces is information for young people and their parents about the needs of the labour market. It is included into the Call for application for enrolment in upper secondary programs for each school year.

A.5. Intercompany training centres

An Intercompany training centre is usually an organizational part of a school centre or school. It represents the connection between education, training, economy and development. Currently there are 19 such centres of different sectors in Slovenia. Most of them were established between 2010 and 2013, when they were partly funded by the EU Regional Development Fund and Ministry of Education, but there were also other sources of financing, e.g. local businesses, municipalities etc.

In Intercompany training centres practical lessons, laboratory work, various project tasks, preparation of candidates for master exams and national vocational qualifications, additional training for employees, research etc. ⁽⁹⁾, as well as a part of work-based learning or whole work-based learning for the agricultural programs are organized.

⁽⁹⁾ Last year in some Intercompany training centres training took place to increase the employability of the unemployed with the resources of the Employment service of Slovenia.

B. Specific features

B.1. Financing

Since 2008 a stimulation for companies to increase their involvement in practical training of students within the project »Co-financing incentives for employers to provide work-based learning in educational programs leading to a vocational qualification«, which is funded by the ESF and implemented by means of annual public tender exists. Funding is set for co-financing or reimbursement of the cost of mentor and student rewards. Fundings are intended for companies, but a part of it (€ 50) is for the school, in which students are enrolled in the final year (for guidance, information and coordination of mentors, administrative and technical support in preparing the documentation for the application to public tender). The amount of financial incentives for one training workplace depends on the amount of available funds in a given year and the number of applicants.

In the school year 2010-2013 slightly less than 4,000 companies received incentives, in total of € 13.5 million for work-based learning of 19,631 students. The average value of incentives was € 688, but it differed by types of educational programs:

- between € 550.00 and € 1,250.00 per student enrolled in vocational upper secondary education (for all 3 years);
- between € 800.00 and € 1,250.00 per student in higher vocational education (for 2 years).

Pedagogical-andragogical training for mentors in companies was funded with the ESF resources as well. More than 1900 mentors were trained in the period 2012 to 2013 (project value was slightly less than € 360,000).

Employers who enter into individual learning contract receive financing for each year from the Ministry of Economy, funding is distributed by chambers. Funds are intended for material costs, student's work and protective equipment, transport and food costs during the work-based learning. In a given school year the amount of resources for each training workplace depends on the total number of registered individual learning contracts that are signed no later than on 30. September for each school year (source: Korunovski, 2011).

Companies are obligated to pay rewards to students. The amount of a reward may vary between sectors and is regulated differently either in sectorial agreements or internal acts of individual companies. If defined in a sectorial agreement, it is usually set at 15% of an average monthly

salary in Slovenia for the previous month. Likewise, the payment of mentoring is regulated differently, either in sectorial agreements or in internal acts of companies.

Companies may opt for providing financial assistance to students during their education and training, i.e. for company scholarship ⁽¹⁰⁾. In this case students usually undergo work-based learning in that company. Company scholarships are on average of the highest and enable immediate employment after leaving school.

For the organisation of work-based learning Ministry of education, science and sport finances an organizer of practical training for 364 students of vocational upper secondary programs and one lecturer-organizer of practical training for 150 students of higher vocational programs. Chambers carry out tasks in the field of work-based learning under public authorization granted by the Ministry of education. For the participation of companies in work-based learning the system resources are not provided. Since 2008 this is being corrected with public tender described above.

B.2. Promotion and career orientation

Numerous projects are held at different levels for the promotion of VET schools, professions, career guidance for young people and adults, as well as projects that indirectly raise the attractiveness of the professions and vocational training:

- activities of Chambers: In addition to sectoral projects which promote specific occupations or occupational groups, the Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia is also carrying out events for the promotion of crafts and craft's occupations in trade fairs, children's bazaar. Within the project Crafts path are organised visits of craft's companies for the groups of primary school children, where children can get to know a particular occupation and industry They provide extracurricular activities at primary schools for children and their parents, in which local artists and craftsmen cooperate well;
- events for promotion of professions at schools, e.g. Open Door Days, Presentations of Professions, Info Days...,

⁽¹⁰⁾ Information about company scholarships are available on the websites of Slovene human resources development and scholarship fund (<http://www.sklad-kadri.si/>), regional development centres and companies.

- schools participate in international projects that are increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and training (e.g. Euroskills, SloveniaSkills, international mobility programs for work-based learning...).

The central role in the promotion of vocational schools, professions, career guidance, support for schools and linking the various stakeholders in this field is held by the CPI, which provides:

- Support for schools organizing different events (counselling, published A brief guide of effective promotion of vocational education and training etc.);
- www.moja.izbira.si, which was created in 2008 in partnership with actors, whose activity cover vocational training for young people and adults. It is aimed at young people, their parents, adults and counselling workers, so all the information on occupations, career guidance, schools providing vocational programs etc. are reachable at one place. With the central informing of primary school children have been ensured that the information centre is reachable for every user;
- promotion of professions among pupils (e.g., video games, printed brochures, occupations cards etc.);
- training for teachers and school counsellors for the enforcement and promotion of vocational education and training.

Several activities for the promotion of vocational education and training and professions have stopped the decrease of proportion of enrolment in vocational upper secondary schools, which stayed about the same in the recent years (see A.3), while enrolment in technical upper secondary schools has even slightly increased.

B.3. National governance and social partnership

Work-based learning is a part of formal education program, which is defined by the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (ZOFVI), Vocational Education Act and the Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act. *The Guidelines for preparation of educational programs in technical upper secondary education and Guidelines for preparation of higher vocational education programs* represent an expert basis for preparation of legislation.

VET programs are entirely under the authority of Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. At upper secondary level the programs are provided by 71 public schools and 26 public school centres, of which 53 schools and 20 school centres provide vocational programs also for adults.

For adults these programs are also provided by 28 People's Universities and 17 other private institutions.

Higher vocational programs are provided by 26 public and 23 private higher vocational schools.

Regulations of vocational and technical education include social partnership in the following segments:

- in the composition of the Expert Council for Vocational Education and Training, established by the Government in 1996 to decide on professional issues in this area and for expert counselling in decision-making;
- in the sectorial committees for designing vocational standards, designated by the Minister for Labour. They are composed of renowned experts, nominated by Chambers. Coordination of sectorial committees for designing vocational standards ⁽¹¹⁾ is carried out by CPI;
- in the involvement of companies at the local level, in the preparation of so-called open curriculum of schools. Open curriculum is part of the educational program (approximately 20%), designed by school in cooperation with representatives of business, enterprises,, institutions or other organizations of social partners in the local or regional environment ⁽¹²⁾;
- for providing work-based learning Chambers carry out verification of learning workplaces, run and update registers of learning workplaces in companies, publish announcements of learning workplaces every school year, provide interim tests (see A.4) and pedagogical-andragogical training for mentors in companies.

Schools are responsible for the implementation of work-based learning. As already mentioned there is an organiser of work-based learning in schools for these purposes. Schools must provide training workplaces in companies for all enrolled students, so they can complete an educational program. Therefore schools or organizers run their own lists of companies that accept students for work-based learning (these lists are constantly updated) and monitor the quality of workplaces (visiting the companies during work-based learning, reviewing reports of

⁽¹¹⁾ Occupational standards are the basis for designing modules, educational program units leading to vocational qualifications.

⁽¹²⁾ Evaluation prepared by CPI have shown that employers and employers' associations do not recognize the importance of their participation in a sufficient level (With the evaluation, 2012).

work, questionnaires for students and mentors). Most of the schools organize annual meetings for mentors at the school to keep in touch with companies, as well as to attract new companies for cooperation. The work-based learning program or competences a student shall acquire in the company are also prescribed by schools and are a part of learning contracts (schools are also contract partners in most cases). Schools also provide final exam, to which one representative of employers can be invited as an additional member of exam commission, in the role of observer.

B.4. Quality assurance in VET

The Vocational Education Act has strengthened the autonomy and the developmental role of VET schools, at the same time it reinforced the importance of quality assessment and assurance. According to the Act schools are requested to establish a Quality Committee, consisting of a minimum of 5 members: representatives of professional school employees, employers, students and parents. Quality Committee consisting of 5 lecturers and 2 students is also requested by Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act. Quality Committee is obliged to publish a quality report on the school website every school year.

For the Quality Committee's work CPI published *Recommendations to schools for the implementation of self-evaluation* that include scope of work-based learning. From the published quality reports on the school's websites it is evident that the work of Quality Committees include work-based learning in companies. A questionnaire for companies and students on various aspects of the implementation of work-based learning is a common practice.

In case of an individual learning contract, quality assurance for verified training workplaces in companies is carried out by the Chambers when mid-test exams occur. For collective learning contracts quality of workplaces is monitored by organizers of work-based learning, meaning by schools, as described above. Cooperation with new companies is most often set up at the request of students who would like to do work-based learning in a particular company. Often organizers visit companies while the work-based learning is taking place.

During the work-based learning students fulfil required documentation, i.e. report of work-based learning or diary of work, which is supervised and confirmed by the mentor and reviewed by organiser at school when work-based learning ends. In the case of an individual learning contract, student must submit report of work before the mid-test exam to expert supervisor for all the previous years.

Students of higher vocational programs in addition to the report of work must write a seminar work, professional part of which refers to company.

C. Main strengths, weaknesses and development initiatives

Work-based learning in companies is an important connection between educational sphere and business. It enables students some insight and the possibility of participation in the real work process in companies. In one school some joint projects with companies, which are beyond the scope of work-based learning, were described as 'side effects' of work-based learning (CPI, 2012). Evaluations prepared by CPI have shown, that cooperation between schools and companies in the context of work-based learning is more successful, if the cooperation takes place in other projects as well (CPI, 2013).

Further, evaluations have shown (Skubic Ermenc (eds), 2012), that the Vocational Education Act in 2006 has largely transferred the responsibility for the practical education to the school, as the responsibility of the social partners and enterprises has decreased. Companies and branch associations insufficiently recognize their role and importance of cooperation in practical training of their future employees.

Schools have taken over the quality assurance of training workplaces, because verification did not succeed in practice and is not systematically renewed in the case of collective learning contracts. The elements of the dual form, for example verification of the learning workplaces which were transferred to all types of VET programs are not successful, thereby the role of Chambers is more difficult.

There are large differences among sectors in comprehension of their role and cooperation in vocational training of young people. In some service industries the concern about responsibility for practical training of future workers is very present (e.g. hairdressing, catering). In others, there is no such awareness, so at beginning of current arrangement schools had problems to provide training workplaces in companies for all enrolled students.

Interest of companies for providing practical training increased with incentives (see B.1). Anyway, low motivation remains in the economic branches where students are included with difficulty into the regular work process.

In the recent times several initiatives arose in order to increase the role and scope of practical training in companies, with the aim of increasing the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and increase the transition from education to work. Some initiatives relate to the introduction of apprenticeship or dual system directly, the other to strengthen the role of companies in the current school system of vocational education. The effects and answers are expected next year. A national conference on vocational education and apprenticeship is

scheduled for October 2014 where some of the initiatives will also be presented. In the meantime relevant occupational profiles, appropriate financing schemes for companies and organization of services to support the practical training in companies remain as the main challenges.

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