

Project title: A Study visit accompanying the conference on “Developing cooperation between VET, higher education and adult learning in response to the challenge of lifelong learning”,

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A study visit on “Raising quality of VET in cooperation with employers and higher education” was an event accompanying the conference on “**Developing cooperation between VET, higher education and adult learning in response to the challenge of lifelong learning**”.

During the visit, which took place from 19 to 23 September 2011, guests from Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, Belgium and Cyprus visited Polish VET and HE institutions, including: the Ministry of National Education, National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education and Centre for Cultural Education of the Capital City of Warsaw.

The aim of the meeting was to present good practices and solutions which can be helpful in raising effectiveness and attractiveness of VET, adapting it to the needs and requirements of the labour market. The role of employers and HE was also highlighted. The programme included presentations and speeches related to the issue as well as visits to VET institutions.

Participants spent the first day in the Ministry of National Education. There, during numerous presentations and discussions, they learnt how VET is provided in our country. Thanks to the presentation prepared by Piotr Bartosik from the Ministry guests learnt how VET system in Poland changed, whereas Anna Wojciechowska (MEN) acquainted them with the priorities of Polish presidency in the area of VET and lifelong learning. Olga Sułkowska, a representative from National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (KOWEZiU), presented ways in which her institution helps to raise the quality of VET in Poland.

On Tuesday, 20 September, participants visited Warsaw Gastronomic Schools Complex while Mieczysława Nowotniak from the Education Bureau of the Capital City of Warsaw told them how VET is being developed in the Capital.

On Wednesday guests visited Vocational Development Institution in Warsaw to see how the classes in, for example, Post-secondary School of Cosmetics, Care, Health and Beauty look like. Training activities on that day concentrated on the procedures beautifying the eye region, students applied henna. – I’m positively surprised to see so well-equipped school. Unfortunately, many VET institutions in different countries face very difficult working conditions. I think that it needs to be discussed – said Margarida Abreu, a representative from Directorate-General for Employment and Industrial Relations in Portugal.

On the next day, 22 September, the participants got to know the meaning of Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy (Voluntary Labour Corps) name. They also listened to the presentation prepared by Piotr Sarnecki from PKPP Lewiatan (Polish Confederation of Private Employers Lewiatan), who told them how cooperation between education institutions and representatives of Polish business sector looks like.

Each day, one of the participants made a presentation on how VET system and its cooperation with HEIs and employers looks like in his or her country. – The education system and VET in your country are organised in almost the same way as in mine – stated Franci Bratkovič, a representative from Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Slovenia.

The programme was not filled only with presentations and specific visits. A very important element of the study visit were discussions. They took place both in the appointed time and during other activities. Guests shared their experience not only with each other, but also with experts in visited institutions. During the visit to Vocational Development Institution, the issue of funding for better quality of training and general funding of VET institutions was a major subject. – Since Poland accessed the EU, many small companies organising vocational training entered the market. Their courses are of worse quality than ours, but they are cheaper. That's why it is more and more difficult for us to get funding for our activity – explained Robert Lenart, the director of Vocational Development Institution.

- In Portugal, we had a similar problem in the nineties – said Margarida Abreu. – Now the situation begins to change. Qualifications become more and more important, so the quality of the course also becomes more significant. The situation will improve in your country in a few years as well – she said. Franci Bratkovič added: – In every European country I visit the question arises: how to create a stable funding system for VET?

Another important issue raised during the discussion concerned international recognition of the certificates acquired by VET students in Poland. – Polish people have to promote their qualifications, they need to gain a good brand. A foreign employer should know that a hairdresser educated in Poland is a specialist worth to employ – said Michael Ryan from Gecko Programmes in the United Kingdom.

What were impressions of the participants after the visit? – The visit will inspire me in my everyday work. It was well-prepared and had an interesting programme. I have also met many people with whom I could exchange experience and comments – said Franci Bratkovič from Slovenia. – I saw and heard about many things during this visit that will help me in my everyday work. Maybe after this visit I will be able to develop some new solutions to implement in my country – added Christos Tanteles from Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The study visit was organised by National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (KOWEZiU) in cooperation with the Foundation for the Development of the Education System. Its aim was to present and share good practices, which could aid the development and quality assurance of VET. Themes of the visit were closely connected to these of the conference. This is why presented issues regarded education on every stage

of life and activities aiming to increase employability through cross-sectoral cooperation and enhancing the role of employers and enterprises as education partners.

National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education is a public institution under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education. Its main task is to inspire, prepare and coordinate activities in the area of vocational education and training of teachers, who deal with VET and lifelong learning. The centre also cooperates with other educational, governmental and non-governmental institutions, located in Poland and abroad.